

MolnarScott_19911114

RICHARD SHARPLESS: [00:00:00] This is an interview with Scott Molnar from 1846 South Delaware Drive, Easton, Pennsylvania. The present date is November 14th, 1991 and this is being recorded at Martin Desht's house, South Delaware Drive. [pause] Okay, where do you work -- well, first of all, how old are you?

SCOTT MOLNAR: I'm 32 years old.

RS: Thirty-two years old? And what do you do?

SM: I'm a precision welder. We weld missile tubes for nuclear submarines. It's what you call a stick MIG subarc. I learned that when I was 21 years old. I've been doing it since I was 21.

RS: Where did you get your training?

SM: Well, first of all, I worked at Victaulic in Easton, Pennsylvania. [00:01:00] And I learned how to weld there. I went to school. Everybody went to school. They sent me to school for about six months. I was -- I had to quit school because I got married when I was young, 17 years old. I was 18, I didn't have nothing to do, so then these people hired me. My grandfather was a crane operator in

the Foundry, so they knew his name, and they hired me, and that's how I worked there.

RS: You were 21?

SM: I was 18 at the time.

RS: Eighteen.

SM: And then, 19. And as the years went on, I had been on the job.

RS: What did you do with your first one in there?

SM: I was a regular laborer, and I got -- about a year later, I was a sheer operator watching old men weld on the sides. You know, I never knew what the hell welding was. An old man just picked up a helmet and said, "Here, just follow me. Watch what I do."

RS: So you learned it on the job?

SM: [00:02:00] So I learned it on that, and then I guess they saw me, you know, wanted to weld. So they sent me to school. That was back in '76 or '77, so at that time, it wasn't bad. Work was good, you know?

MARTIN DESHT: Where was that?

SM: Victaulic.Easton, Lehigh Foundry.

MD: Oh, Lehigh Foundry?

SM: Yeah, they called it Victaulic when I went there.

MD: They still open?

SM: No. You should see that place. It's like a goddamned ghost town. It's a shame.

RS: You have any -- you're married, and you have kids?

SM: Yes, I do. Tara's 14 and Jennifer's eight. Matter of fact, that's why I was late to me because I had to go to my kids' -- to see how she's doing in school. She's in Wilson.

RS: All right. How long did you work for Victaulic?

SM: Four years, I think.

RS: Four years?

SM: They were telling me the place was closing down.

[00:03:00] They had a thing on the bulletin board stating that they were moving to Forks Township. Again, things got bad. People were moving around, so I got down to a laborer, and again, was filling these hoppers up, and they told me either start looking for a job or just hanging out to get laid off, so I went out and I got into [redacted]. That's where I'm employed now.

RS: How long have you been with the [redacted]?

SM: Monday the 18th will be 11 years.

RS: Eleven years? Nice. Okay, hold on, I want to make sure I got that. [Background noise, that's alright?] What are you doing at [redacted]? You're a welder now, right?

SM: Mm-hmm.

RS: Were you hired as a welder?

SM: No, grinder.

RS: Grinder?

SM: I had to start all over again. You know, start from the bottom up. I didn't know that much. It was just two different weldings. [00:04:00] You know, there was easy welding at Victaulic, which was nothing, but here is a whole new different ballgame. You know, your welds are going in a submarine, so they've got to be perfect, x-ray. So it took me many years to actually, you know, learn the process. A lot of older fellas taught me to. You know, good people.

RS: How many people work there now?

SM: Right now, 115.

RS: A hundred-and-fifteen?

SM: Yeah.

RS: Is that constant or were there more people there --

SM: No, it's on and off. Maybe lower. A little bit more, maybe. Not much. Right now, things are really slow at [redacted].

RS: Is that because the defense industry is bad?

SM: That and -- no.

RS: The economy?

SM: Yeah, the economy is bad. Usually, they have welders advertise all the time.

RS: Yeah, I see signs up sometimes looking for welders.

SM: Yeah, it's a shame.

RS: Did you work -- during those eleven years, [00:05:00] did you work more or less continuously?

SM: Uh-huh. I got laid off twice. Twice one year -- well, once one year, once another year, but that was only maybe three to four months at a time, you know what I mean? I had a job. I worked out here at [Walter Smith's?] then.

RS: What does Smith's do?

SM: He's a welder.

RS: So you've sort of filled in with him?

SM: Yeah, I had to. When I went down to unemployment, they told me. They said, "Look, you can collect unemployment," you know? And I saw the [Walter Smith?] sign, said, "No." I said, "I want to work. I don't want to collect unemployment," because it was nothing then at that time. I wasn't making nothing, but the benefits, that's what you gotta worry about, because I have children. They're not getting nothing off of them on unemployment.

RS: Do you have a union up there at the [redacted] --

SM: [00:06:00] Yeah, it's an association. It's not as strong.

RS: So it's not the United Steelworkers?

SM: No, nothing like that. I wish it was. The people voted them out, the employees.

RS: Why? Do you know --

SM: No. When I started there, they were out maybe two years before I was there, so I have no idea why. I don't know.

RS: What kind of association is this? It's a company union?

SM: It's something like that, yeah. You could call it that.

RS: Do they just represent the workers right there?

SM: The union, yeah. Association, yeah. They go through their steps, terms and agreements. I'm on an agreements committee, so it's a tough job here.

RS: Why did you say that you wish the Steelworkers' union --

SM: Well, I guess they'd be a little tougher, you know?

[00:07:00] The Steelworkers. Well, I guess Bethlehem Steel has them. I guess they're a lot [leaner?]. The association's all right. I don't know. I can't explain it. They're strong in a way, but then they're not, you know? It's like anything. You've got to sit down and tell them what you want, you know? If they don't want to sit and talk about it, or if they don't want to listen, you've got to plead with them, you know, practically.

RS: The company?

SM: Yeah, that's what I'm saying, right, but it's not bad.

RS: Do you think the company has been pretty fair to the association, to the workers?

SM: So -- this past contract, yes. I think so. When I started there, you had Blue Cross Blue Shield, you had dental, prescription. That's all gone now.

RS: That's all gone?

SM: [00:08:00] Yeah, we don't -- I have Blue Cross Blue Shield, but I don't have the dental or the vision. I mean, not the vision, the prescription. They took that away over the years until now.

RS: This was a result of the company asking the association?

SM: Yeah, it was, like, a recession at that time in the '80s. I think '83 it happened, and we just had to pass contract right now in July or whatever. That went pretty well. We told them what they wanted, and they bickered around, came back and said -- you know, we took it back to the men. We wouldn't say nothing unless the committee felt that it was right.

RS: Does every employee belong to this association?

SM: Yeah. Well, I mean, you know --

RS: Every --

SM: Not all. I don't know if it's --

RS: Managers, though?

SM: No, no, no. They have their own. I don't know how many is in there. I don't know if it's 115. I'm pretty sure it is.

It's got to be 115, unless there's management too.

RS: What kind -- [00:09:00] so in other words, in the '80s, you had to do what a lot of people do. In other words, give back --

SM: Right, cut back.

RS: -- give back certain, cut back certain --

SM: Well, at one time, we were paying our own for Blue Cross and Blue Shield. That was back in '88 or '87 anyways. We had to pay \$27 a month. That was for a family man, I guess single was cheaper.

RS: Is that when you had the prescription and the dental?

SM: No, I don't think so. I think that was -- yeah, this was before we had that. Before this was already taken away, and they come up with this, for so long. I don't know. We did it for about six months and another contract came up. And they said, "Well look, you don't have to pay it no more, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah."

RS: [00:10:00] How do you feel about working for this particular company. Say, as if you compare it to working in Lehigh Foundry or Victaulic?

SM: If I had to compare them?

RS: You feel pretty good about the company?

SM: It's not bad. Let me tell you, I'm still working today, you know? Well, a lot of other people are making \$5, \$6 an hour. Where I'm there, it's bread on the table, you know? You learn something every day. It's not the greatest place to work at, you know.

RS: Why is that?

SM: Well, the conditions. Smoking. I'm a welder. It's smoking. You're eating a lot of dust. You know, you've got 30-ton cranes flying over your head with pieces on it. You don't know what's gonna -- ever would happen. I guess it's like anywhere else.

RS: But it's dangerous.

SM: [00:11:00] Yeah, it's a dangerous job. Sure.

RS: Do you feel that the company takes proper safety precautions?

SM: Sometimes, when they want to.

RS: When they want to?

SM: You know, you've got to get on their ass. There was something on safety, you gotta go to the committee -- there's a safety committee they have -- and you just tell them, "Hey, this ain't right." But we have safety meetings

every month. So if we feel that something's not right, at the meetings that we have there, you know, people raise their hands and give off suggestions. So there hasn't been any casualties that I know of. You know, real serious stuff, maybe [pretty major stuff?]

RS: How about the rest of the people you work with? How do they feel? They feel pretty much the same way you do? "Hell, you got a job."

SM: Some of them do, yeah. You know, you got people in there that are grinders that are making less money than me. [00:12:00] They get all the shit jobs, you know? They'll never go anywhere. But then they're the guys that just started there, six months to a year. That's why I hang in there so long. The only thing -- my regret is -- which I am going to do someday is get my -- see, I had to quit school, so I want to get my diploma and learn another trade. Right now, the industry, there ain't nothing out there, you know? So that's something, like I don't want to do that for the rest of my life.

RS: Do you -- so you feel, then, the way things are going, it's a pretty good job?

SM: My job?

RS: Yeah, your job.

SM: It's all right. It's not, you know -- like I said, it's bread on the table. I have to be there, whether I like it or not. That's the way it is.

RS: You think the company takes advantage of this situation?

SM: What do you mean?

RS: [00:13:00] Well, for example, they know that times are tough, jobs are hard to come by, and they press on such, like taking benefits away, asking for give-backs, things like that.

SM: Well, I don't know. The only thing I think, this contract here was pretty fair. The only thing we got was, you know, like I said, that we didn't have to pay the Blue Cross.

RS: Which is pretty sweet.

SM: Yeah, right now it is, man. What else? They gave us \$25 back refund on eye glasses, safety glasses, the basic things. It's not really that outstanding. It's not like at PP&L, or, you know.

RS: Do they have a pension fund there?

SM: Yeah, yeah. I don't know offhand, I don't have my -- I've got a contract, but I don't have it with me.

RS: Do you know if anybody's retired from there?

SM: Yeah, I know a lot of people who retired.

RS: Oh yeah?

SM: But a lot of people don't live to see a year or two after, welders. [00:14:00] So, I've met a lot of old men in my time since I've been there. Out of let's say ten of them, five of them are dead now.

RS: Oh yeah?

SM: Yeah.

RS: In other words, they died soon after they retired?

SM: Yeah, some of them even maybe had two or three months before retiring, and died.

RS: Would you say then that you think that they're paying you a living wage, say, compared to other industries?

SM: Right now, I'm at \$12.34 now. That's the highest I'll ever go in that company.

RS: No more than that?

SM: No. Well, unless contracts -- you know what I mean. My contract runs out in '93 anyways, so that's the only time--

RS: Do you think your income has kept up with, let's say inflation, over the last 10 years?

SM: No, not really.

RS: No?

SM: I mean, twelve-something an hour. You mean mine?

RS: Yeah.

SM: It's tough. I'd have to work a lot of overtime. That's the way to make the living.

RS: [00:15:00] Right. Do you do any overtime?

SM: I do Saturdays once in a while. Maybe in the winter, I'll work 10 hours, 9, 10 hour days, but they're long.

RS: Yeah?

SM: Yeah, 6:00 in the morning to 4:30 in the evening. So it's tough.

RS: So actually, in essence you standard of living hasn't really improved that much over the last 10 years.

SM: No, not really.

RS: Could we say that's true for other people you work with?

SM: You mean the same as me?

RS: Yeah.

SM: Yeah.

RS: Yeah, generally.

SM: I don't think they do. Like I said, if you work the overtime, you're in the higher bracket. Hell, I've made so far \$24,000 right now. You've got a guy in there that's the same grade as me. He got \$30,000. He lives here. This guy lives here. Six in the morning till 4:30 at the evening, so there's a difference.

RS: [00:16:00] If you work overtime, can you pick it yourself or do they give it to seniority?

SM: They have a chart. Well, they have a chart. It can go by seniority, yeah, but if I wanted it, I could do it, but if he was doing it and they didn't ask me, then I could bitch about it saying, "Hey, you know, this bastard's working more overtime than me. I deserve it now." That's how they work that. They've got a chart right on the wall as soon as you walk in the office.

RS: What was the atmosphere like working there over the past 10 years? In other words, working conditions. Would you say they've improved, or they've stayed about the same, or you're actually working harder now?

SM: No, I don't think we're working -- it's steady.

RS: Steady?

SM: Steady, you know. When I first got there, it was a bastard. Push, push, push, you know? But I think, well, there's a lot of foremens in and out of that place, and I think now they've got pretty good foremens. [00:17:00] You know, they're not bad right now, but they're not constantly on your ass all the time, you know?

RS: Right, right.

SM: You can't, because we're working with big shit.

RS: Well, if you're working with submarines and stuff like that, I mean, you can't rush, right.

SM: We're talking tonnage of metal here, and once that lets go, it don't say "Get out of the way," so. We all have our times, there's time schedules.

RS: Sure. What kind of -- what about some of the other people you work with? How do they feel about the company, you know, they talk?

SM: Well, some of them, I don't know. It's cold, or the heat. Let's see. The work, the smoke, a lot of people are complaining about the smoke. [00:18:00] But otherwise, it's the same old grind every day, but they're there every goddamned day punching that clock.

RS: You have to be, yeah. You have a seniority system, like you said?

SM: Yeah.

RS: You have any idea what the average age of the worker at the company would be?

SM: Of--?

RS: Of everybody, you know, what's the average age?

SM: The average age?

RS: Just a ballpark figure.

SM: Well, we got a lot of guys that are up in their late 50s, you know, early 60s. A couple of them are gonna retire next year, a lot of them. The average, I would say, in there right now is 40s, you know?

RS: Uh-huh.

SM: We have a couple that are, you know, 20s, that are kids that just started there.

RS: So most of the workers are probably in their 40s.

SM: Yeah.

RS: Have most of them been there as long as you, or longer?

SM: For longer.

RS: For longer?

SM: Yeah.

RS: So you're talking about, essentially, a workforce that's middle-aged that has been there for quite a few years.

SM: Well, that place just started there in '77. [00:19:00]
There was a [redacted] in Bethlehem itself, but then they moved, and then they came here. That was Treadwell, I guess.

RS: Treadwell, right. Did they always do this kind of work?
Defense work?

SM: Defense? Sometimes, yeah. We've got a lot of boilers. We make boilers, we make porcupines, processing, all that

stuff. A lot of defensive. If we didn't have the Navy, that place wouldn't be there.

RS: So you think it's really defense industry that's keeping it--

SM: Yeah, that's -- I mean, that's -- yeah, of course.

RS: Are you concerned with the talk about cutbacks and stuff?

SM: Damn right I am, because that'd knock me right out. I mean, I've got 11 years there, but there's a couple older welders that are -- they will stay there, they've been there for so many years.

RS: Do the other welders talk about this at all or anything?

SM: A couple of them do. [00:20:00] We had a big job for [Sea Wolf?], I guess, and I don't know if they're going to make that or not. I heard no, but that was supposed to bring a lot of work in to us.

RS: Now, it's up in the air?

SM: I guess, yeah. I don't know if they're going to take it because I heard from Newport News that they welded a hull and the damned thing cracked. I guess it was three inches thick. The walls cracked all the way around it, so they were having trouble welding it for some damned reason, but I never heard nothing about that. I don't know if they're gonna make it or not.

RS: In your view, what do you think the major problems you have on the job are? You personally or you in general, meaning the other workers. What kind of problems?

SM: You mean conditions?

RS: Yeah, conditions. Working conditions. [00:21:00] You mentioned already the dust and the smoke.

SM: Well, you've got to eat in the goddamned locker room. That's another thing. I don't know, the building. It's rundown. They don't want to get new equipment or, you know?

RS: Is the equipment you're using now pretty old?

SM: Yeah, well, some of it is. They check them out once in a while. As a matter of fact, today the goddamned welding machine I had just blew up, and I told the foreman today, "That's the second one in two months, so it's time for a new machine." They don't want a new machine. They expect me to do Grade A work. They're going to have to buy new shit.

RS: You think the company is a little slow in that, modernizing?

SM: Yeah, only when they want. If a new job comes in, they'll buy a new machine for that particular one.

RS: Where do they get the machines from? Are they American-made or foreign-made?

SM: Yeah, they're American-made, yeah.

RS: [00:22:00] But, the company doesn't go out of its way to modernize, or--

SM: Not really. I don't know how the hell you can modernize. Like, machines, the example, you know, welding machines --

RS: Well, your machine, for example.

SM: Yeah. Well, my, you know -- bathrooms. Who the hell wants to eat in the goddamned smelly room, that change into a locker, you know? I don't know. Modernize? I think I can't say.

RS: They don't put anything into it?

SM: No, not really.

RS: So they're really working on what they've got?

SM: Yeah, until it totally breaks down.

RS: Breaks down, and then they replace it.

SM: Yeah, that's why they got me this way. You know, they're trying to fix it, fix it, fix it, to where you can't do nothing with it.

RS: Do you think the management is shortsighted in that regard? You think they could be a little more far-sighted in terms of equipment, things like that?

SM: You mean they could do it?

RS: Yeah.

SM: [00:23:00] Oh yeah, I think they could.

RS: Has the company been profitable?

SM: It was just in the paper the other day, what was it?
Profits were up? No, sales were up, profits were down.

RS: Oh, that's right. I read that. Sales were up --

SM: Five thousand dollars or something. Was it seven?

RS: Yeah, the profits were way down, to almost nothing. Does
the company ever explain that?

SM: Yeah, that's bullshit. That's bullshit. I don't believe
that. They've got to have more money than that.

RS: Is it a corporation with stocks, or is it about family? Or
what? What is it?

SM: I know a lot of people have stocks in there. I don't know
who.

RS: You don't know who owns it?

SM: Yeah, James Ruth, I guess, but I don't have any idea. I
have no idea.

RS: You don't have any kind of stock sharing, or profit sharing
program, do you?

SM: What? With the welders?

RS: Yeah.

SM: No, no, no. Hell, no. We tried to get that. They wouldn't do it.

RS: They wouldn't buy that at all?

SM: [00:24:00] No, not that I know of.

RS: What was the reason? They say?

SM: No, they just told us no.

MD: No employee profit sharing?

SM: Yeah, nothing at all. That would be nice. It's like a bonus then.

RS: Sure. Do you get any kind of bonuses? Nothing?

SM: Nah, god damned turkey for Christmas. That's my bonus at the end of the year.

RS: No, that's okay. How about the pension plan? Is it decent? Do you know anything about it?

SM: Like I said, I got a contract at home, and I don't -- I can't think offhand what the hell it is. It's not much. I can't think what it is.

RS: Do you contribute to it, or you contribute along with the company, or something?

SM: Well, they take it out of your pay, you know?

RS: Right, so you do contribute to it.

SM: Yeah, I would imagine. Yeah. I can't think what the hell it is. I just can't, unfortunately.

RS: [00:25:00] Does the company ever get the workers together and talk about conditions in the industry, for example? The situation of the company? For example, they just announced sales up, profits down, that doesn't make sense.

SM: No, they don't.

RS: So there's no real talking back and forth between management and workers?

SM: No. You know, with this committee if anything would go wrong or something, yeah.

RS: What do you think the company could do for the workers that would make conditions a little better? Apart from, of course, higher pay, everybody wants that.

SM: Yeah, I understand. Oh, I don't know. Conditions? Well myself, I probably -- now, I'm only talking about myself. You've got others.

RS: Okay, yeah, what you know.

SM: Working conditions? I don't know. I think equipment is number one. [00:26:00] Like I said, the guys need ventilation. As far as that, I can't really -- Hell, I'd like to have shoes. You know what I mean?

RS: Safety shoes?

SM: Safety shoes. I keep wearing mine out every damned six months, stuff like that. Heat, you're working under a tin roof.

RS: Cleaner air?

SM: Yeah, which there's nothing you're gonna really do about that? You know? You've got to expect those things.

RS: Do you think the -- alright, you talked about your work, and you talked about the fact that apparently for you, as a welder, a skilled welder, experienced welder, there's not a lot out there.

SM: Out today?

RS: Yeah.

SM: Not that I know of. I mean, I could -- I was told in '85 I could get a goddamned job anywhere at that time.

[00:27:00] I could have got a job at Ingersoll Rand. I could have gotten [OJ Oliver?], I could have got a job with him. There was one down in -- not welding, this was maintenance mechanic, \$15 an hour. This was two years ago, but it was an hour-and-a-half drive away, so, you know? Right now, it's tough. There ain't shit out there.

RS: Yeah, most of the industry is pretty much closed down around here.

SM: Well, like I said, I drive by Victaulic every day when I drive down there. When I look at that, I just cry, because I would have never left there. If that place would have stayed, I would have stayed there.

RS: Why did they go under? Do you know?

SM: No. Well, it went to a different plant, and they didn't take the union, or the union workers, where I was. They didn't take them. They wouldn't take -- they hired all new damned people out here.

RS: Nonunion?

SM: Yeah. After a while, then they got a union in there, but then they accepted all the guys that where I worked with. Some of them went over there now. [00:28:00] As a matter of fact, some of them are working there now, but a lot of them went off to --

RS: Different places? Did these people who went back there keep their seniority, or did they have to start over?

SM: Some of them, I think, had to start over. As a matter of fact, I think they did, yes. I think they had some --

RS: And of course that's probably a lower pay.

SM: Yeah. Well, there was a lot of guys in there for, like, 30 to 35 years, and it's all down to goddamned tears.

RS: How many people were employed there?

SM: There was a lot there, I don't -- hell, over 200, 300, something like that. Three shifts.

MD: Let me get this straight. They closed up -- Lehigh Foundry closed up the old factory, built a new plant --

SM: Forks Township.

MD: -- and told all the other men --

SM: They couldn't go up there.

MD: -- you can't go up there?

SM: [00:29:00] Right, because if there was someone in the union, they didn't want a union there, or that's what I was told.

MD: What union was it?

SM: It was a local. I don't know what it was.

MD: It wasn't a shop association?

SM: No, this was a local --

RS: It's probably metal workers', or steelworkers'.

SM: Yeah, something like that. Steelworkers', anyway.

RS: Steelworkers'.

SM: I was paying \$15 a month --

RS: Dues, yeah.

SM: -- for dues and that was in '78. '77, '78. That was a lot of god damned money.

RS: Right, right. That was probably the steelworkers'.

SM: Yeah, I'm pretty sure, but after a while, I guess they let them go in there. As a matter of fact, they called me. All the guys that got laid off or whatever, I got a letter in the mail stating that they would send you to pick for a resume. They would teach you how to learn, or whatever, but I never went because I was already working. But I heard they're real bastards over there now. I heard they're son of a bitches, because I see a lot of them over at the club, guys talking about it.

RS: [00:30:00] You mean in the son of a bitches, pushing?

SM: Pushing, bad. Real bad. Time-punching the god damned clocks in and out going to the bathroom.

MD: Oh yeah?

SM: That's fucked up, man. Jesus.

MD: Lunch hour?

SM: Huh?

MD: Lunch hour's over?

SM: Well, if you go out. You know, but I mean, if you go to the bathroom, they want you to --

MD: That sounds like down South.

[INTERRUPTION]

RS: Okay here, you said that you were on the grievance committee. Talk a little bit about what you do there. What kind of cases do you handle now?

SM: Well a lot of people -- let's say if somebody gets in an argument with a foreman or if somebody gets written up, we have three procedures. Verbal, written, three days off, and suspension. A lot of people take time off. You know, they'll get a verbal warning or whatever. My step is that if they want to file a grievance, they'll file a grievance. [00:31:00] Then, we have a grievance meeting, the company with the vice president and personnel managers. And you have, I think there's four or six grievances. We go in there and we try to hash things out, but if that don't do it, then we go to arbitration.

RS: Have associates ever struck the company?

SM: What do you mean?

RS: Strike. Do you ever have a strike?

SM: Oh yeah, we had -- when the hell was it? I was on strike too, a couple years back. Eighty-five, I think it was, '84.

RS: What was that? Do you remember?

SM: No, I don't, shit. As a matter of fact, I'm on the front page of the Easton Express, but yeah, but I can't think of what it was. Probably -- I think it was benefits.

RS: Benefits?

SM: Something like that, yeah.

RS: That seems to be the big thing.

SM: I think it was pay at that time. [00:32:00] I think what happened was, went on strike, they accepted our thing, and then three years after that, they wanted an extension. And they wanted, I guess we gave them, a year extension. We had to pay it then, that \$27 or whatever the hell it was.

RS: So that was the only time then, that --

SM: Yeah, I'm pretty sure. Well, they were on strike before that, before I got there. I started three months after that.

RS: How long did that strike you were involved in last?

SM: Two weeks.

RS: Two weeks?

SM: Yeah, two lousy weeks. And the vice president said it only counted for one because actually, it was a shutdown week, which was two. You know, everybody was on vacation, so. A lot of guys were worried about their jobs. They had homes to pay, cars.

RS: Sure. Do you get a vacation every year?

SM: Me? Yeah, I get three weeks now. [00:33:00] I mean, 10 years, I think it's three weeks. So I get three weeks.

RS: It depends on how many years you've been there?

SM: Yeah. Well, hell, it's one year, one week, and then five years, two weeks, 10 years, it's three. It sucks.

RS: That's it?

SM: Yeah. Well, now, as you get older. I think it's 15 is four. I think 25 years is five weeks. I think they have six weeks, too. I'm not too sure.

RS: What kind of pay scale have they got for the older guys? In other words, somebody who's been there 20, 25 years. Probably they're experienced workers then. Very skilled jobs. I mean, how high is the --

SM: Well, the pay rate goes from \$1 to \$13. Well, \$1 to \$12. They get away with \$13. I'm 10, you know? You've got a [layout?] man with 11. He's a really young guy.

[00:34:00] A lot of machine shop people get \$10 up, and a lot of your local, your sweepers are low, which is like \$8.

RS: What's the most a -- at the top of the pay scale, what's the most a worker can make there? Not with overtime, just normal.

SM: An hour?

RS: Yeah.

SM: I think it's \$12-something. No, it can't be \$12. I think it's \$13-something. That's grade 12.

RS: Right.

SM: I think it's \$13.50 or so an hour.

RS: So that's at the top?

SM: Uh-huh.

MD: You said it went from being an increasing hourly wage to only \$1 to \$13, the rates?

SM: Yeah.

MD: And they did away with the highest rates then?

SM: Well, \$12 and \$13, they were going to pay the same, okay? So they did away with \$13. They figured, "fuck it, we'll leave \$12 the same," for some reason. [00:35:00] I don't know, because a lot of guys, I guess, let's say, if they were on a machine. One guy was on a grade 12 machine, another guy was on a grade 13 machine, but they're both the same machines, see? So they just said, "Okay, we'll do away with it." So, I don't know, that's the way.

RS: Does your wife work?

SM: Yes.

RS: She works full-time?

SM: Yeah, she's a loan officer for the [inaudible] credit union.

RS: Do you feel you really have to -- both of you have to work?

SM: Oh yeah. Two kids, sure. Hell, I don't even own a house yet, that's --

RS: Oh, you don't? You're renting a house?

SM: I'm renting it, yeah.

RS: You obviously want one.

SM: Well, of course. American dream, yeah.

RS: Do you think that -- do you see this as a possibility?

SM: Right now. Now is the time to buy. [00:36:00] You know?

RS: Interest rates are down, yeah.

SM: My wife knows all that shit. She's got car loans and all that, but I just don't have the money for a down payment, you know?

RS: Is this true of a lot of the younger guys?

SM: A lot of the younger guys had their houses handed to them.

RS: By their parents?

SM: Yeah, yeah. My parents were divorced for many years. My mom lives in Florida, my father was around here. I'm not going -- well, her parents right live up the street, but I couldn't ask. I'm going to work for the damned thing. I might get a house when I'm 60 years old, but, you know.

RS: Now as a family, have you found in the last -- you said it yourself, you felt that things pretty much stagnated over the last 10 years. [00:37:00] For your family, have conditions improved over the last 10 years, do you think?

SM: You mean the way I'm living, or?

RS: Yeah, yeah. Living conditions or the way you're living. Things you're doing, things you're buying.

SM: I think it improved. I mean, what I have right now, I work my ass off for, you know? For example, I just bought a Harley Davidson, and I had to work for that, plenty of time. It improved so much. It's like she and the kids can say, "Well, dad, I want this. I want that." A \$40 sweater or whatever. You know, you've got to set your ass up for it. I just can't --

RS: Give it out?

SM: -- give it out. I mean, I'll have some aside, but it's tough to save. It's rent, cars, Christ. That's where the overtime comes in. That's where you've got to bust your ass.

RS: How about conditions in the country? How do you see that over the last 10 years? [00:38:00] Obviously in industry in this area, it's been pretty bad, but how do you see that?

SM: A lot of things are raising higher than what I'm making is how I see it.

RS: Price of these things is higher than what you're making, so it's tougher to keep up?

SM: Right. You've got to work that last half hour a little longer, you know what I mean, to make what the hell you've got to get. It sucks, really. I get paid every two weeks, so you've got to try to buy all the things that are going to last you for two weeks, you know?

RS: Right.

SM: Hope by the time two weeks comes up, it's almost done.

RS: Do your other fellow workers feel the same way? I mean, those with families.

SM: Oh yeah. Oh yeah, they always complain. Taxes falling on them. The men who do have their house, short cash, everything. Yeah, a lot of them bitch about it.

RS: [00:39:00] Who do you think is to blame for this? You think it's the government policies? The management says American workers aren't productive enough.

SM: Yeah, but I think that's -- I don't believe in that. I mean, I know what I do, and I know what the men do where I work, you know what I mean, as far as quality-wise. You

know, like you say, any of the foreign shit coming in here I think that has a lot to do with it too. For example, Bethlehem Steel. You know, they have different competitors. Japan and all that. For a while there, we had a lot of Japan steel coming in where I work. That one year, I don't know what year it was, '85 I think it was. Guys were looking at it, you know, "Look at this," you know? Buy American-made. Buy American. You buy American. That's -- I have the stickers all over the place.

RS: [00:40:00] You believe in that, right?

SM: Sure. I do it. Hell yeah. I don't believe in -- I mean, I'm not prejudiced or anything, but we got a lot of, a couple Japans -- not Japan, Koreans. They're all right, don't get me wrong, they're nice people, but for a guy to come over here in this country, drive a goddamned Trans Am and have everything in the world. And me, I'm just scraping by the end of my ass to make it, you know what I mean?

RS: Right, right. These guys are actually working?

SM: Well, there's a couple of them there. You know, not many. Just maybe one or two, but there's one there that has, you know he's got a Trans Am, he's a regular worker, regular worker, you know.

RS: Guy's obviously single.

SM: Yeah. Well, he just had a maternity suit not too long ago.

RS: (laughs)

SM: But they're nice people. Don't get me wrong.

RS: So you don't buy this business, the American workers aren't productive, or [isn't interested?] in quality?

SM: [00:41:00] I don't think so. I can't believe it. I mean, that's where I work. My point of view. I don't know how everybody else in other factories -- I mean, I worked, like I say, at Victaulic. I had, like, side jobs and shit like that. I know what I do. I try my best anyway. You know, you can't -- and hey, there's other competitors. It's not like years ago, I guess.

RS: Do you think American management has made a lot of mistakes? You know, people who worked at Bethlehem Steel say management screwed that up there. Of course, you talked about your own management not being interested in modernizing.

SM: Right.

RS: You think this is part of the problem?

SM: I think that's a part of it, sure. From what I read, you know, yeah. [00:42:00] Matter of fact, they want to buy it, I guess.

[To go on a cruise?]?

RS: Sure.

SM: They want to take all the goddamned money and piss on the workers. That's the way I picture it.

RS: Do you think this attitude on the part of management is recent? Or, you know, let's say compared to when you first started there. Do you think the attitude of management towards the workers in your company has changed over the last 10 years, or is it pretty much just the way it was?

SM: I think it changed somewhat. Not much. There's a conflict always between the union and them. If there was no union there, I mean, I'd be making \$5.50 an hour if they had it their way. I think that's any place, but in my place if we have a problem, we try to solve it right then and there.

[00:43:00] But actually, there's conflicts all the time.

You know, people they're always crying, they ain't making money, you know what I mean? We lost this, we lost that, but goddamn, they must be doing something. That place was a gold mine there.

RS: Well, I saw that headline. (laughs) Sales up, profits down. It didn't make a lot of sense, especially since the profits they made compared to last year, there's a huge gap. The only -- they didn't buy a lot of new machinery this year.

SM: No, not that I know of. Not that I know.

MD: How old is that building? That building's been there--

SM: Well that was a foundry. Where I work at now, that's a foundry. That used to be a foundry. That's concrete floor, so there's guys there that was been there with Treadwell. A couple of them died, you know what I mean? [00:44:00] Like I said, they retire and die. I couldn't tell you how old it is, but I mean, it's old. Tin roof. You're working under a goddamned tin roof. That's what it is. But like I said, it's work, you know?

RS: Have you ever thought about going any other --

SM: Oh hell, I would -- Ingersoll Rand. That was a foundry though. They didn't want to pay shit. Ten dollars an hour. I was making \$11.50 anyway, \$11.75 anyway. They didn't want to pay. I passed the physical, and then I went back. They said, "You're hired." I said, "When's your contract?" They said, "Two months." And they went on strike anyway. I didn't take it. I said, "No, I ain't going to take all that."

RS: So in other words, they wanted you to work?

SM: Yeah, they wanted me bad, yeah. I should have went, but when I was there, I was talking to a guy there. He must have had about 40 years there. This guy was pretty old.

[00:45:00] He was an old welder. He said to me, "Oh, I see you're a young kid. You're starting out." I said, "Yeah." He looked at my test placements, "Yeah, you're hired." He says, "The only thing is when you start here, you'll never get the hell out of here. You'll stay here." I said, "What the hell are you talking about?" Here, they just passed I guess that you can bid out of the shop, and all these old bastards were there for 30 years, you know? There's no way. There's no way I would have got out of there. You know, I like to go somewhere. No, even if it's five years, you know, I don't want to stay there for the rest of my life, and the guy, as soon as he said that to me, I said, "Oh, God." He wanted to get out. He was one of the first ones that wanted to get out, so then I went back, I talked to personnel. I told them, "Hey, when does the contract come up?" I wanted to know what was happening. 'Cause they got good benefits I guess now, yeah. And when he told me April, no way.

RS: How long ago was this?

SM: Two years ago.

RS: Two years ago?

SM: Yeah.

RS: [00:46:00] After Ingersoll went through all their firing and everything?

SM: Yeah, yeah. I got a couple buddies that work there now. Matter of fact, I guess they're going to be hiring pretty soon again.

RS: How do they feel about the place?

SM: One guy loves it. As far as I hear, I don't know other people. I don't know what the benefits are. I think they got more than what I have, for sure. The pension is outstanding. But I ain't going to work in no damned foundry. No way. If I'm ever going to go, I'm not going to go to one shit hole to another. I'm not going to do that. But I don't -- if I stay in my trade now, I don't expect to see 50, you know, or 55. That's, you know --

RS: Because of the working conditions?

SM: Yeah. [00:47:00] You see these guys in there, when I started there, you see these guys who were 59 years old, and when they were turning 61, "Man, I'm getting out of here. I can't wait another year." Boom, they're fucking dead the next week, you know, or month. It's a shame. I seen that happen many a time, it's a shame. Welders are not

-- what I do is not that great. I mean, the pay is there.

It's enough to keep the bread on the table, but--

RS: What would you like to do?

SM: Me? Maintenance.

RS: Should you get out. Maintenance?

SM: Yeah, maintenance, or machinery.

RS: You thinking about doing any kind of training?

SM: I want to go to school, yeah. I've got to get my GED.

See, like I said, I got married when I was 17. I had to quit school, so I had to quit school and get a job, you know? As a matter of fact, it will be 15 years this -- next week. Twenty-seven, 15 years. It will be 11 years where I work down here.

RS: [00:48:00] How long has your wife been at [inaudible]?

SM: Two or three years. I'm not sure. She was a factory worker too.

RS: She was?

SM: Yeah, and then had problems with her back. They told her, "You either get the hell out of here or you're going to be crippled."

RS: Oh yeah?

SM: Yeah.

RS: Who did she work for?

SM: Quality Packaging. My father-in-law works there now.
Father-in-law -- well, he's a foreman there. Father-in-law,
mother-in-law.

RS: How did she get into [inaudible]?

SM: Just filled out an application, I guess. Typing. She typed
in high school. She worked her way up to where she is now.

RS: What about your kids? What are they thinking about doing?
You said you had a daughter -- a son, 14?

SM: No, daughter. Tara's her name.

RS: Daughter, 14.

SM: What is she thinking of, what?

RS: What is she thinking about doing? She's--

SM: As a matter of fact, she just told me the other day she
wanted to be a psychiatrist.

RS: [00:49:00] Better get some money.

SM: That's what I said. That's another thing you learn.
That's why when I heard that, my ass fell to the floor,
cause I didn't know what to -- "That's good," you know.
Ended up turning to the wife, you know "Jeez, we've got to
do some talking," because by the time she gets out of
school, which will be in what, four years, you know, it's
going to be tough.

RS: That means college.

SM: Right, that's what I'm saying.

RS: How about your son?

SM: Daughter? I got another daughter.

RS: Oh, another daughter, pardon me.

SM: Jennifer.

RS: She's younger.

SM: Yeah, eight.

RS: Eight? Okay.

SM: She don't know what the hell she wants to do.

RS: No, of course not. Not at eight. Well, the 14-year-old
will change her mind several times.

SM: Yeah, right. Yeah.

RS: She a pretty good student?

SM: Yeah. As a matter of fact, I'm going to the school
tonight. As and Bs. Had no problems. That's good.
[00:50:00] Pleasant, you know? She's smart.

RS: Right, but she wants to go to school?

SM: Yeah, oh yeah.

RS: Company doesn't have any kind of programs, scholarships?

SM: I wish they did, man. That'll never happen. That'll never
happen.

RS: Okay, Martin, do you have any questions?

MD: Your wife worked in a factory?

SM: Yeah.

MD: It's still open, do you know?

SM: Yeah, it's still there. I don't know what they make. Not an hour, wage wise. I know they tried to get a union in there at one time, but they turned it down. They didn't want it.

RS: The workers didn't want it?

SM: Yeah, the workers didn't want it. I don't know for what reason.

MD: You're contributing to your health benefits now?

SM: No.

MD: No?

SM: After three years.

MD: But you were?

SM: At one time, yes.

RS: But they gave up the prescriptions and the dental?

SM: Yeah.

RS: And the company doesn't supply safety shoes, things like that.

SM: No, no.

MD: Safety glasses?

SM: No, you've got to go out there and buy them, and then, you give them a receipt, and get \$25 back. That's your refund.

RS: And they're expensive.

SM: Fuck yeah, they're -- well, what I do is -- I haven't got them yet, though -- but you can get the safety glasses off of them, take that to them. That's the cheapest way to do it, because I've done that before. What the hell? They came as \$50, I guess.

RS: Fifty, sixty bucks for that.

SM: Right.

RS: [00:52:00] Well, how do you see the future?

SM: There?

RS: Yeah.

SM: Well, we better get some goddamn work in there, because it's slowing down. I don't know -- I mean, they didn't lay nobody off yet, but.

RS: Have they talked about it?

SM: Not that I know of. They don't say shit to you. The only thing you know is -- If they do, they'll say it to the chief shop steward, who's going to be there. Most likely, grinders go first, then your upper-skill -- your middle-skill people, they go.

RS: Now, the place start laying people off then people with seniority bump down?

SM: Yeah, bump across or down, but I've got super seniority.
That kinda saves my ass.

RS: You'd be actually one of the last to go?

SM: Yeah, in a way, but if there's a guy with 30 years there,
and he -- I'm going to let it go. [00:53:00] I'm not going
to say, "You go out the door before me." I'm not going to
do that, because I'm not that kind of a person. You know,
super seniority don't mean shit to me. I mean, that helps
out the officers, but like I said, again, it's not gonna --
The guy with 30 years, whatever, say, "Hey, I'm gonna
bump," you know, I can't bump, that's not right. That
just saves the officers is what that is.

RS: Yeah, I've never heard that, super seniority. I've never
heard that. What does that mean?

SM: That means you can't be bumped.

RS: Oh, I see. You can't be bumped.

SM: Well, you could be bumped, but they would have your job.
You could bump somebody all around the plant.

RS: I see, I see. How many people have that?

SM: Just the committees.

RS: Your associations?

SM: Yeah, your president and vice president.

RS: How did you get into that in the first place?

SM: I was a shop steward.

RS: Yeah, but how did you get into that? Because you were interested?

SM: Yeah, I was. [00:54:00] When I first started at there, I never knew that they had this. There was the president of the union at one time, and nobody would run for it. Nobody wanted this shop steward, man, you know, everybody -- I guess we had a real dick for a foreman, so I said, "I'll take it." So I only had about maybe two years at that time, but they accepted me. Nobody wanted it, and I got it. I learned a lot.

RS: Like what?

SM: Well, you learn how to deal with people that, with foremen and workers. That's what your mainly shop steward is, just in the shop, arguing, doing this right or that right.

RS: Did management's etiquette change toward you when you became shop steward? They treat you differently?

SM: Foreman-wise. I guess I was a real prick, I guess, after a while. [00:55:00] We went to arbitration one time because we did a levying job, and they wanted this -- the fitters there felt that this was their job, but they had a welder seat putting this job together. That went to arbitration. I'll tell you, after the -- the company won on that. The

company won. Yeah, I mean, the next day after the arbitration, boy, I was, oh man, "Why did you lie up there?" And all this shit. But that's just like at court too, you know what I mean?

RS: Sure.

SM: I don't know. It's like anybody else, I guess. You gotta -- they don't treat you different. Now, I mean -- when I started, they were -- you were a prick, you know.

RS: Just because you were shop steward?

SM: Shop steward, yeah, but now, it's different. I think they mellowed, the foreman now mellowed out a little bit. This guy, he mellowed out a little bit. But I like him. And the higher-up is your grievance committee. [00:56:00] That's why I moved up. Matter of fact, I just got voted in a month ago again for another three years.

RS: So obviously, you like doing this stuff.

SM: Yeah, you sit down with the company while we negotiate a contract and your grievance range, you try to talk. Some are hard, some are lenient. You know, they'll give in or we'll give in.

RS: You said you just negotiated a contract. Did you find the company over the last few years has gotten tougher or not on the contracts?

SM: As far as contracts?

RS: Yeah.

SM: Well, this contract went pretty goddamn easy. I don't think -- we had no problems with it. We told them what we wanted. We sat them down, said, "Look. This is what we're asking for." We had the time they needed to say, "We don't want it," to bring it back to their men. [00:57:00] If we feel it's good, we'll take it back, if not, we're just going to come back together again. We had one meeting, and I forget what the hell it was. They said something. Oh, we had to pay for the process, whatever it was, so we said, "No way. We're not going to take this back." So, we came back again. What they did was, the raise is, I think it was 40 cents or 50 cents. They knocked a nickel down off the raises. They said, "Okay, we'll pay you for Blue Cross and Blue Shield," which was fair, you know? It sucked, but it was fair. What are you going to do?

RS: What you could get, right?

SM: Right, so we took it back to the men.

RS: You thought you probably made out all right.

SM: Yeah. I mean, a lot of people bitched and moaned about it, you know?

RS: Yeah.

SM: But, I mean, these guys here were the big mouths, but after a while, I had a lot of people come up to me and say it was fair.

RS: [00:58:00] But this is -- had you been involved in any negotiation, contract negotiation, before this?

SM: This is my first one.

RS: Your first one?

SM: No. I have been to grievances, arbitrations. I've been to a couple of them.

RS: Who does their arbitration? Who does your arbitration stuff?

SM: Well, we have a company -- I mean, a union lawyer, and I guess they have a list.

RS: Right, you pick off.

SM: You have to pick off, whoever picks. Matter of fact, I went to one yesterday.

RS: You pay any union dues?

SM: I do, \$8.

RS: Eight dollars a month? This standard for everybody, more or less?

SM: Yes. Yeah, it's standard.

RS: If you go on strikes or anything or layoffs, do you get any kind of benefits from this association?

SM: Just a -- we have a strike fund.

RS: [00:59:00] Yeah, strike fund. You have one of those?

SM: That's about it. You're laid off. Well, we have where I work if you're laid off, they carry that to the end of the month you're laid off until the next month. That's your Blue Cross and you Blue Shield, they extend it another month. Then you have a two-year recall to come back.

RS: If you're laid off, do you contain your seniority, for example, those two years within that two years?

SM: Yeah, you're still in seniority. If it's after two years, you're done.

RS: You're done?

SM: Yeah. It's the same thing with if you get hurt. After two years, you're done.

RS: So overall you think the company could do more for the workers?

SM: A little bit more, yeah. Not much. I mean, you can't get blood out of a stone, you know what I mean?

MD: Could the company do more for itself? For example--

SM: In what way?

MD: [01:00:00] Like, most of your work's defense. Do you see that the company makes an effort to get other work other than defense?

SM: Oh yeah. Yeah, they got other work. They're trying for these Porcupines, these processing -- they have salesmen going up there. Boilers, little knick-knack shit. Matter of fact, we got a ladle carver just making right now that's in the process of being burned. They're trying to go out, you know? We have vice presidents that goes out by themselves and try to do it.

MD: I saw in the paper that they called it an "environmental company."

SM: Yeah.

MD: What is that? What do they mean by "environmental company?"

SM: I have no idea. I would say boilers? The only thing I can think of is they make these Porcupines --

MD: What's a--

SM: -- it's a shaft. We make them in the lengths. [01:01:00]
It's a shaft, I'm going to give you a small version. This long and it has paddles on the end, on each end, right here and here. This thing spins, it's like a dryer like, and it will dry, like, cow manure into powder. You know what I mean? It's weird. I can't explain it.

MD: Oh, it sounds like a big drill going all over.

SM: Yeah, going sideways now, horizontal.

MD: Do they lose material as they dry?

SM: No, it just dries it, and then it will go out to a powder or whatever.

MD: Ah, I see.

SM: Whatever they want. They try to get work. From what the vice president says to me, you know, to me.

MD: But other than that, they wait till the welder blows up?

SM: You mean machine-wise, yeah.

MD: Do you have a Lincoln welder?

SM: Lincoln, Hobarts.

MD: All USA-made?

SM: [01:02:00] Oh yeah. Every one of them. Matter of fact, my favorite one right now -- You see I air-arc a lot, alright? Air-arc is [back-gouge only?], if you know what that is, but anyway, I used it's generators to air arc. Air arc takes a lot out of them. My favorite one is a Westinghouse Buzz Box. That's my favorite. That's USA. That fucking thing must be made in 1930, man.

MD: Really?

SM: Yeah, it's old, but it runs good. Smooths out. You know, there's nothing wrong with it, and I won't air arc with it because I'm afraid I'm going to blow it up, and I blow it up, that's it, they won't -- they'll leave it sit there,

you know? Probably the parts are obsolete, but it -- I weld a lot of tubes with that and they came out perfect.

You know, the x-rays.

MD: When you used to work also, did you notice you were working on a lot of foreign steel?

SM: [01:03:00] At one time, yeah. Like I say, '83 or '85, somewhere around there.

MD: So the company was -- the heck were they doing, how did this foreign steel arrive?

SM: I have no -- either -- maybe the company that they were working -- making whatever it was, shipped their own, you know what I mean? We have a lot of -- the Navy furnishes their own materials, you know what I mean?

MD: Mm-hmm.

SM: The Navy will come, say, "This is what we want, you know, done. You make it into whatever we want it." That's what it is. Sometimes, they supply their own materials.

MD: Now this foreign steel wasn't supplied by Navy contracts?

SM: No, no, no. This wasn't. No, Jesus Christ, no. I think it was Libya. We a get Libya job one time, I don't know what --

MD: Sounds like ships.

SM: Huh?

MD: Sounds like ships.

SM: No, this was a concrete -- matter of fact, there was a big article in the paper about it, in the Express.

MD: [01:04:00] Libya?

SM: Yeah.

MD: Recently?

SM: Yeah.

MD: Yeah?

SM: Yeah, it was a pipeline. We did this [voices overlapping]. It was back in, I think we did this in '83, yeah, but I mean, they said how good this job was and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, you know?

RS: It was probably oil.

SM: No, no, no. This was a pipeline to somewhere.

RS: To an oil field?

SM: It was really -- this thing, it was huge. We made a lot of them, and then we shipped them out, and then something happened. The president or something stopped something to Libya. I don't know what the hell it was.

RS: Yeah, well, they stopped trade with Libya.

SM: Well then, that's what it was. They stopped it. Cause we had a lot of contracts with them after this, what we made,

but when they broke off, that was it. We had nothing.

[01:05:00] But I think it was that steel at that time. Can I bum a cigarette?

RS: Sure.

SM: Yeah, at that time. That's the only time I recall. I forget what the hell it was made from, too.

MD: Let me ask you this, do you have any idea how many men worked when you started, and how many men work today?

SM: Not that many.

MD: There's not that much difference?

SM: No, I'd say about 125.

RS: So pretty much stayed --

SM: Yeah, yeah.

MD: You know, when I drive by there, I see signs. They have a sign out in the lawn, "Skilled help wanted." How come they always put that sign out?

SM: They're always looking for help. They can't keep their workers.

RS: Why? Why is that?

SM: [01:06:00] Well, the welders, they can't keep them. Welders are -- at that time, welders were finding better jobs. They were learning how to weld there. Hell, matter of fact, they had a school there teaching them how to weld,

and guys would learn how to weld, get the hell out. Hell, they were going to PP&L and everything. I had -- we had five guys go to PP&L, you know? I wish I could go to PP&L but, like I said, they won't even look at me.

MD: PP&L? They won't?

SM: Yeah.

MD: Why?

RS: Because [voices overlapping]--

SM: Well, a sizeable diploma, plus I'm not Puerto Rican, you know? That's what it is. No, that's true.

RS: Is it?

SM: Oh yeah, it's true. It is true.

MD: Explain.

SM: Huh?

MD: Explain that.

RS: Explain that, will you?

SM: Well, as a matter of fact, they just had it in the paper the other day about something about a course they had or something, or a school, or-- [01:07:00]

RS: Yeah, for minorities.

SM: Minorities, that's what I'm thinking -- okay. What's killing me is the high school diploma, and I can understand that.

RS: Yeah, but here you are. You've got over 11 years' experience. You're an expert welder. You do really highly specialized -- and that high school diploma makes a difference?

SM: Yeah, but see? That's what I say, that's the first thing they look at, right then and there. I know -- I'm not gonna mention --

RS: It doesn't make sense.

SM: I know. I'm not gonna mention -- I ain't going to mention no names, but I know a guy that walked in there and he -- they had a test there. He failed it three fucking times. Twice, rather. They said the third time -- they gave him the third time. He barely passed. They hired him.

RS: This guy was black or --

SM: No, no.

RS: -- Puerto Rican?

SM: He's Puerto Rican.

MD: PP&L.

SM: PP&L. This guy is making fantastic money. Seventeen, nineteen dollars an hour. Jesus Christ, benefits up the ass. Now, they gave me an application, you know? You know, it's -- [01:08:00] Like I said, the high school

diploma rings around your head. That's today's thing, and I've got to get that, which I understand.

MD: Why haven't you gotten a GED?

SM: I went four -- a couple -- two years ago. I went to school, but they weren't teaching you nothing. You sit there, they throw a book at you and say, "Look, this is what you've got to know." It's not, it's not like -- I mean, they're there to help you if you have a question or anything, but that's not learning, to me, that's not learning. You know, to me, I know it's stupid, you've got to grab them by the hand, show them how to do it. That's the way I was taught on everything. It's a poor way to do it. I'm going to go back to Easton. I went to [P-burgh?], but I didn't go to -- I'm going to try Easton again.

MD: So it's not that you don't have time? Or is it?

SM: Well, time. I've got to be home for the kids. [01:09:00]
After work, I come right home. You know, my wife comes home at 5:30.

RS: What do you work, seven to 3:00?

SM: Three-thirty, yeah.

RS: Three-thirty. How many minorities do they have up at your company? Do they have many working?

SM: I'd say about 10. Ten or 12.

RS: Did they go out of their way to hire the few? In other words, say a Puerto Rican or Black comes in and there's a -- a white guy comes in, they've got the equivalent experience, training, or whatever. Does the company lean toward the minority?

SM: Oh, I would imagine. We had a couple guys that didn't know what the hell they were doing, you know what I mean, they need -- I mean, you gotta train them. Where I work, you can't just walk in there and know what -- "I'm a welder, blah, blah, blah." I saw a lot of people do that. First, you got to take a test, see what you know.

RS: Sure, sure. [01:10:00] How about women? Are there any women at work?

SM: No not that I know. None of them work in welding. One woman where I was at, I guess she was getting screwed by everybody and her brother in there, you know what I mean? So that didn't work out, as far as I know.

RS: That's surprising because a lot of companies, you know, now, try to hire women.

SM: Well, when I worked at Victaulic there was a lot of women there. Women welders, and I'll tell you, they were big as just the men.

RS: Oh, yeah, there were women welders?

SM: Mm-hmm. Yeah, I'll never forget the time I opened the door -- well, screw open the door and I walked by, she had a set of tits on her. It knocked the shit out of me because I didn't -- she had bib overalls on, you know. I just stood there and stared at her. Jesus Christ, you know? I thought it was a man with a hard hat on. It was a woman. She was a welder, too.

MD: [01:11:00] So did you ever try to get into Bethlehem Steel?

SM: No. I know guys that tried, that did have jobs in there. I knew people that was going to get hired in 1980, and they told them right out, "You might work six to eight months," so they didn't take the job.

RS: I have a friend who was a welder for Bethlehem Steel, he finally went out and started his own business.

SM: Welding is -- it's bad shit. Smoking fat tubing, the dirt, you're constantly breathing grinding dust. It's a shame, but you've got to do it to live. To make money, anyway.

RS: How does your wife feel about that? She --

SM: About what I do?

RS: No, about things in general. Does she feel that you're -- you're threading water. [01:12:00] She obviously wants a house too.

SM: Oh, sure.

RS: She get disgusted with the way things are going?

SM: Yeah, you want money, when payday comes, you look at your check, you look at what you have, and what you've got to pay out. Look what you've got, you know?

MD: Did your wife always work?

SM: Did my wife--

MD: Did she always work?

SM: Yeah.

MD: Ever since you married?

SM: Yeah, you have to. You can't make it on one. There's no way. I don't think nobody can do that now, you know, one people per marriage. I didn't want her to, but you know.

RS: How about the kids? You think this will affect the kids at all?

SM: What's that?

RS: Both parents working.

SM: Well, I'm going to tell you. My daughter, she's 14 years old, but she does a lot for me and my wife. [01:13:00] It doesn't bother her, but you put more of a workload on the child because when you come home, you don't feel like doing shit. I don't, you know. She'll come home, she'll have supper on the table for me because my wife comes home at 5:30. So I've got a damn little girl -- a good girl there.

She helps out a lot, but without her, you know, it's -- the wife would have to come -- She helps at home.

RS: Do you think the American government could do more for the workers -- for the American workers or for the economy as a whole?

SM: [01:14:00] Yeah, they could do a little bit better with it. They say, "Well, Reagan," -- not Reagan, "Bush says that we're not in a recession." I said, "He's full of shit."

RS: He isn't on a recession.

SM: Yeah, yeah.

RS: (laughs)

SM: Well, you know what pisses me off was you know they had that storm down there, and then they had a big thing in the paper, whatever it was, in his house. Who the fuck cares about him? What do you think about somebody else that really needs you, you know? That's what really pisses me off.

RS: You have a feeling in the last, maybe the last 10 years, the government doesn't give a damn about the American worker?

SM: They don't care enough. I would say you don't, no. Government in general? No. Economy's bad, like I said.

[01:15:00] I don't know. Nothing's doing -- nothing's

being built. You know, buildings or something like that. Hell, when I started there when I worked, it was going like a bastard. We had three shifts. You know, it was fun to be there, you know, working, but now, things are slow now. People worrying about losing their jobs. It's a shame. It's back to where it was, I guess -- the recession I guess is where it was. I think it was a depression myself. They don't say --

RS: Well, a lot of people feel that way.

SM: Yeah, I think it's slipping right back again.

RS: A guy called it the "silent depression," yeah.

SM: Yeah, I saw that in the paper.

MD: When you say it's slipping right back, slipping right back to what? Like 1991 is slipping back to?

SM: To back in -- well, I was hired in '80. [01:16:00] I think back in '81, '82, '83, you know, that's what it -- the -- what do you call that? Not depression, recession --

RS: Recession.

SM: -- at that time, right?

RS: Yeah. Eighty-two, '83.

SM: You know what I mean? It's like it's going right back again, 10 years again now, but we always had work. I was there.

MD: The defense work?

SM: Yeah. Well, it depends. Some commercial, but defense was there. It was always there. Without the Navy, I think we would have been screwed.

RS: Where would you go if the place closed down? What would you do?

SM: I have no idea, and believe me, I've thought about that a lot, because you don't know, you know, the gate will be locked. [01:17:00] Like I said, I'm just a welder. I mean, I'm good at fixing things and stuff like that, but that would have really put me in a shit hole. I'd probably have to end up collecting, you know, unemployment for a while, probably end up working five, six, four dollars an hour. I couldn't tell you.

RS: Do you think you'd -- when you started back in 1980 you didn't feel this, the way you feel now, about the uncertainty of the future, obviously.

SM: No, because there was a lot of work then. I mean, when the recession came, you know, I got laid off, but you knew things would be picking up. You could see it. Things were coming in, you know, the materials or whatever. [01:18:00] You know, they just didn't have the okay to do whatever, blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, but no. Right now, you don't

need -- it's like I said, you can wake up in the morning,
"Hey, we're going to close the door." Well, you saw in the
paper.

RS: Sure, sure, yeah.

SM: But that could be a lie, too. Fuck, anybody can put
something on paper, you know?

RS: Well, companies often do that to scare their workers.

SM: Yeah, well, what are they going to do? Something? Jesus
Christ.

RS: Okay, anything else Martin?

MD: I think we got it.

RS: Okay. Do you want to add anything, Scott?

SM: Well, I just hope it don't -- [01:19:00] what you're doing
is good, you know? I just hope it makes the people aware
of what's --

RS: Well, that's the idea of this.

SM: -- what's happening, you know? Maybe some people have it
worse than what I have it. You know, some people might
have it a little bit better, but it's a hell of a life to
live, alright.

RS: Yeah. You live literally one day to the next.

SM: Right [voices overlapping]. It's not job security at all.
You gotta have a high school -- well, yeah, a high school,
college degree, and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah.

RS: There are only a few college degrees open. They get nailed
too.

SM: And I wish it would be a little bit better. You know, the
economy and whatnot.

RS: Let me ask you one last question. What did you think about
the -- did you follow the last senatorial election in
Pennsylvania at all? Because Wofford --

SM: No, I don't follow --

RS: -- because Wofford was talking about a lot of this stuff.

SM: [01:20:00] Really?

RS: Yeah.

SM: What did he have to say on it?

RS: Well, he, you know, he wants a national healthcare plan.
He wants to keep -- he doesn't want a free trade act --
pact -- with Mexico. He wants to keep jobs in this
country. He wants to do more in terms of investing in this
country.

SM: I believe in that. Same thing with, like, the foreign
shit, you know. Toyotas. I mean, I drive one, but I

shouldn't. It's the only thing I could afford, you know
what I mean?

RS: Okay, good.

END OF AUDIO FILE