Interviewee: Joseph Edward Lawrence (JL)

Interviewer: Michelle Stefano (MS)

Transcriber: Matthew Schueler

MS- Michelle Stefano

JL- Joe Ed Lawrence

MS- You'll say your name and just introduce yourself however you'd like.

JL- Okay…right now?

MS- Whenever you'd like...

JL- Okay, my name is Joseph Edward Lawrence...and...oh, and I have to look straight ahead...

MS- No, you can look at me...forget about that camera

JL- Okay, forget about that camera because I’ve doing my hair all night...my name is Joseph Edward Lawrence, I go by 'Joe Ed' because I celebrate my mother because she always wanted twins...I’m from 'Old Donald Heights'...I left there in 1961 and I went into the military...Airforce...and never went back because I was stationed all over the world...I married my high school 'sweetheart'...who lived on Dundalk Avenue...and we both have 100 girls, no, we only have three but it seemed like 100 (laughs)...but, we had a great time...we now live in Perry Hall...we like to call it 'Perry Heaven' but...it's [Perry Hall] a really nice area...the area that we grew up in, 'Old Donald Heights' it nothing but a plowed down field...because all the houses are torn down...where we [JL &Spouse] grew up...so it was a rough life...

MS (1:12)- Tell me about where you grew up?

JL (1:13)- Well I grew up...we didn't have things like cars and phones...and when I grew up we had one person in our neighborhood who had a phone and like nine people our on a line so, you make a call or pick up the phone and people are talking all the time, but we didn’t have a phone so we didn't have to worry about it...we played sports at the 'Old Donald Heights Rec Center'...[it] would keep us out of trouble...it was a good neighborhood...I didn't know we were poor till I went to High School...when you said you were from 'Old Donald Heights' they[other High School Students] would say ohm(smirking facial gesture)...and they'd move away from you...I was lucky enough to go to Parson...they had a super football team...it was really great...so I had no problem...but then I graduated February of '61 and I was in boot camp March of '61...

JL (2:03)-...In those days...if you lived in a development like a housing complex...what we all used to call it...we used to call it 'Hillbilly Heights'...when you grew up there, when you left High School...you had to either find a house, I mean find a job, or they'd [unknown entity] move your mother out of the house...because you were no longer a kid, now you were an adult so,...most people went in the service...which I did...I went into the Airforce...to avoid the draft...I wound up spending some 30-some years in...it was not too bad of a life, really...I mean I have no complaints about it...like I said I didn't know I was poor until I went to High School...because, you know, we just take things for granted...we had something to eat....we had shoes...what else could we need...

MS(2:55)- Would you mind speaking a little about the relationship of where you grew up and the 'Point'?

JL (2:56)- When I grew up...in my area...everybody worked three places...(1) Sparrows Point, (2) Sparrows Point Shipyard, or (3) the Fischer Bodies Chevrolet Plant...I knew a lot of people that worked at Sparrows Point...my brother was a foreman down there at Sparrows Point...so, when I got out of the service I had to find a job...obviously...I had spent four years in...I was a crew chief on a C-130...the wife didn't like me flying a lot so I decided I’d get out...she worked at BGE [Baltimore Gas & Electric]...so, I figured I’ll get out and see what’s available...I went down there [Baltimore, Maryland]...I went down to Sparrows Point...my brother was there and asked if I wanted to go through as an apprenticeship...an Iron Workers apprenticeship...which was really difficult...people think if you're an Iron Worker all you do is climb and look pretty...but it's really educational enhanced...it's smart...in other words, if someone said to you, you had to make a pair of steps...you'd better measure everything correctly....angels and everything else or you'd lose money...you don't do it right...it was really hard...matter of fact...the very first time I went there [Sparrows Point]...my first class was, Algebra...in High School I had Algebra...so, I had the basics on it...but my brother was pushing me he really wanted me to do it good...when I came home from school and I told him about it...the class I had...Algebra...he said wait a minute...you're telling me that you can multiply letters? I said yeah...he said, it took me four or five years to learn long division, now you can tell me you can multiply letters...I said yeah...he said I guess 'A' plus 'B' equals 'C'...I said yeah it does...that’s the way we were we[I] stayed with him for a while...the apprenticeship down there was really hard...when I went in, in March, I got out of the service...applied for the apprenticeship...I had to take so many test...you take a test and if you passed that they gave you a higher test...

JL (5:01)- ...Until you reach a certain level and they say, 'ya' you were accepted to the program...but, the program doesn't start 'till September when school does...from March till September I had to find a job...he [unknown] said they're a lot of jobs...we are hiring...he[unknown] said, well what do you want to do...I said, what pays a lot of money...he said, well you want to go to the 'Tin Mill' it's called a 'Roll Shop'...that's where the most, highest, paid jobs are...so I said fine and I went over there and he gave me a 'paint card'...punched in and I interviewed [with] a general foreman...his name was Pat Heely...he was really a strong guy he was [an] ex-military guy...he set me down and said look, have you ever been in the military...I said, yes, I just got discharged...he said start Monday...that was my interview...that's how it was in those days...it[there] were jobs available. They would put you on a test...if you were good they kept you...if you weren't...see 'ya...so for the first month or two you worked as hard as you possibly can...it really was good...it was a really good paying job...then when the apprenticeship opened in September I transferred back to the Iron Workers...and I’ve been with them for forty-years...I have no complaints, really...in that time frame that are a lot of things that happened...

JL (6:26)- ...You know...changes and so-forth...I mean it's hard to explain...most of the apprenticeship, which lasted about four years...now if you work a lot of overtime you can finish early because it goes by hours...but I did it in a little more than three hours...three years...because in those days we worked a lot of overtime...so, you'd be working a lot of overtime...Winter...an Iron Worker...see, most people don't know what an Iron Worker is...if I told you I was a carpenter...you know I’d do lumber work....a pipe-fitter I’d do pipe work...but what does an Iron Worker do?

JL(7:02)- ...An Iron Worker does any maintenance on Sparrows Point...in other words, you have a 'Tin Mill'...and they have a maintenance unit...and they have us do basic work...for then for some reason that 'Tin Mill' shuts down...and they bring the Iron Workers in to do the big jobs...we're trained in just about everything on Sparrows Point...the good thing is that we are always smart and intelligent...the bad thing is when you go to these different mills...the mills know as soon as you come in there you're doing a lot of work they would normally do and not getting so much overtime so they love us..."oh you're an Iron Worker"... they give you that look...and that's the way it goes...we're superiorly trained and we think we're smart so we must be...so that's the way it was for like forty years...

MS (7:48) So you gained a good knowledge…as a whole, of Sparrows Point?

JL( 7:50)- Exactly...so in other words you'd...one day you'd come in and worked a 'Tin Mill'...next day you'd come in and work the 'Coco Mill'...it all depends on the jobs...like one...the hardest jobs was the 'Blast Furnace'...we had at that time like ten 'Blast Furnaces'...when they would come down they'd stay down for like ninety days...we would rebuild the whole thing...all the steel and everything else...and then they would have to install-late it...brick layers would come in...you'd work...no matter what the temperature is...no matter what the weather was...you'd work constantly around the clock...so that was really hard...but you'd put a lot of overtime in...but I know a lot of guys that got injured and worked like that...say a gang of like ten people...and you'd go in there and it's really really hot...so we'd say look, five of you work and five of you take a cool-down...and we'd switch around...I mean it was really hot it was unbearable...and your skin would burn and stuff like that...most of the guys you worked for because it was so tough...it was the same as the military they were always backing you...we had jobs were you would come in at midnight working on a 'Crane-runway'...then a friend of mine would come up to me and said he just got a call...a friend of his...his kids just got hurt and they need some blood...any of you guys O-negative or any kind of blood...just like that four or five guys would go give blood...we kind of took care of each other...I mean we'd fight amongst each other...[for example] working three to eleven and get off at midnight...well instead of going home because the family is already asleep we'd stop by [the bar] and have a couple of beers...when Iron Workers drink beer they are like four-foot John Wayne’s..."what are you looking at" (making an impression)...you know that kind of stuff...and a lot of times if you had really big jobs and not enough guys to do it they'd bring in outside Iron Workers...they were like the same type...real tuff guys...they were like our competition too...sometimes we would have a problem with them here and there especially after work like in the bars...

JL(9:58)-...it was really good...it was really good training...most of the people there were really tuff...I tell you what...most people there were so tuff they had nicknames...if you worked at Sparrows Point for four or five years you had a nickname...for something you did in the past...for example, we build a 'Blast Furnace' and it's really dirty and scuzzy...so they have a room set-aside and they call it a 'cool-down'...so you go in there and you eat your lunch and wash your hands...and you go and eat lunch. Well in those days you'd come to work and go to 'cool-down' first and you'd meet around and your boss would tell ya' what your job was...and you'd take your lunch ...and in those days it's all paper bag...and you go set it in the area. And when it's your turn to eat lunch you come down...wash up...take your safety gear off and sit down and eat lunch...well this one guy...he's from Dundalk...he came in one morning...and everybody smoked those days...and he put his cigarettes in his lunch bag...and he...he forgot about them...so he lit on the job...so then he remembered...so he went back to get his cigarettes...so he's looking through the bags...and...some guy saw him...cause everybody had brown bags...so you know what his nickname was for forty years?...'food inspector'...'the food inspector ‘right!...so then we had one guy...he was all the time smiling...you'd say something...always smiling...nickname 'howdy dowdy'...you know it was that kind of stuff...but we had some tough guys too...one guy was like...I think he was...what do you call it?...a guard...a guard at Gales...one of the bars...he was the bouncer...when he came down there...he's really big...like 6'3"...his name was "Bubba"...but ya know it's like those kind of guys ya work with...so matter of fact...when they line you up in the morning they tell you what your gang is....you generally have three guys work together all the time...depending on the size of the job...if it was larger...they give you help right....Joe-Ed you're working with Bubba...Howdy Dowdy...and you know who it was...and sometimes you'd meet up afterwards...like at East Point...and you'd be with their wife or their family...and you try to introduce them...uh...Bubba...because you forget their first name...but everyone there had a nickname...and it was...like i said...the work was tough...but it's like...it's kind of like it was a challenge...like you'd go through a mill...and the mill...we had a couple explosions...and you'd have to get this mill back in...because we had so many orders...and the longer it's down...the more orders we lose...and the more money we lose...so they gave you an incentive to work this job...the quicker you get done...the more money you make...incentive...you know...the more orders we lose the more money we lose...so they give us incentives...the quicker you get done the more money you make...now you made your average salary and you'd get a bonus and stuff like that you know what I mean...we had a job...I think it was a '93'...it was a halogen line...it was rebuilding the halogen line, basic stuff...we had mill rights, outsiders, [and] Iron Workers...what it is a chemical that they put the sheets through...when the sheets go through they coat it[sheets]...so the chemical that they put it through is really toxic...depending on who you talk too it's like arsenic...bezyte...all those lovely things...

JL (13:17)- ...So the guys we're just about finished and we put this tank in...I mean it was huge...it was about 100 foot long and twelve foot square...it was all made out of metal...well this material would eat the metal up so they decided too rubber line it...with this rubber so they would keep this acid from [touching] this material...which was good...so we had two weeks to do the job and the last couple days we were ahead of time and we were working overtime...and the last couple of days we had guys come in...they [guys] had a couple little small jobs...handrails and stuff like that...and then one day...too this day nobody knows why...but they set a fire off and it exploded the mill...I couldn't say the guy’s name because it was embarrassing...who I think did it...but after it was over his name was, 'Sparky'...but it was really strange...from that point on...we all got called together and said, look we need to put this Mill back together within 16 hours and I want this whole Mill put back together...so we did it...in 14 days and the plant manager was going to walk around and shake everybody's hand...so we were going to have this...the plant manager was going to talk to us he wanted to thank us...and we said, well I don't want to go to that...but he said, we wanted to give you free doughnuts...and we said, well now that you mention it maybe we will go...so everyone showed up and we all were sitting around eating doughnuts and talking and they had a stand [four foot wide]...so they had a stage set up a portable stage...and here comes the plant manager walking down the stage and shaking hands [giving condolences]...well there was a guy next to me...his name was 'Louie the Hog'...the guy could eat anything, he ate oysters for breakfast...but he had lost his hearing...he had hearing aids on...so whenever you talked to the guy and he didn't want to her what you were saying he'd turn his hearing aid off [making a gesture of turning a hearing aid off]...very simple he'd turn his hearing aid down...so when the manager came around, shaking hands, I said [to the manager] I want to introduce you to somebody...this guy here, Louie the Hog, is oldest guy working here at Sparrows Point...at the time the guy [Louie the Hog] had like 50 years in service...and the guy [manager] said, I’ve bet you've seen a lot in your time... and Louie said, it's about noon [laughs]...he couldn't understand what he [manager] said...but that’s the way it was down there...we finished the job and we went back to work...it was like that on a lot of jobs because the jobs were [primarily] accidental... the negative side was there was a lot of deaths because of the way the atmosphere was down there and stuff like that... you [Iron Worker] had to get this done...

JL (16:05)- ...[pause & hesitation]...you would not believe how many people have been killed at Sparrows Point...I’d say since the '60's...it's in the 200's...I had the opportunity to join the safety department because we had lost so many people through accidents...and most of the accidents are as dumb as you can be...I mean...like for example, we had this guy go into a building...like a B.O.F...and it [building] had all this dust flying around [unknown] particles...he took his safety glasses off for whatever reason..."oh it's too hot" [mocking]..."I can hear better" [mocking]...you know that kind of stuff...and they'd [safety violators] get eye injuries...something as dumb as that...so, we came up with a safety team and once a month we'd have a meeting...we [safety team] had this many accidents this month...so you'd [employee] be aware... [now] if you had an accident, for example a trip, I call that a 'Near Miss'...and for every 1,000 'near-misses' you'd have 'One Accident'...so, be aware [shrugging shoulders] when you walk into a Mill...like [looking] for electric lines. Just be aware...simple as that...so we started that and it was effective...for example, one April we had eleven [emphasizing] eye injuries, the previous year and then we[ safety team] got this 'Safety Program Awareness' ...so then you have this guy... we got this one guy...you see him with his safety glasses on [off]...and you tell him to put his safety glasses on...you say, "look man I don't want to' here anything [just put the safety glasses on]"...you say they're dirty, [then] go clean them...

JL(17:40)…if you’re glasses are so dirty, you leave, go clean them, and come back…you don’t take them off in a hazardous area…you think people…we save some many accidents that you think people would be happy…no [commenting]…you’re a pain in the butt…”he didn’t wear his glasses” [quoting unknown]…safety man was a tough job…[example] if you had a problem with two people and you finally settle it…whoever one that argument, that guy, liked you for a whole day…the guy that lost that argument, he hated you for life…safety man was a terribly hard job…like I said, we had one accident…we had one job one month…a B.O.F on a major job and we had so many people with eye injuries…so, I listed all the eye injuries…people that went to the dispensary and so-forth…I went to my ‘Zone Man’ who had lost his eye when he was young…I asked him and said, “I’m going to have a meeting at the end of the month and it’s going to be about eye injuries only. I am going to sit there and read about eye injuries and ask for suggestions and I am going to read the names of all the people [eye injured employees]”…he only had one eye…a glass eye…so I said, “would you mind sitting there and talk about your eye [injury] and what it means to lose an eye”…he said, “yes, I would”…so we did…we had the meetings at least once a month…and the guys would be sitting there and talking and he [eyeless coworker] came up and I introduced him…we had parked from the ‘Main Office’ and sometimes we [they-unknown] would just send people [unknown] up there just to see what we were doing…so he sat there, with a real growly voice, a super, super worker, he said, “ya…ya I lost mine [eye] when I was younger…a lot of you guys are ugly anyway and you can only imagine what I was like when I was younger.”… And he pulled his one eye out…

MS (19:29)-…[shocked]…

JL (19:30):…That’s what [pointing to Dr. Stefano]…that exact look…that’s what...[unknown] lose ya [unknown] how you speak [emphasizing hand gestures]…pink, like…but that was the type of [unknown]…but it was effective you were making people aware…people would complain to you but at least they were listening…that was hard in the actual working job… we had, like, 10 to 15 representatives from each area and they would base and they would basically say the same thing you know…you name it [for example] broken fingers…I’ll give you an example…there was this guy on a roof…he was drilling a hole and the drill broke…we had to take a chuck key, stick it in the side, loosen the bit and put a new one in…so when he was doing that, he hit the trigger and dislocated his finger because that thing [drill gun] went around [unknown]…right beside him was the plug [to the drill gun]…all he had to do was unplug [the drill gun] and he could do what you [he] want to do and it’ll work [increase safety and or prevent mishaps]…those were the things…they were really irritating because why wouldn’t they [employee] just use common sense? The key thing down there [Sparrows Point], my key thing, the thing everybody used to tease me about…I hated carbon monoxide…if you’ve ever been in carbon monoxide it messes your whole system [body] up…it got to a point that I had to go through the chamber…I’d really sick or something and it got really serious…but I got some and it made you so sick, I mean [sick] for weeks…so my big thing was carbon monoxide…[reciting protocol] make sure we have the [safety] equipment, make sure we have the training and so-forth…it’s almost always…when you have one or more accidental deaths…it’s almost always carbon monoxide [related]…for example, you have a gang of six people working inside a tank…you have one guy one guy passes out…what do the other five guys do? They run over and help him…guess what happens to them…[pause]…they pass out [pointing finger towards the ground]…so we came up with rules for carbon monoxide training and so-forth and basically it says [states], if someone passes out you leave immediately and get help…that’s the only way you can save him and you…and it was effective because from that point on we had carbon monoxide accidents but we didn’t have any multiple [carbon monoxide] deaths [fatalities]…so it [there] was [were] some positives in the [safety] training…go ahead…

MS (21: 45)…Thanks…

MS (21:46): …These are great stories…you just mentioned the ‘Chamber’…now can you just briefly explain what the ‘Chamber’ is?

JL (21:51): …If you inhale carbon monoxide through a certain level…it gets in your bodies system…your body is more attracted to carbon monoxide then it is oxygen… fortunately, your body help you, with the hair follicles and all that stuff…but it you get so much of it in…[then] you want to get it out as quick as you can because it could affect your brain and all your organs…they put you in a hyper-something chamber and it pressurizes your body and forces it [carbon monoxide] out, basically…so it’s a pain in the butt really but, you save yourself…for example, our meters we have in our house for carbon dioxide…they’re at such a low-level…[compared too] the meters down there at Sparrows Point are ten times higher so you’re at that level…I’ll give you an example of how much it’s down there…we all here about the coal mines…methane gas, carbon monoxide, and everything else…we all here about it on the news…well there is more carbon monoxide down at Sparrows Point in one day then there is an a coal mine in an entire year…that’s what the levels are…so you have to be very, very vigilant…because, every time you have a heat, you have carbon monoxide…you have a fire, carbon monoxide… so it’s that kind of stuff and you have to be extra aware…that’s what we try to do…we try to make everybody as best aware as we can…the safety teams were really effective and each department had safety teams and it really was it was starting to spread…I’ll give you an example…there was this one time say you fell down you broke your leg and you needed an ambulance…well each ‘Tin Mill’ has a ‘doc’ [doctor] and he has a number…for example, ‘Doc 16’ and if your familiar with the plant and you know where ‘Doc 16’ is and you’re an ambulance driver you show up and you don’t know where [or who] ‘Doc 16’ is…so they came up with this idea of putting this emergency plaque [on] all the bulletin boards and all the things that tells you what you do if you [experience] get an emergency…[listing protocols] you call (911) as far as [where to] meet them at the gate…so we all these procedures…as far as the explosion we had…we came up with something they called a, ‘Hot work permit’…what it is, is a written form that says’ “the owner of the mill [in which] that you’re working is safe to work”…. So he signs that where it is safe to work…well what do you do if you have to work around electrical, high voltage, where there’s high ampage…he [owner] makes sure it’s killed [energy source] …so you don’t have to work around danger…so this ‘Hot work permit’ was given around to all the departments…what I would do before the job started…say we got a gang [workers] coming in [to work] Monday…I’d meet with him Friday and go over the ‘Hot work permit’…well he’d go down it [Hot work permit], sign it, preliminaries….so when the guys came in to do the job… it would already be done so we didn’t have to waste time doing it… so that was really effective…the safety things was really ‘tops’…

MS (25:05): Excellent…you showed us a beautiful photograph of yourself and two colleagues…would you mind telling the story of that photograph?

JL (25:14)…Yes, it was 1990 it was over the ‘68 hot-strip’ ‘slab-yard’ which was an area that takes these slabs and they store them… and once they’re ready to use them they take these slabs the storage and transfer them to a conveyer which them transfers them into a furnace …the furnace brings them up to a certain temperature…they come out of the furnace and come [go] over to another assembly line and they shrink them… It’s like going into the old days, when you had ‘ringers’ for your washing machine it was similar to that only a bigger structure…it [would] be life 11 inches thick…it goes through the one set of Mills and then it [goes] to ten inches…then nine inches…then down to a pea-down to a thickness that you could use it…

JL (26:00): …Well we get a call once [that] they had an accident down there…that one of the ‘Overhead Cranes’ that was transporting these slabs…and one of the [crane] arms broke…and one of these slabs [supported by the crane] fell…and when it fell it fell on one of these area where they [workers] was working on a ‘Transfer Car’…it crushed everything…so we went in there and tried to replace the, ‘bad rails’, the ‘cars’, and everything else…it was middle December, really cold, because a ‘Slab Yard’ is like a big empty lot with a big roof on it…the air just blows in…it really was cold…so, we went in there and worked that and we did a wonder job…well, we think we did anyways [laughing]…but that was typical because when you’re an ‘Iron Worker’ you’re on stand-by 24 hours, anytime they’d need somebody they’d call you…so it was really good…matter if fact…when we first sold the ‘Plant’ I.S.C. bought it…the guy’s name was **Wilbur Ross**…the reason why I mention this [is because] I asked you [Dr. Stefano] what an ‘Iron Worker’ was…well here’s a guy that was buying a new plant…and we had a meeting…all the foreman’s…and I was invited because I was a safety rep [representative]…to answer any questions about our department as best as I could…anyway in his meeting he had said something like, “We are going to abide by all the Union rules if we buy the Plant…if we buy the Plant we are going to go by seniority and everything else…but we are going to consolidate some jobs”...

JL (27:43): …[Commenting on new owners quote]...So, too an ‘Iron Worker’, when you say that we’re consolidate…that means you’re going to ‘Cut Forces’…so I raised my hand and asked him [I.S.C. representative] if I could ask a question…so he said, “sure”…and I’m sitting next to my general foreman…because he knows I generally speak my mind…and he’s [general foreman] like [impersonating general foreman] [making an uneasy looking facial gesture] …so I said to him [I.S.C. representative], “so you say you going to cut forces…[pause]...and again we know what a carpenter and a pipefitter are…well what is an ‘Iron Worker’ that’s my job description…an ‘Iron Worker’…what do I do?”…he said, “well…I…uh…[stuttering]…got a staff working on that”…[JL] “So, let me get this straight…you’re going to cut jobs…from my point of view…[as] an ‘Iron Worker’ but you really don’t know what we [Iron Workers] do. I tell you what I feel like…I feel like ‘Sparrows Point’ is a tuxedo and the ‘Iron Workers’ wear a pair of shoes”…and he said, “Well, I guess that’s better than cussing” [light laughter]…but that’s the way it was…as it turned out…

JL (28:40): …Now there’s so many different things, rumors [about] large amount of monies…who could you believe…we had been told later on…that while he was giving his meeting…thinking about buying it [the Plant]…he had already purchased it…so he was like…I don’t know what you call it [Deception]…from that point on it [Sparrows Point] has gone downhill and everybody knows it…as far as the owners…you know…it’s common knowledge now….I mean people bought it for this and sold it for this and we [workers] don’t know why…I mean [shrugging shoulders] can you imagine all the unemployed workers…and we sold it [them: the unemployed workers] to foreigners…I’ll give you a very basic [example]…see, every time we hear something about the Union…particularly on the news…it’s widespread…it’s negative…[quoting news headlines] “All they’re high paid, they did this…this thing”…that’s right…but what people don’t realize is that our Union [Steel] started the things that we take for granted, (1) a forty hour week, (2) health care, (3) a pension…you name it (4) a vacation…for example in 1936…we built the Golden Gate Bridge…of course I was young then…but can you imagine we built the Golden Gate Bridge at ‘Sparrows Point’, shipped it to San Francisco…well recently, because it was sold old they upgraded it…rebuilt it…where the built [installed] it…

JL (30:04):…China…a couple months ago we were watching T.V. and on T.V. here comes this crane being shipped in…underneath the bridge and it just has this many clearances [Hand gestures] coming in to the ‘Inner Harbor’ and we’re so proud, right…[pause]…[look of disgust]…that was a $100 million dollar project…and the crane was made in China…and ten miles down the road ‘Sparrows Point’ guys are laid off…does that make any common sense…when is this government going to take care of its people…very basic…let’s buy stuff…like the Super Bowl just happened and my wife went down there…I didn’t go because I had to get my hair done…and she came back with a whole bunch of shirts and stuff and everything else…but she had these whole box of beads…people were throwing beads all over the place…because it was an era…Bourbon Street…well she heard on the news all those beads was like 400 million beads she had them in little bags and they had little labels on them…and guess where there were made…they were made in China…can you imagine the Super Bowl selling beads made in China…and you wonder the economy in this country is so bad…I mean it’s easy to say were going to do this but sooner or later were going to have to sit down and say…that hat cost ten dollar and from China but that hat cost twelve dollars made in the U.S., forget about the two dollars, lets support our own self…you know, I’ll tell you what now…I really think the next large person that is going to be having trouble is our military…I really believe that…because it just seems like we’re cutting forces and stuff…we’re combining bases so I’m really worried about that…what that has to do with the ‘Steel Plant’ I don’t know it just seems like a theme…any company that’s been in for a long time, truthfully, now we do have a lot of pensioners from the original company…I heard it was anywhere from77,000 people that were drawing a pension and I understand that it’s really hard for a company to draw a profit…with so much money being spent on vacationers drawing a pension…but that’s part of the theme…instead of limiting their pension, lets come up with a better way of financing their pension…whatever it takes…you just can’t eliminate a person…like when I left in 2003…I was 61 and they said to me here are your options…they’re going to give $50,000.00 to retire but you can’t work for the new plant…wait a minute…I’m 62 and things are getting really slow…and I’m [unknown] to departments [[unknown] people were going to eliminate people who [were] part of the safety department…which I thought was a real thing…you’re going to give $50,000.00 to retire…of course we’re going to take it…so, a lot of people took the fifty thousand dollars to retire and not work for the new company…but why…?

JL (33:05): …Why would after all these years [they] give us fifty thousand dollars…I went to all these financial groups, Prudential and everything else, and nobody would know the answer to that…most people would say they want to eliminate forces, cut forces…you see at Sparrows Point they’ve always done that...they lay you ‘off’…after so many years if they want to continue they get rid of you…don’t get me wrong I’m happy, it was fifty thousand dollars, but you only get like twenty-nine…but still nobody knows why and when you go to different meetings and different departments and you ask about it…they say, “we’ll check on it”…but all those people that are in the same category took that [money]…I mean again I don’t know why…?...what would be your guess…I’m giving you fifty-thousand dollars…what would come to your mind [pointing] ?

MS (33:56): …That they’re cutting forces and I can’t have any grievances with them afterwards…

JL (34:00): …Exactly…that was really strange…to this day nobody would really say why…now there may be something under the table…some fancy word like, ‘consent decree’ or something like that but no one would talk about it …now a lot of guys that were younger decided not to take that…they got their pension from the government and they still worked down there for the new company…for short periods…I don’t know why but I was at the meeting one time and I said to them, “why wouldn’t the government…if we cannot show a profit for two things…which is the pension and the ‘legacy’ which is health care…why wouldn’t the government take over those things from the company…so this company over here can still have the workers and still show a profit”…and their words were, “Well you don’t want the government taking over your pension”...well guess what happens when you lose it all…who do you think takes it over…the government does anyway…so if they’re going to take it over why not take it over at a point that benefits everybody…no, they’re going to wait to you lose everything and then take it over…does that make any sense…?...

MS (35:16): …No…

JL (35:16):…I mean I’m not a genius I’m just an ‘Iron Worker’ ya know…with uh…that can come my own hair…

MS (35:22): ...Do you think ‘Iron Workers’ are the smartest?

JL (35:24): …It has to be…here’s what we do…we meet at McDonalds every morning...[the] ’Iron Workers’ group…and by ten o’clock we’ve solved all the problems around the world…for example, here’s how he’d handle the problems at schools….any school, elementary, high schools, we now have two police man that park their cars and do a perimeter and do their jobs…but you know how much that cost you…a bundle…because you’re paying their salaries, their pensions, legacy…here’s what I would do, here’s what we settled on…there’s at least 700 people in Maryland from the military that retire…when you retire from the military you are at the age that you’re a grandfather or grandmother…and who would take better care of a kid than a grandfather…so why not hire a couple of these, to walk the school, give them a stun gun not a pistol, and a walkie-talkie…everybody knows if you got a problem then you got help…you don’t have to pay for his retirement, pension or legacy…

MS (36:37):... That’s a great idea…

JL (33:38): …So what we ought to do is call [unknown] who really works for the ‘Iron Workers’…call him…how much longer I got?

MS (36:49): …Just a couple more minutes but I’d like to move away from the ‘Point’ for a moment and talk a little more about the ‘Sparrows Point Community’…

JL (36:55): …Yes..

MS (36:57): … So, how did the ‘Mill’ affect your family or influence your family life…

JL (36:58): …My older sister and her husband lived in the ‘Bungalows’ and as a little boy I remember riding down to ‘Sparrows Point’ on a trolley and visit them and it was like a village and they had a drug store there where you could buy fountain soda and everybody knew each other…football, baseball, and it was a real community…well they decided to tear that down and move everything out…it was a really difficult thing…for example, there was a main highway and on that highway they had many churches…we called it ‘Church Roe’ and everybody saw each other there the whole time and when they tore that down everyone just wasn’t the same…even when we go back now the projects that are on ‘L-furnace’…someone came up with the idea that they wanted to put a star on top of it…well the guy’s name who was in charge, an ‘Iron Worker’, his name was **John Molly**...a lot of guys work with him to do that…but he put that star up there and that was way back then to this day if you drive up there you can still see that star up there…here it is an ‘Iron Worker’ without a college degree put the star up those kind of stuff…but the ‘Iron Workers’ themselves we still meet down here as ‘retirees’…but the sad thing is, is that is seems like every month we come in here somebody has passed…because of the atmosphere primarily ‘asbestos’…but it’s an example of the upper-echelon and the ‘asbestos’ area and they knew about it…especially…now we made somebody rich by filling all these cases…we’re not going to mention his name but everyone knows who it is…but even when he initiated it we would get large payments…but now we get payments that are so small…well you still had to pay for your physical…well we’re you’re an ‘Iron Worker’ they mess with your mind because you don’t have college degrees…when you think you have poisoning you go to the doctor and he says you have asbestos and you receive a payment…well when you receive that first payment you deduct is deducted for the physical…you pay for it yourself…okay when we were working down there…in those days…it was called Blue Cross and Blue Shield…that covers any accident you have on the job...isn’t asbestos an accident?...if it was covered, well then why would you have to pay for a physical that you got while working at ‘Sparrows Point’…so I went to the people in charge and I said’ “look I have this $600 fee for a physical and I have Blue Cross and Blue Shields…why am I paying for it?”…”well you’re right”…so they would reimburse me…well you know how many guys like me are in the same category?

JL (40:12): …In the ‘80s, twenty-years later, I get charged again for a physical…so I already [unknown] this…so I go see them…”well we’re going to check on it, we’re going to check on it”…well by the time they were done they were closed I went to go see them and they told me there was nothing they could do it about it because they went bankrupt…does that make any sense…that’s how they treat the lower-working class. I don’t want to say ‘lower’ but we pulled…being lower…tell you what…a lot of foreman down there are good foreman but a lot of foreman down there have a college degree and because I got my college degree…I am so much smarter…I’ll give you an example, all the foreman down there, the salary people, wear ‘white hats’…so if you saw someone with a white hat on you knew they were in charge…and if you had to make a phone call you go into the office and ask to burrow the phone…”Well how long are you going to be”...[JL] “a few minutes”…I seem him looking at you…and I got to thinking maybe ill take a can of white paint and paint my hat…then his response would be, “Oh yea, go ahead its [telephone] right back there…take your time”…that’s how they treated you…does that make any sense…but if you’re an ‘Iron Worker’ you learn how to get around this…if you’re an ‘Foreman’ they call them, ‘Loopers’ [impersonating foreman] “any paper that sits on my desk for five minutes. Well I’m an expert. I went to the University of Maryland…”

JL (41:54): …One more story…when we started getting girls in our outfit…well in those days girls weren’t tough enough to work as an ‘Iron Worker’…we had this girl, I won’t mention her name…but I’ll say **Pricilla**…anyways when she came in she could do any work anybody could do, burn, weld, anything else…she held her own…so now other women started working on these other types of jobs…and they started saying, “well we have these men’s rooms and not enough women’s rooms”…so they bought this area portable trailer toilet…so I get this call asking me to install it by using a ‘Crane Car’ and setting it up there and the pipers are going to do the piping…at that time I was a ‘Crane Car Operator’…so there was the six of us and we go to unload it and take it inside and I can’t get the crane inside the doorway…there was a crane inside so I said, “okay well I’ll go in there get this electric crane and operate it the best I can…we’ll put this big [unknown] on pipes and push as far as we can and I’ll get this overhead crane”…so the crane was assigned to the ‘Mill’ under the ‘Mill Rights’… so as I’m getting this crane these two ‘Mill Rights’ come up to me and say, “you can’t use that crane” and I say “well, I’m only going to be a couple minutes and [interrupt]”…[Mill Rights] “well you can’t use it”…and I say, “well okay”…and I go outside to my gang and I’m working with, ‘**Hoghead**’ and ‘**Bubba**’…and I tell them…okay we’re going to make some money…so we go into the ‘Mill Rights’ office and they’re sitting there and I say, “We’re going to take that crane”…they guy said, “well you cant have it”…I say look, “you got two choices, let us take the crane and shut your mouth or me and **Bubba** are going to kick your butt”…the guy says, “oh okay take it”…so we get the crane and here comes their ‘General Foreman’ and he comes up to me and says, “you ‘Iron Workers’ can’t use that…my people need it”…so I say to him, “believe it or not, who are you and how do I know you are who you said you are”…I cant mention the guys name because it would embarrass him…”I’m the ‘General Foreman’”…would you believe he pulled his wallet out of the ‘Steel Plant’ and I pulled my wallet out and showed him pictures of my grandchildren…I said, “look you got two choices the daughters of the revolution are going to come down here and complain that they don’t have a bathroom or you can let me do what I have to do and I’ll be out f here in twenty minutes”…but that’s their mentality…now if we would have been quiet and said okay and walked away then we wouldn’t have got the job done…but that’s the way you got to be as an ‘Iron Worker’…okay I think I have taken enough of your time…

MS (44:52): …What is the legacy of ‘Sparrows Point’ to you…why is it important?

JL (44:59): …I look at all the guys down there…they’re my brothers…because we worked so close together…and you become so dependent…once you’re dependent on somebody that drastically…you become really close…anything happens, like you have car accidents or car problem…you call them and they come help you…it was like a brotherhood…well the same way I treat the women…all women in my life are my sisters the only one who isn’t is my wife and that’s how we treat each other…can you imagine treating your sisters bad?...that’s how the ‘Iron Workers’ were…alright, I’m finished…

MS (45:41): …That was wonderful, thank you…