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CHASING THE DOLLAR:
AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE TRAVELING WELDER

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate School
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of
Master of Arts

Jennifer Shepherd

Pittsburg State University

Pittsburg, Kansas

July 2014

CHASING THE DOLLAR:
AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE TRAVELING WELDER

Jennifer Shepherd

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CHASING THE DOLLAR: AN ETHNOGRAPHY OF THE TRAVELING WELDER

An Abstract of the Thesis by
Jennifer Shepherd

This is an ethnographic study of a group of men who work as traveling welders. This study looks at both the kinds of challenges the men face as well as the positive aspects of the work. The questions asked of the ten interview subjects were chosen in order to gain an understanding of a day in the life of the men in this profession, both on and off the clock.

The thesis will open with a pitch given by a welding school and segue into the literature review, delving into occupational and organizational culture definitions before comparing welding to other careers such as long-haul truck drivers, boxers, policemen, and those in the armed forces. From that point, the interview responses will be discussed, from the worst and best parts of the job to the most interesting stories that the men have gathered from their time on the road.

These men started out as starry-eyed, healthy young men seeing the world, often for the first time, and slowly devolved, either into jaded old-timers who were no longer awe-stricken by all of the places they traveled or broken men who lost more than they could express in the perpetual quest to chase the dollar.

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I. LOCAL AREA UNION WAGES/BENEFITS SHEET

LOCAL AREA UNION WAGES/BENEFITS SHEET

Wages/Benefits Effective 1/01/2014														Last Report 10/01/13 Boilermaker Area and Local Wages/Fringes										Report Date 01/24/2014				Prepared by D. Branscum 913/371-2640			
NEW	AGREEMENT	JURNY WAGE	ASST FRMN	FRMN	GEN FRMN	NATL PENSION	NATL H & W	NATL APPR	NATL MOST	NATL ANNUITY	OTHER	OTHER	OTHER	OTHER	JURNY TOTAL	TERM DATE	AGR YRS	FUTURE INCREASES													
*	WESTERN STATES															9/30/14	3														
*	Locals 4/627 AZ	33.05	34.30	35.55	TN	14.34 PP	8.57	0.75	0.34	1.00 PP				3.00 VA PP	61.05																
*	Local 549 N. CA (Bay Area)	43.03	44.28	45.53	TN	17.94 PP	8.57	0.75	0.34	3.00 PP		0.50 TR		4.00 VA PP	78.13																
*	Local 549 N. CA	39.43	40.68	41.93	TN	16.74 PP	8.57	0.75	0.34	2.50 PP		0.50 TR		3.50 VA PP	72.33																
*	Local 549 N. NV	32.50	33.75	35.00	TN	16.74 PP	8.57	0.75	0.34	1.26 PP		0.50 TR		2.50 VA PP	63.16																
*	Local 92 S. CA	41.91	43.16	44.41	TN	14.26 PP	8.57	0.75	0.34	3.00 PP				3.50 VA PP	72.33																
*	Local 92 S. NV	34.24	35.49	36.74	TN	14.26 PP	8.57	0.75	0.34	2.50 PP				2.50 VA PP	63.16																
*	Local 242 N. IDIE. WA/OR	36.44	37.69	38.94	TN	14.34 PP	8.57	0.75	0.34	1.00 PP				3.00 VA PP	64.44																
*	Local 502 WA	36.44	37.69	38.94	TN	14.34 PP	8.57	0.75	0.34	1.00 PP				3.00 VA PP	64.44																
*	Local 502 ALASKA	44.01	45.76	47.51	TN	14.34 PP	8.57	0.75	0.34	1.00 PP				3.00 VA PP	72.01																
*	Locals 4/627 NM	31.81	33.06	34.31	TN	14.34 PP	8.57	0.75	0.34	1.00 PP				3.00 VA PP	59.81																
*	Local 101 CO / WY	32.22	33.47	34.72	TN	13.75 PP	8.57	0.75	0.34	1.00 PP				3.00 VA PP	59.63																
*	Local 4 S.ID / UT / WY	32.22	33.47	34.72	TN	13.75 PP	8.57	0.75	0.34	1.00 PP				3.00 VA PP	59.63																
*	Local 11 MT	30.00	31.25	32.50	TN	13.15 PP	8.57	0.75	0.34	2.89 PP			0.25 TR	3.50 VA PP	59.45																
*	SOUTH EASTERN															9/30/15	3														
*	Locals 26/37/69/108/110/263	25.37	29.32	30.57	32.57	11.96 PP	7.07 PP	0.55	0.34	1.00 PP	28.57 CPW	27.32 CW			46.29			1/1/15+1.40JMTA_1.50/CW&CPWITA													
*	433/453/454/455/456	25.37	29.32	30.57	32.57	11.96 PP	7.07 PP	0.55	0.34	1.00 PP	28.57 CPW	27.32 CW			46.29			1/1/15+1.40JMTA_1.50/CW&CPWITA													
*	Locals 74/132/587/592 TX	23.14		27.34	29.34	12.43 PP	7.07 PP	0.55	0.34	1.50 PP	26.34 CPW	25.09 CW			45.03			1/1/15+1.40JMTA_1.50/CW&CPWITA													
*	Local 592 OK	23.61		27.81	29.81	11.96 PP	7.07 PP	0.55	0.34	1.50 PP	26.81 CPW	25.56 CW			45.03			1/1/15+1.40JMTA_1.50/CW&CPWITA													
*	MISSOURI RIVER															12/31/16	3														
*	LOCAL-83 IAKSNEW.MO	33.36		35.86	37.36	14.37 PP	7.07 PP	0.55	0.34	4.80 PP	0.47 SW,PP		0.35 TR	1.05 VA,DE	61.31			1/1/15+1.40TA_1/1/16+1.50TA													
*	LOCAL-27 E.MO	32.21		34.71	36.21	16.74 PP	7.07 PP	0.35	0.34	4.35 PP	0.10 PAC,DE,PP		0.35 TR	1.05 VA,DE	61.41			1/1/15+1.40TA_1/1/16+1.50TA													
*	NORTH EASTERN															12/31/14	3+														
*	LOCAL-237 CONN	36.39	38.14	40.39	42.39	13.32 PP	6.97 PP	0.85	0.34	4.17 PP				1.00 VA,DE	62.04																
*	LOCAL-29 MASS/RI ISLAND	39.52	41.27	43.52	45.52	12.71 PP	6.97 PP	0.85	0.34	3.00 PP				0.50 VA,DE	63.39																
*	L-29 MAINE/VERMONT. HAMP	33.23	34.98	37.23	39.23	9.64 PP	6.97 PP	0.85	0.34	3.00 PP				0.50 VA,DE	54.03																
*	LOCAL-5 Zone 175 OSWEGO	29.13	30.88	33.13	35.13	13.75 PP	6.97 PP	0.85	0.34	2.50 PP					53.54																
*	LOCAL-5 Zone 197 ALBANY	31.24	32.99	35.24	37.24	13.66 PP	6.97 PP	0.85	0.34	3.25 PP					56.31																
*	OHIO VALLEY															9/30/14	3														
*	LOCAL-40 KY	35.00		38.00	40.00	14.34 PP	7.07 PP	0.55	0.34	2.25 PP	0.50 SW,PP	0.25 ML,DE	0.30 BT,DE	4.00 VA,DE,PP	60.05																
*	LOCAL-45 VA	30.32		33.32	35.32	14.34 PP	7.07 PP	0.55	0.34	3.25 PP				0.25 BT,DE	55.87																
*	LOCAL-105 OH	34.20		37.20	39.20	14.34 PP	7.07 PP	0.55	0.34	3.00 PP	0.55 SW,PP	0.08 ML,DE,PP	0.25 BT,DE	4.00 VA,DE,PP	60.05																
*	LOCAL-193 MD	38.07		41.07	43.07	11.96 PP	7.07 PP	0.55	0.34	3.00 PP		0.15 ML,DE	0.15 BT,DE	4.00 VA,DE,PP	60.99																
*	LOCAL-667 WV	36.48		39.48	41.48	12.21 PP	7.07 PP	0.55	0.34	3.00 PP	0.40 SW,PP	0.20 BU,DE	0.25 BT,DE,PP	4.36 VA,DE	60.05																
*	GREAT LAKES															12/31/16	3														
*	LOCAL-107 WI	32.05	33.30	34.55	36.55	15.69 PP	7.07 PP	0.35	0.34	3.00 PP	1.00 SW,PP		0.59 TR,PP	1.05 VA,DE,PP	60.09			1/1/15+1.50TA_1/1/16+1.50TA													
*	LOCAL-374 IN	34.03	35.28	36.53	38.53	15.55 PP	7.07 PP	0.35	0.34	2.87 PP	0.50 SW,PP	0.05 PAC,DE,PP	0.35 TR,PP		61.06			1/1/15+1.40TA_1/1/16+1.40TA													
*	LOCAL-647 ND/SND/N	32.75	34.00	35.25	37.25	14.14 PP	7.07 PP	0.35	0.34	4.00 PP	0.50 SW,PP	0.05 ML,DE,PP	0.36 TR,PP	1.05 VA,DE	59.51			1/1/15+1.40TA_1/1/16+1.40TA													
*	LOCAL-744 OH	34.00	35.25	36.50	38.50	15.44 PP	7.07 PP	0.40	0.34	2.76 PP	0.75 SW,PP	0.10 BT,DE,PP	0.15 PAC,DE	1.00 VA,DE,PP	60.76			1/1/15+1.40TA_1/1/16+1.40TA													
*	LOCAL-1 CHICAGO, IL	44.24		48.22	49.54	32.01 %	6.97 PP	0.35	0.34	5 %		0.10 PAC,DE	0.40 TR,PP		71.64	6/30/16	3	7/1/14+1.78TA_7/1/15+1.79TA													
	TERM PAY																														
	LEGAL PAY	0.25																													
	SUB PAY	3.50 %																													
	(Jury wage includes base rate of \$42.13 plus 5% termination pay)																														
	(Added to total)																														
*	LOCAL-5 Zone 5 NYC, NY	50.45	52.45	54.45	56.45	16.15 PP	7.07 PP	0.85	0.34		1 %SW	17 %LAN	0.50 %IPF 0.50 %SF	15 %VA	92.01	12/31/15	3	1/1/15+1.50TA													
*	LOCAL-7 BUFFALO, NY	30.25		32.75	35.25	16.26 PP	6.97 PP	0.85	0.34	2.77 PP			0.25 TR,DE,PP	1.50 VA,DE	57.44	12/31/15	3	1/1/15+1.25TA													
*	LOCAL-13 PHILADELPHIA, PA	39.06		42.06	44.06	18.65 PP	8.47	0.85	0.34	4.50 PP				3.00 VA,DE,PP	71.87	12/31/15	3.25	1/1/15+1.75TA													
*	LOCAL-28 NEWARK, NJ	40.39		44.39	46.39	17.41 PP	8.57	0.85	0.34	3.90 PP			0.25 BT,PP	5.71 PP,VA	77.42	12/31/15	3	1/1/15+2.00TA													
*	LOCAL-40 PEORIA, IL	36.75	39.25	39.75	40.75	12.47 PP	7.07 PP	0.35	0.34	3.37 PP	0.10 SDR,PP	0.05 PAC,DE	0.35 TR,PP	0.75 VA,DE	60.80	12/31/14	3		MOB-4.56/yr												
*	LOCAL-85 TOLEDO, OH	31.82		35.00	36.50	12.56 PP	6.97 PP	0.35	0.34	3.00 PP	1.00 SW,PP	0.10 CSF	0.60 TR	1.00 VA,DE	56.74	6/30/15	3	7/1/14+1.35TA													
*	LOCAL-154 PITTSBURGH, PA	39.05		42.05	43.55	13.15 PP	7.07 PP	0.85	0.34		0.50 SW	4.25 PP,LAN	1.60 ML,DE,PP	2.25 SA,DE,PP	65.21	5/31/15	3	6/1/14+1.85TA													
*	LOCAL-169 DETROIT, MI	32.78		35.28	36.78	13.38 PP	7.07 PP	0.35	0.25	3.00 PP	0.90 SW	0.10 SI	0.44 TR 0.05 WC	3.00 VA,PP	61.32	6/30/20	7.5	1/1/15+1.60TA_1/1/16+1.65TA													
*	LOCAL-627 HONOLULU, HI	34.18	35.68	36.68		13.72		0.75	0.34		4.70 LHW**	4.25 LAN		4.95 VA	62.89	9/30/14	1		Wage Opener 6/30/17												
	National Funds Participant Rate	34.18	35.68	36.68		13.72	8.57	0.75	0.34	0.38				4.95 VA	62.89			**Maintenance of Benefits-Contact L-627 for details													
*	LOCAL-363 E. ST. LOUIS, IL	32.06	33.81	34.56	36.06	17.83 PP	7.07 PP	0.35	0.34	3.44 PP		0.04 PAC,DE	0.20 TR	1.00 VA,PP	62.29	12/31/16	5	1/1/15+1.85TA_1/1/16+1.90TA													
	34.49 (AVERAGE)					13.39 (AVERAGE)				2.87 (AVERAGE)					61.89 (AVERAGE)																

THIS REPORT DOES NOT INCLUDE PAY FOR TRAVEL, REPORTING, OVERTIME, SUBSISTENCE, OR FIELD DUES. SOME DEDUCTIONS MAY BE VOLUNTARY. LODGES ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR DISTRIBUTION TO MEMBERS.

%=PERCENT OF WAGE AD-ADMIN FEE AN-ANNUITY AP-APPR BT-BUILD & TRAIN BU-BUILD TRADES CSF-CONTR SAFETY FUND CPW-CERT PRESS WELDER TIO CW-CERT WELDER MIG DE-DED FROM WAGES EF-ENTERTAINMENT FUND
 HW-HLTH&WEL IPF-INDUS PROMO LAN-LOCAL ANNUITY LHW-LOCAL HLTH&WEL LWG-LOCAL WAGE MB-MANT OF BENEFIT MI-MISC MQ-MOST PAC-POLIT ACTION FUND PN-PENSION PP-PER HR PAID SA-SAVINGS SF-SCHOLARSHIP FUND
 SI-SICK & INJURY SDR-SICK & DISTRESS, RETIREE ST-SAFETY TRAINING SW-SUPP WELFARE SUB-SUPP UNEMPLOYMENT TA-TO BE ALLOC TN-TO BE NEG TR-TRAINING VA-VACATION WC-WELDER CERT WG-WAGE

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Work four or five months each year! Travel the world!

Make \$3000 a week! Enjoy the rest of your time at home!

Experience things you've never experienced!

And do it all without a college degree!

Who wouldn't want to explore an option that offers those freedoms? This is what seduces many young men every year who might not be able to afford or might not be cut out for a traditional college education, and this is why the welding industry has steadily grown each year despite the rise and fall of the economy. Although posted jobs often require education, these welding programs typically take less than a year to complete, at a fraction of a cost of the traditional college degree.

Entry-level welders tend to be young men in good health, who haven't done much traveling. For the most part, these men have no difficulty with the hard labor that is required of a welding job, or remaining in cramped quarters in one position for hours on end, welding the same small area. When the shift is over, the options seem endless. With so much money to burn, many enjoy the nightlife...the bar scene to explore locals, maybe, or expensive restaurants, or shopping for the latest gadgets. Unfortunately, due to

12 to 14 hour shifts on the job, seven days a week, many also turn to drugs in order to keep up with the daily demands of the work.

As the career welder ages, he might settle down, get married, and have a family, and this is when his job doesn't seem as glamorous anymore. The money made isn't all for blowing like it used to be, and his family members and bills are the recipients of paychecks. Hitting the bars to pick up dates should no longer be an option for these family men, but all too often, it still is.

The same goes for drinking and drug use – the older and more embittered these men become, the more they turn to vices to get them through the long, lonely days on the road. This is a time when many look at other career options, but they often find that they aren't qualified for anything that pays the kind of money they're making on the road, and they definitely can't find the kind of work that permits them to be off six months out of the year. So, it seems like a vicious circle.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Welders are part of a blue-collar brotherhood in which members are identified by shared history and stories. Though these stories are similar to organizational narratives, they aren't tied to any one specific organization. In this case, the theory best used to describe this group is occupational culture, and, subsequently, occupational narratives. Occupational narratives are stories told at and about work that not tied to any one particular organization (Lucas & Buzzanell, 2004). These narratives are used to bring co-workers closer together and give them a shared identity.

Taking it further, Richardson (1990) stated that occupational narratives also serve as cultural narratives, or stories that are sociologically significant in that they possess the ability to create and support a social world. Richardson further identifies occupation as a type of culture, noting that stories about specific occupations “provide exemplars of lives, heroes, villains and fools as they are embedded in larger cultural and social frameworks” (p. 127). By hearing these stories from a specific culture, we learn a great deal about it, from its members’ feelings on and about the job down to the very nature of their beings, their values, and their belief systems.

Occupational culture, simply defined, is a set of shared values, beliefs, or norms associated with a particular occupation. It is an organized set of understandings shared by workers and acquired through socialization into the workplace with its concepts of ideal conduct at work. It has both its own formal and informal structure. It has its own vocabulary, rules, social structure, and rituals (Ames & Janes, 1992, p.128). Every occupation has one, and each one is different. However, there are certain thematic similarities that come up in many different careers, and those blue-collar, male-dominated industries share numerous traits.

Lucas & Buzzanell (2004, p.280-5) posited that there were many different ways that occupational culture identity was formed. The pair developed a semi-structured interview process with men in the underground mining profession that delved into six areas relevant to occupational identity: family background, work history, work conditions and safety, organizational values, union involvement, and current events. They interviewed 13 retired underground mining workers with an average career span of 27.4 years looking for commonalities in these areas. For inclusion in the study, those

commonalities, or themes, had to exhibit three things: recurrence, forcefulness, and repetition. What the pair found was a repeated reference to the Finnish word “sisu,” which, loosely translated, means “inner determination” and, more broadly, is also defined in qualities such as perseverance, guts, courage, and the strength to deal with adversity. These qualities are also found in the traveling welder, as they often have to work in high-pressure situations, dealing with chemical leaks, evacuations, and serious on-the-job injuries.

A key quality desired in a traveling welder is toughness. As a wealth of research has shown, that combination of inner and outer strength is a trait that infuses the police identity as well (Loftus, 2010, p.2). These powerful undercurrents of masculinity encourage an aura of toughness. The police officer has to project that aura of power in order to gain respect, not only amongst his co-workers, but also and especially with the community he is sworn to protect. It is the same with the welder. Younger and stronger individuals come into the work force every year, and the competition is fierce amongst those who have been in the field longer to keep up with their younger counterparts, which in turn creates more competition within the current field of workers. The work itself is physically exhausting, and years of trying to maintain that breakneck pace eventually take a toll on bodies. The physical toll, combined with the mental struggle of being away from home, eventually leads to higher emotions in the workplace.

Another parallel in the two occupations is the disillusionment that sets in, as well as the cynicism, after the excitement of the job wears thin. In the case of the welder, the excitement of seeing new places only lasts so long, until the realization dawns that each job starts to look the same after a while. The occupational culture of the police officer

seems full of excitement from the outside looking in, as television often portrays the job as full of high-speed pursuits and similar chases. However, “officers soon discovered that instead of engaging in exciting criminal pursuits and being respected by the public, their work was largely unrewarding and monotonous. In defense of this, they developed a profoundly cynical and pessimistic view” of their social world (Loftus, 2010, p.3).

That cynicism and pessimism in the welding field can seem even more crushing to those who entered the field believing that they were going to break out and make something of themselves. Between the physical and mental tolls, tensions within the group can escalate quickly after the men have spent so much time together with little respite. Waldron (2000) broke down aspects of the work relationship that create potential for intense emotion within organizations. In the case of the welder, the worries are always how long the job will last and where the next job is going to be. Every day brings a new speculation. This emotional buzzing, as Waldron termed it, can lead to widespread panic (p.64). One worker telling another that he heard that there would be mass layoffs at the end of the shift can rumor-mill its way into confirmed status in no time. These men live their lives in a state of flux, and in their field, everyone is replaceable.

Those in the welding or boilermaker industry are typically men who have not done as well academically in a traditional classroom setting, who grew up in homes with lower income, and who might feel otherwise limited in their choices for the future. And these blue-collar fields are often not sought out by choice, but rather by socioeconomic status and class. While their white-collar counterparts often achieve that status by having had more opportunities along the way, blue-collar workers typically come from backgrounds in which the ceiling isn't nearly so high, and encouragement is generally to

go to a trade or vocational school, if not to immediately enter the workforce in low-pay, low-status jobs (Lucas & Buzzanell, 2004, p.275).

Boxing is another blue-collar occupational culture in which a lower socioeconomic status is seen as a strength. Boxing as a profession is seen as one in which too much education is a weakness. “Too much education softens a man and that is why college graduates are not good fighters. Out of the downtrodden have come the greatest fighters...an education is an escape” (Weinberg & Arond, 1952, p.461).

For the boxer, as for the welder, the skill lies in the degree of physical strength. The stronger the individual is, the more chances he or she will have to succeed. Injuries equal weakness, and there is no room for the weak. In both professions, the only room for advancement is rising victorious from repeated scraps – the boxer must prove that he or she can beat everyone else in the neighborhood, in the city, and in the region to prove his or her worth and have a shot at big fights and big money. The welder must do the same. It takes a combination of strength, skill, and networking to rise out of the lowly ranks of the entry-level welding positions and make it on the regular circuit with traveling companies. Once that status is attained, it is a race to rise above peers to win a spot as a foreman, then as a superintendent.

The long-haul truck driver is also no stranger to long absences from home. Two aspects of the job, independence and control, tie these careers together and are shared traits of the two occupational identities. Independence, in this case, refers to the freedom of these workers to essentially go where they want, and to stop going when they want, “things you just can’t do working for a company with rules and regulations that many people just can’t live with” (Anonymous, n.d.). It also refers to freedom from the

constraints of a supervisor and an eight-hour job in a factory or office. There is a tendency for truck drivers to wax enthusiastic about this (Blake, 1974, p. 205). Those are the freedoms that the traveling welder also enjoys. The control is tied to the independence, in that the welder can control when he goes, where he goes, and how long he is gone. The boredom and monotony of routine is minimized, and the jobs are interspersed with leisure time at home. When home gets boring or when money runs out, it's time to hit the road again.

The downfall to both truck driving and welding, however, is the need to stay awake for long periods of time while doing the same thing over and over. For the driver, of course, it's the monotony of watching tires eat pavement, but for the welder it is focusing on one tiny spot, making sure the weld is perfect and will pass inspection. For both it is doing the same thing for hours on end with little to no relief.

A misconception of both of these professions is the preconceived notion that travel equates excitement. Those people not familiar with the industry may believe truckers lead somewhat of a rock star lifestyle: out on the road, different towns, with plenty of opportunity to meet many new people. It is this misconception that can "cause major strain on a relationship, especially if [the driver's] significant other buys into this stereotype. If your significant other doesn't trust you on the road, a lack of trust will always be present, causing further stress on the relationship" (CDL Truck Driver, n.d.).

Melanie Mills summarizes three points in her chapter on truck driving in the 2007 book *Dirty Work* that are right in line with the welding profession. "Physically, the job is associated with dirt, grease, and dangerous conditions. Socially, truckers do servile

delivery work that is not accorded high prestige. Morally, they are often suspected of dubious behavior” (p.78).

Mills also pinpointed a quality in these “dirty work” occupations: there is a strong occupational culture, “a sense of ‘we-ness’ against the stigma of their work in an occupational class system, where they cast themselves as heroes, and those who would disparage them and their work as villains” (p.79). This ties back into the idea of occupational cultures providing stories of heroes and villains (Richardson, 1990, p.127).

This role-casting is not without its flaws, however. In casting one’s self as the hero in an organizational culture, and another as the villain, the objectivity and automatic-pilot nature of rote work is compromised, and a term known as emotional labor comes into play. Waldron (2000) noted three aspects that comprised emotional labor. He first noted that organizational relationships constitute a unique context for emotional experience. Because work relationships are sometimes only partially distinct from personal relationships, sometimes it is difficult to compartmentalize the feelings associated with each. Second, emotion can be a resource through which organizational relationships are created, interpreted, and altered. Third, the interdependent nature of work roles creates the need in some organizations for collective emotional performances. In this case, emotion is relational in the sense that certain kinds of affect are experienced primarily because employees learn to work as partners in its production (p. 65).

Emotional labor is also a large part of the early process of becoming inducted into an occupation. In organizational culture, researcher Fred Jablin and his colleagues used the word *assimilation* to refer to “those ongoing behavioral and cognitive processes by which individuals

join, become integrated into, and exit organizations (Jablin & Krone, 1987, p.120).

Assimilation is a two-way process: the organization works to influence that vital adaptation through both formal and informal socialization processes. Socialization occurs in organizational culture when one learns about the requirements of the job, or decides that a certain way of dressing might help fit into the culture of that organization. Once an individual reaches the assimilation stage, according to Jablin, he or she can achieve *metamorphosis*, or full immersion into the culture.

Bullis and Bach (1989, p.273-74) noted that adaptation was not automatic for those employees just joining an organization, and broke socialization down into three phases, or “turning points” in which those employees would become more (or less) connected. Such turning points might include promotions, additions to job responsibilities, or new supervisors or coworkers who alter the dynamic of the group in some way.

The first phase, anticipatory socialization, occurs before entry into the organization. This involves learning about the work in a general way, learning about the occupation itself, or learning about a particular organization specifically. This phase can occur in school or an apprenticeship, or even more informally, from family or friends who are familiar with that organization.

The second phase occurs upon the organizational “point of entry,” when a new employee arrives on the job and begins to experience the culture personally. Louis (1980, p.226) described the encounter experience as one of change, contrast, and surprise. The newcomer must work to make sense of the new culture. This involves a combination of predispositions, past experience, and the interpretations of others. This is a phase of great

uncertainty for a new hire, particularly if preconceptions don't match up with the actual experience.

The other way is known as individualization, and that occurs when an employee tries to change the structure of the organization from within. Maybe the employee might see a procedure that could be performed more simply, and find a way to perform that same procedure in less time or using fewer resources. Maybe a new hire might see a need for the group to become more cohesive, and organizes informal after-work meetings once a week at a restaurant or bar so that employees can get to know each other outside the constraints of the job, thereby becoming familiar with each other on a more intimate level.

The third and final stage of assimilation is known as metamorphosis, and occurs when the new employee has successfully transitioned from outsider to insider (Jablin & Krone, 1987, p.712). The relationship between the individual and organization obviously doesn't remain static after this point due to changes within the organization and the employee's uncertainty as to his or her role within that organizational culture. As this applies to the traveling welder, that metamorphosis must be achieved again and again as he or she travels from company to company. Although they aren't considered new employees, the people they work with and for change continually, and although the jobs are more or less the same, the safety requirements or environments of those jobs are generally slightly different each time.

Traveling welders leaving home for the first time on their own often find that they are in a strange environment with a lot of older, seemingly tougher people that they don't know and learn that assimilation is particularly vital in order to create a niche for

themselves with a company or within the group. A way that these rookies of the road cope, both in the sense of dealing with the loneliness and boredom and as a way to bond with others, is in drinking. In that sense, they have something in common with another occupational culture: those deployed in the Navy, particularly first-time deployments. Navy life, too, alternates between long periods of hard work and boredom, and the work is highly regimented and regulated for the serviceman, as it also is for the welder. Navy culture, too, has emphasized, through ritual and habitus, drinking as a mechanism for bonding, recreation, and stress relief (Ames, Duke, Moore, & Cunradi, 2009, p.130).

That same 2009 study showed that the work environment itself shapes drinking norms and behaviors through both organizational and regulatory structures of particular worksites. The study posits that workers who are predisposed to problem drinking are attracted to work environments that reinforce and encourage that behavior. The long hours on the job, combatting the boredom that sets in when the shifts are completed, and the use of alcohol to help sleep or to adjust to different shifts are all mechanisms used to deal with the long hours away from home with limited entertainment prospects.

A 1991 study by Gleason, Veurn, and Pergamit examined drug use in various occupations and found that physical laborers in blue-collar industries were the most likely to engage in on-the-job drug use, or at least the most likely to report it. Although the single highest occupation in the study to report the phenomenon was the long-haul trucker at 13.1%, craftworkers in general came in at over 16 percent, and operatives at 15.3% (p. 5). Those occupations examined in particular those workers who came from “disadvantaged” (p. 3) status, or lower socioeconomic status.

Vices on the job can extend past drinking or recreational drugs, however, to other ways to pass the time while on the road, such as infidelity. Mills (2007) also touches on this particular vice of the long-haul trucker. In her experience, those whom she interviewed dismissed her queries, telling her that she had seen too many movies. The men seemed close-lipped about the topic, as were the welders for the most part. The most Mills got from one man was “guys either got the energy to do it or talk about it, not both” (p.84). Another time, when a trucker turned off his CB so that she wouldn’t overhear talk about a woman for hire, she surmised that this was “taint management,” or an attempt to hide the darker parts of the occupation (p.86).

Infidelity as a vice may not have as much to do with sex, however. Pruitt and Krull (2011) studied male patronage of prostitutes and uncovered an underlying desire to project and prove masculinity, a quality very important to the traveling welders who were interviewed. They found that “another reason men visit prostitutes is to avoid emotional involvement, entanglements, and other issues that may accompany sexual relationships with other women” (p. 41).

All of these vices also serve as a way to pass the time and avoid thinking about the realities of the job. A common difficulty faced by the blue-collar worker is how easy he or she is to replace. With regard to outplacement services, blue-collar workers are at far greater risk of layoffs, strikes, overseas competition, and technology displacement than are other occupational groups (Perrucci & Wysong, 2003, p.43). Because the predominant requirement is the ability to perform physical labor, and not a college degree, these workers are under even more pressure to work quickly and effectively

without becoming injured, and additionally, to be able to keep a low profile and fly under the radar when layoffs happen.

Occupational image within the culture is constructed over time by various historical, social, cultural, and political factors. The occupational image, or position of an occupational category in society, is at least partly influenced by popular culture. In fact, the media's portrayal of a particular occupational category, individuals performing the work, and the organizations that supply the good or service, may influence how individuals perceive others to view them (Grandy & Mavin, 2011).

Additionally, rites and rituals, according to Deal and Kennedy (1982, p.23), are the ceremonies through which an organization celebrates its values. They might include something as minor as a company picnic, or, more formally, an awards banquet a company might conduct for outstanding employees. To break it down further, Beyer and Trice (1987) argue that an organization's culture is revealed through these rites, which encompass everything from an individual's entry into the organization to his or her battle for ascent, struggle for positioning, and even descent and removal from the culture (p.272).

And despite the fact that this group of men is very much defined by rites and rituals on the road, there is also a great deal of emotional labor involved in their identities as workers as they struggle against perpetual cognitive dissonance, and striking a balance between providing for their loved ones and seeing them. Emotional culture, or emotionology, the historically variable cultural conventions and standards that govern the

experience and expression of emotion (Gordon, 1989, 115; Stearns and Stearns, 1985, 813), emerged as an intriguing component of the welder's occupational culture as well.

Over the years, the ideal of the successful white-collar male worker evolved into a sensitive man who could express his own vulnerability even while ruling the boardroom with an iron fist. The success ideal emphasized emotional labor skills distinctly at odds with traditional conceptions of aggressive masculinity. This white collar "New Man" is encouraged to "act like a woman," by, for example, engaging in empathetic listening at work, but the point of his behavior is to reduce the appearance of power, not give it up (McDaniel, 2003, p.128).

While these more intellectual, privileged workers continued that ascent, the blue-collar worker clung, by stubbornness or ignorance, to a simpler time. The counterimage of the "New Man" is less privileged men, such as working-class, immigrant, and Latino men, who are portrayed as embodying the elements of masculinity that the New Man has rejected – aggression and overt displays of sexism (Hondagneu-Sotelo & Messner, 1994, 204-5).

Although there are several workers in different occupations who share characteristics of these men, there really are none that are similar. The particular mix that makes up the successful traveling welder persona is hard to match in occupational research. There are certainly aspects of the culture that transcend career, and are more all-encompassing, but these men, with their particular brand of proud exclusivity and inner pain, march to the beat of their own drum, by the blinding light of their welding torches, in a mind-numbing progression of long hours.

Types of Welding

A quick history of welding traces it back to metalworking, which began when primitive humans realized that they could shape rocks by chipping at them with other rocks. The first metal to be worked was likely pure copper, due to its softness and wide availability at the time. From there, bronze was developed, swords and daggers started to be made in 1300 B.C., and the idea of using manual labor to change natural resources was well underway.

Metal Inert Gas (MIG) welding, also sometimes called Gas Metal Arc Welding (GMAW) is a process that was developed in the 1940s for welding aluminum in addition to other non-ferrous metals. MIG welding is an automatic or semi-automatic process in which a wire connected to a source of direct current acts as an electrode in order to join two pieces of metal as it is continuously passed through a welding gun. A flow of an inert gas, originally argon, is also passed through the welding gun at the same time as the wire electrode. This inert gas acts as a shield, keeping airborne contaminants away from the weld zone.

The primary advantage of MIG welding is that it allows metal to be welded much more quickly than traditional "stick welding" techniques. This makes it ideal for welding softer metals such as aluminum. When this method was first developed, the cost of the inert gas made the process too expensive for welding steel. Over the years, the process has evolved, however, and semi-inert gases such as carbon dioxide can now be used to provide the shielding function, which now makes MIG welding cost-effective for welding steel.

TIG stands for Tungsten Inert Gas. The technical name is Gas Tungsten Arc Welding, or GTAW. The process uses a non-consumable tungsten electrode that delivers the current to the welding arc. The tungsten and weld puddle are protected and cooled with an inert gas, typically argon. TIG welding is similar to oxy-acetylene welding; in both techniques, you use a filler material for build-up or reinforcement. TIG welding is also often referred to as heli-arc welding. This name originated from an early Hobart "Heli-Arc" machine and comes from using helium gas as a shield around the electric arc. TIG welding was developed in the 1930s and was used during World War 2 as the preferred way to weld many aircraft parts. Previously, some alloy steels and aluminum had to be welded with a torch, something that required considerable skill and time.

Welders generally learn to specialize as they hone their techniques. Workers who can weld stainless have their foot in the door in terms of skill, because that goes above and beyond what the MIG welder does. Welding stainless takes a lot of experience.

Weld overlay occurs when one or more metals with specific characteristics are deposited on a base metal in order to improve desirable properties that are not inherent to the base metal or to restore the original dimension of the component. The procedure itself involves weld "beads" placed side by side, leading to the formation of a continuous layer. The weld overlay technique can be classified according to the specific objective of the coating. Weld cladding corresponds to deposition of a corrosion-resistant material, in general, measuring at least three millimeters, or an eighth of an inch.

Hardfacing is a form of surfacing used when the weld deposit is done using a hard and wear-resistant material to reduce the loss of material by abrasion, erosion, galling, cavitation, and other forms of wearing mechanisms.

Welders are classified according to what kind of welding they're doing on any particular job. In one story, interviewee Cam was "the stainless guy." MIG welders are the ones coined "miglets" by Cam, a definition that will be more fully explained in his summary of the group. Another set of workers might say "we're overlay on this job."

Grinding is a necessary evil of the job that nobody likes. Weld up, grind down. It is hard physical labor. Arms have to be held up for long periods of time, and not just held up, but held up while using the grinder. These aren't little grinders you might use in a workshop on a table. These are heavy, and more so after being used on walls or overhead for hours on end. Breaks are necessary for both mental and physical well-being.

Rigging is another job in the plant. It doesn't involve welding, but is instead a method of lifting things. One welder called the riggers geniuses. They calculate wind direction, how heavy something is, and what is needed in order to lift it before attempting to move the object successfully.

There are other types of plants and locations in which these men work. The highest-paying is underwater welding. It might seem like that means welding in some sort of unit that happens to be underwater, but the conditions aren't that safe. Rather, welders are fitted into suits, given oxygen, and sent down to pipes that are located underwater to weld them. None of the interviewees had performed this type of welding, but knew of those who did. One said that he had been offered a longer job with a company welding underwater, in which he would be paid \$200,000 for six months' work. But he had heard too many stories. The one that stood out to him involved a man who was welding along, doing, as he said, a pretty bad job, because you're welding in water and it's impossible to do that job well. He was focused in on the task at hand, and not paying much attention to

what was happening around him. Then he sensed a disturbance in the water, and looked to his left, right into the gaze of a tiger shark. He got away by blowing fire into the shark's eyes and got back up to the surface as quickly as possible.

“I’m not going into water with no killer shark fish.”

There are also paper mills, another environment with an unmistakable smell that might turn off even the most passionate book lover. There are powerhouses, such as the one in Asberry, Kansas. Generally, any type of plant that contains boilers is fair game for the welder. The plants operate as usual every day, but inevitably something will break down, necessitating a plant-wide shut down. The company's job is to get their men in and out as quickly as possible, which is why jobs are typically described as seven to 10 days in length. However, as in any kind of contracted work, sometimes things go wrong. Alternatively, sometimes they go a little too right, and the men are right back home within a few days. Rarely is the time ever what it is estimated to be.

The Beginning

Industrial hot sheets are used by all employers to find workers. The hot sheet is a list of those companies and contact information for them so that they can find workers. New workers call and call, trying to get their foot in the door somewhere in order to start building a reputation. Although the union is the ideal working situation because of the benefits and workers being taken care of, it's still hard for a new guy to make a name for himself with so many other, seasoned workers fighting for the same spots. Many new workers just take jobs wherever they can get them; like any job, it's a matter of breaking

into the work in order to get the experience necessary to find a job with better pay and better benefits.

Although many go through some kind of training prior to getting hired on, it's more complicated than that. As is the case in many careers, those who had gone to welding school said they really didn't learn until they were on the job, actually doing the work. Not being familiar with the way things worked, these former students thought that welding school or an apprenticeship was necessary to find the work. And those things do help, but there are also back-door methods.

Welding school programs generally run several months and combine classroom learning with hands-on welding. At the Missouri Welding Institute, located in Nevada, Missouri, there are three different programs from which to choose: Master Pipe Welding and Fitting, 18 weeks or 720 hours; Master Structural Welding and Fitting, 11 weeks or 440 hours; and Customized Welding and Fitting Courses, one to 10 weeks or 40-400 hours (mwi.ws).

Apprenticeships also incorporate class time, but the hands-on learning goes beyond with a requirement of 6000 hours. One welder who had been through it likened it to indentured servitude. The six thousand hours seem similar to an internship in that an apprentice can perform many tasks not linked to the job itself, such as being a gofer. There is no salary, but the room in which the apprentice stays is complimentary. The benefit of the training through the apprenticeship is that the novice learns things like real-job skills like rigging that aren't taught in welding schools.

But these aren't the only ways into a job. As one welder said, "You can cheat your way in, too." He had gone through the Welding Institute, but did not complete an

apprenticeship. Instead, he contacted the now-defunct NTL (National Transit Lodge) and obtained a union book, which is an absolute requirement to get on with specialty companies. But the NTL folding didn't mean there were no other options. What many new welders do is buy union books from a dying Local lodge.

Local Union lodges are regional and cover jobs in local areas. There are some lodges that cover regions in which there is no longer work, or hasn't been for a long time. These organizations are referred to as "dying Locals." They will sell books to welders because that ensures they'll have union dues coming in from those individuals, which in turn keeps them alive. This is a win-win situation for both parties: the new worker gets his book and therefore his foot in the door, and the Local lives another day. "They would go under without people paying dues," the welder explained. He had just purchased a book from one such Union for his son, who had neither attended school nor gone through an apprenticeship.

One new worker set to graduate in a couple months was talking about his friend who was out on his first job. His friend had it made, he explained, because he was making 800 dollars a week doing little more than pushing a broom. To this young man, who currently made minimum wage in a part-time job, that was a princely sum of money. Just starting out, with no expenses and no family to care for, benefits provided by the union didn't mean as much to him as they might to someone with a baby on the way. A veteran who had been a union member for years said that he had been the same way. The money seemed great at first, he said, and by having your own weld machine you could make 55 bucks an hour – 25 for the labor, 30 for using your own machine. However, that provided no insurance, no worker's compensation, no pension, no annuity, no per diem,

and no vacation pay. As he continued working, he realized how important those built-ins were to cover expenses and that the union might not be a bad idea after all, especially as he had a new wife and baby. He joined the union and said he couldn't imagine if he had stayed non-union.

The insurance had been a lifesaver when his wife had cancer and again when he had two hospital stays for heavy metal exposure. Bills that would have been hundreds of thousands of dollars were reduced to less than five thousand. His 2013 motel bills alone were over eleven thousand dollars, all covered by his per diem pay. He has a healthy retirement fund and annuity in place through the union. He pays a hefty sum for dues: six percent of his gross pay and an additional 42 dollars a month, but in the long run, he said, it was worth it.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

I interviewed ten traveling welders, all Caucasian males. The age range was 20 to 45. This was both a convenience and a snowball sampling. The men working the night shift in Bangor who happened to be part of the daily breakfast ritual were the first asked, making them the convenience selection. From that point, the sampling snowballed when the first crop of interviewees then suggested others from the shift that weren't present for the initial request.

The interviews were done one-on-one in a motel in Bangor, Maine. In addition to the individual interviews, I was also present during the winding-down, post-shift informal group time that occurred each morning.

I incorporated the first-person accounts from these interviews, but I also used stories of other welders that the men talked about in group settings. The average interview was about 15 to 20 minutes in length.

Data were gathered through observations and interviews. I took field notes by writing down specific quotes and notations about the interview subject's mood or attitude when answering different questions.

Through conducting the interviews, I gained a better understanding of the interviewee as a whole as well as an overview of the occupation. My research question was, "What is the experience of the traveling welder?" The questions I asked in interviews were designed to try to gain an understanding of both the physical and mental aspects of the job.

The next step I took in the thematic analysis was identifying data related to the patterns I had noted in those interviews. I identified content that fit under specific patterns and separated the overall interview into those corresponding patterns. These included attitudes, qualities that tied the men together, or shared characteristics the men had.

CHAPTER IV

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Us Against Them

I traveled to Bangor, Maine to interview a group of men who were working a two-week stint at a trash-burning powerhouse. The weekly work schedule consisted of seven 12.5 hour days, and the group interviewed was working the night shift, beginning

at 6 p.m. and running until 6:30 a.m. At the time I conducted the interviews, the men had worked seven to eight shifts in a row, and the mood was generally short-tempered and exhausted.

Occupational culture was strong in this group. The group bond was one of cohesion and strength, and even as they tore each other down verbally, they were just as quick to back each other. Many stories started to be told about others, but stopped early because the teller didn't want to incriminate anyone.

The men seemed very similar to the truck drivers described by Mills (2007). In her study of the long-haul truck driver, she identified the mindset of those in the profession by a strong occupational culture, "a sense of 'we-ness' against the stigma of their work in an occupational class system, where they cast themselves as heroes, and those who would disparage them and their work as villains" (p. 79).

There was a similar phenomenon of this we-ness with the welder, an "us against them" mentality. This quality was expressed repeatedly when the men referred to "the brotherhood." The brotherhood is the one group that understands the alienation that comes from the job, the difficulty in maintaining friendships with those back home who don't travel, the likelihood of divorce, seeing your kids so infrequently that it seems like they grow a foot in two weeks.

In any kind of occupation, there are bonds formed. The people you spend the majority of your days with are a part of your life, whether you like them or not. But there is a deeper bond with the union welders and their brotherhood. This was referred to time and again, both directly and indirectly, in both individual interviews and group settings. Richardson's 1990 definition of organizational culture was a perfect match for this

occupation. Their tight-knit behavior was akin to a middle-school clique. These men cast themselves, as a group, in the role of heroes, and those on the outside looking in, by default, become the villains. To them, nobody understood what they were going through, and anyone who tried was wrong and almost more deeply vilified for trying. Those who seemed to bear the brunt of their dismissal were wives or significant others, but in digging a little more deeply, all women seemed to be the enemy. Female welders were considered the lowest of the low, regardless of their skill level. Women, regardless if they were fellow welders, wives, or picked up in bars by these men, filled the role of the villain in their culture.

These references supported the fact that these men often turned to one another because nobody else understood the lifestyle. Nobody else understood what it was like to be away from significant others, from children, from family and friends for an unknown length of time, at a moment's notice. As the spouse of a welder, I mentioned a couple of times that I had a little bit of an understanding what it was like, only to be shut down with "No, you don't." The group seemed very inclusive in that sense, almost smug at times. It was like that childhood joke, "Inside joke, you're on the outside." My status as a woman seemed to single me out automatically, and my inclusion in the group sessions was clearly only for the benefit of my husband, who had helped most of these men get jobs numerous times. I was a favor.

Another supporting argument to the idea of everyone on the outside being cast as the villains in this organizational culture was the way the men looked at those back home. One of the men, Pee Wee, summed the feeling of isolation up when he talked about losing his hometown friends.

“Your friends stop being your friends. They stop calling you. You’re home and you hear that there was a party or they all got together, and you say, ‘Why didn’t you guys call?’ And it’s all, “Sorry, man, we figured you were gone.”

Another one talked about the unofficial quote of the group when he said that the men didn’t need anybody else but each other.

“We are all counselors, shrinks, doctors, if something’s ever wrong, call us....about 90% of us are a close group.”

“We help each other. We’re the only ones who know what it’s like, and it’s hard. It’s real hard. But we stick together, no matter what.”

The men stuck together, but as the quality of toughness exhibited in the boxer and the Lucas and Buzzanell 2004 discovery of the miner’s “sisu,” they believed it was important for them to be strong, no matter how much they leaned on each other in the group setting. It seemed as though they drew that strength from each other even more than from within themselves, further deepening their bond together as well as their distrust of those outside their culture.

It was an interesting note that the men seemed so determined to project that persona of toughness and untouchable-ness, because as my period of observation continued, Waldron’s emotional labor seemed to have been coined for them.

A mantra of the group is “Don’t bring a feeling.” These men, for the most part, start out on the job as kids, and they’re terrified. In the group discussion, many mentioned being scared to leave home for the first time and work with people they had never met before and may never see again. Every job brought a new group of men, new foremen, new safety men, new quality control officers. The adjustments to new co-workers and

their ever-changing moods never stopped. But all of these changes made the men tough. They built each other up as they tore each other down, relentlessly teasing each other, making fun of everything that could possibly be mocked. As soon as one of them broke or showed anger at the ribbing, their weakness was exposed and they got it even harder.

“Aww, did you bring a feeling?” one would commonly call, followed by raucous laughter. The offended party would try to recover, but occasionally would bite off a curse and storm from the room, chased all the way by laughter and jeers.

“You get tough real fast. You don’t have a choice. If you’re going to make it on the road, you don’t have a choice.”

The protestations of these men only served to show how close to the surface their feelings really were. Emotional labor, as defined by Waldron In this cohesive group, in spite of the fact that the interviews took place when the men were off the job, it was easy to see how much emotional labor was a part of the job, and how easily it bled into their personal lives.

The men spoke of not having many options when they turned to welding as a career, but they were also quick to point out that they made more money than the majority of people with advanced degrees. The tone in these conversations was an interesting mix of pride and shame. But always, they stood together against any who might disparage them, whether that disparagement be real or imagined.

Rituals and Routines

Rites, ceremonies, values, belief systems, metaphors, stories, communication rules, and hallway talk are just a few of the windows through which an organization’s

culture can be viewed. In the course of a regular work day, regardless of the occupation, people have routines. They might get to work, have coffee, and tell stories about their evenings prior to settling into the work day. Afterward, they may go as a group to a restaurant or bar in order to unwind.

Beyer and Trice (1987, p.274) argue that an organization's culture is revealed through its rites and rituals. Ames and Janes (1992, p.128) also speak of organizational culture being to an extent defined by the set of vocabulary, rules, and rituals that the culture employs. There is comfort in routine, particularly in these blue-collar, labor-intensive occupations. When so much physical and mental effort is devoted to the job and the struggles contained both within and outside of the work while the welder is away from home, it seems that the men embrace those routines that don't require much effort or thought. This was supported repeatedly in the three days of my observation. The men followed a pattern every day, almost to the minute, down to the types of conversations they had and the way they positioned themselves physically while they had them.

These men were very much creatures of habit. They had achieved assimilation and metamorphosis, Jablin's (1987, p.712) essential stages of individual identification within an organizational culture. The very culture of the traveling welder was patterned after their routines and rituals. The men stuck to this daily pattern as surely as if it were a part of the job. They left the plant at 6:30 a.m. and drove back to base, which in this case was a Comfort Inn about 15 minutes away. Upon arrival, they went to their rooms, showered, and changed into comfortable clothing before meeting back in the lobby to partake in the continental breakfast.

Talk was scarce while they ate, mostly throwaway comments about that night's shift ("Boy, Jamie pissed Sam off tonight, didn't he? Did you hear about that?") and random commentary on whatever was playing on the television overhead, whether it was headline news or ESPN. The main goal seemed to be to eat and decompress.

Following breakfast, the men scattered for 10 to 15 minutes before meeting up again, drinks in tow, at one of the rooms. The rooms chosen seemed to be first due to convenience (there were three together on the third floor, so most men convened in one of those), then due to a rotation basis. They generally didn't meet in the same room two days in a row. One of the men explained his reasoning for trying to keep them out of his room.

"If you go to someone else's room, you can leave any time. If they all come to your room, it's not that easy. Some of them are hard to load." This was the terminology for the men who put off going to sleep, usually while drinking. With such long hours and no days off, as jobs wore on, the amount of sleeping per day generally would decrease. The men said that otherwise, they felt like they had no life aside from work and sleep.

"You miss out on sleep just to have a life."

So the winding down with drinks and banter sometimes continued well into the morning, until the men passed out from sheer exhaustion or drunkenness. The chosen room of the day might change, the brand of beer might change, but everything else was eerily the same during my stay.

Once in that chosen room of the day, the "safety meeting" commenced. Never was the "us against them" mentality, Mills' (2007) "we-ness," more present than in this group setting. Despite the official name, safety meetings merely meant sitting in the

room, telling stories, making fun of one another, and drinking. The first rule of the safety meeting was that it was sacred, and nothing was to interrupt it. Significant others, if they called for a rare moment of conversation with the men before bedtime, were told that a safety meeting was taking place and that they would call back right before bed. Then the men laughed about how they pulled the wool over the women's eyes with the legitimate-sounding terminology.

"Write that down," the foreman, Sam, instructed me. "Write down safety over women." Just then, one of the younger men's phones rang and the identifying picture of the caller popped up – his girlfriend. He turned red, mumbled that he'd better take it, and hot-footed it out of the room, followed by jeers and catcalls. Sam sent a parting shot at his back as the door slammed against the flipped lock after him.

"YOU'RE MISSING THE SAFETY MEETING!"

"In contrast, private and public dimensions of work relationships are in constant tension. Relationship violations often occur in public view, with limited options for recourse" (Waldron, p. 65). For these men, there was no line. There was no decompression after dealing with a difficult person or situation on the clock. Individual identities flitted in and out, but overall these men seemed cut from the same cloth. They didn't speak of personal lives, they didn't discuss children or spouses. The talk was always the same. It was almost as though personal discussion might cause them to "have a feeling," which was perhaps why they were instructed not to bring any. Curiously, the more robotic qualities they projected, the more human they seemed.

In the safety meetings, though the television was generally on behind them and typically programmed to ESPN, the men paid it no mind. Safety meetings were all about

giving one another a hard time or talking about the next job. This was business in its most light-hearted form, designed merely to fill the time between work and sleep.

The men seemed to feed off of each other, and rumors of job length, and resulting plans for the next job, abounded and defined the tone of these daily meetings.

“Catastrophic organizational events, like layoffs or plant closures are an obvious source of extreme emotion” (Waldron, p. 68). Talk of the next job was never far away, and while the men would briefly get distracted by a funny story or how much beer they had left, the patter inevitably lost its light edge after a minute or two and focused back on the immediate future of their employment.

In Bangor, the talk was of a job in California, where the scale was high and the weather was not extreme. At the time of the Maine job, snow was falling steadily almost without respite, and the night-time temperatures were generally in the single digits. The general consensus was that California was the preferred location, because the length of the job was just right and the money was even better. The job was with the same company, one generally thought of as the best to work for, the “varsity,” as they called it, or the “A Team.”

“I’ve been to every state but Hawaii. I’m tired of being gone. I’ve seen it. I’ve done it. There’s nowhere you can take me I’ve never been.” This statement spoke to the difference between the starry-eyed novice on his first job and the seasoned, worn-out veteran. The men discussed locations of jobs, but never once did they discuss tourist attractions or things they could do in their off-time while in those locations.

One worker was headed to Texas as soon as Maine ended; two were going to the California job, and one to Indiana. The longest break in between jobs would be three

days. Many go from one job straight into the next, trying to maximize income in the “busy season.” There are two such seasons, one in the spring and another in the fall. Summer’s heat is often too extreme for a welder to work safely in the confines of powerhouses, and winter provides a long holiday break before jobs start pouring in again, usually in mid-January.

Again, the desire to project toughness was evident in every facet of behavior, but it was almost as if the men were trying too hard. Cracks in the façade were many. Emotions ran high, as seen by how quickly one would snap when being teased, or how obviously currents of tension ran just below flexed muscles and stony gazes. Even off the job, emotional labor abounded. “It is the nature of work relationships, not the nature of the task itself, that creates the highest potential for intense emotional experience, including emotional abuse” (Waldron, p. 66). In the case of this occupational culture, there was no disconnect. On the job flowed into off the job, and the men remained in the same building around the clock, whether it was the plant or their motel. And yet, they sought each other’s company at shift’s end, day after day. Butting heads with their co-workers seemed preferable to being alone with their thoughts, and all the unrest contained within.

A little of this togetherness also had to do with the hours the men worked. This particular group, as the night shift, had a slightly different routine than their day shift counterparts. As the new kid on the shift, 20-year-old Gabe summed up the difference. The night shift isn’t as fun because it’s hard to go out and have fun between seven and nine a.m. Those new to the profession or relatively young want the day shift so they can go out and party afterward. The more seasoned welders, the settled ones, those who had

already had their months or years of fun, those men wanted the night shift. Time goes by faster on the night shift, they reasoned. The long nights away from home are spent at work, and that helped.

Upon leaving the safety meeting, several men called their wives. Two broke off to a room and started to talk about get rich quick schemes that would enable them to stop traveling. Cattle was a big topic. One man had land, and the other had been a rancher on the side for several years. Cattle was the way to go, they figured. After they paid off this, and bought this, and spent money on that, THEN they could start investing in cattle.

One finally looked at the other. “We’re going to have this same conversation next year, and the next year, and the year after that. It don’t ever change.” This single statement summarized the precise nature of the group’s daily routine perfectly.

Gabe, the youngest, went back to his room after the daily meeting. He had no girlfriend, or real peers on the job, so he deviated from the group in several ways. Of the men there, these differences made him stand out, and although he had been accepted into the group, he seemed less assimilated into the workplace culture than they were. He was stuck with family men on this night shift and was a good sport, but had the itch to explore. “It’s hard to be the only young one,” he said. “They don’t want to do anything, and I don’t want to go out alone. I’d rather be with guys my age.” He played the part, but had not achieved true metamorphosis into the group, or at least not this group. There was a clear generation gap at play in his case. He often perched at the edge of the room during the safety meetings, smiling a lot but rarely contributing.

In the three days that I observed this group setting, the only things that changed from one day to the next were the stories about the previous shift. Everything else was so

much the same, down to the exact times, that a strong argument could be made that the traveling welder is the very definition of an occupational culture comprised of routines and rituals. The idea of deviation from the ritual, such as one day when I suggested going out to breakfast, was met with rejection and disdain.

Occupational Culture on the Site

These welders definitely had their own occupational culture, but what made this particular culture unique was that whether the men were on the job or off of it, they were still physically together. To them, there was little difference between the confines of the plant and the confines of the motel in terms of their familiarity with one another. However, in the case of my visit to the plant, that relaxed workplace culture was decidedly more structured and strict. Regardless of what the men were like off the job, regardless of their dismissals of me visiting the site as “no big deal – come anytime, it’s fine,” once I actually got there, the prevailing mood was one of tension.

The setup for me to visit the plant had been a shifting one. It all depended on Ricky, the superintendent, and unfortunately, Ricky was in a foul mood during my stay. Because I didn’t have a rental car of my own, I drove the van. We left the motel at 6:10 p.m., and I was behind the wheel, with Cam in the passenger seat next to me. Pee-Wee and a guy named Tim were in the back. The depth of the previous routine was such that my role as the driver threw the entire dynamic off in the vehicle. Pee-Wee had been the driver prior to that, and he seemed very physically uncomfortable being relegated to the backseat with Tim. Cam took it upon himself to coach me as if I had never driven prior to that day.

Cam started talking before we left the parking lot and never stopped for the duration of the drive. He had decided that, in exchange for his interview, he needed a steak dinner for lunch that night, and was telling me his order while I drove. Then he started commenting on places we passed by. Pepino's Tacos, a leather-tanning business, his favorite gas station. As I kept driving, Pee-Wee stopped me in his quiet way.

"That means he wants you to pull in there."

I pulled into the Shell station and the men went inside to purchase drinks. It was a long, dirty shift ahead, and hydration was important. We took our time, since we were running early, but still arrived at the plant parking lot with 20 minutes to spare. I expected them to get out, but they stayed, telling me that they weren't leaving that van until they absolutely had to go. While we waited, Cam texted me his order, directing me to order it from the Longhorn Steakhouse by the motel. Since the lunch hour was at 1 a.m. and the restaurant closed at 10, I had reservations about how hot the food would still be, but he didn't care.

After the slight hiccup of their routine with me as the new driver, the men had settled back into the easy familiarity that seemed to define their occupational culture. As they prepared to leave the parking lot to enter the site, they all told me goodbye and that they would see me at lunch time. There was no indication that my return at the halfway point of the shift would be a problem in any way. However, given the group's strict adherence to ritual, I should have foreseen that this interruption to the routine would be problematic.

They finally got out of the van just before seven, and I left. I had two jobs to complete in the next six hours: to buy myself a pair of work boots and to order, pick up,

and deliver the steak dinner to Cam by lunch time. Due to a mischievous GPS, it took me a lot of that time to find a place that carried boots to fit the requirements of the job. Even though I would be sneaking in while the men were at lunch, it was still important to them that I had the proper gear.

I returned fifteen minutes early, with the steak dinner bag in hand (wrapped in foil, due to the super-helpful staff, to keep the heat in as long as possible) and the boots on my feet. But I wasn't done with gear. Once the men came out for their lunch break and my choice of boots was approved, I was given a navy blue pair of coveralls, a pair of safety goggles, a huge, thick pair of gloves, and a hard hat. There was a definite shift in the mood as I dressed. Only Tim and Cam were there to greet me, and the only reason Cam was there was to collect his dinner. Tim had agreed to take me on a tour of the plant, something that he had no concerns about prior to the shift, telling me that nobody would be in there so it was not a big deal, but now he was rushed, tense. Conversation was minimal, limited only to his direction for me to put on the gear.

He mentioned many times that he really wasn't supposed to be doing this, and his obvious discomfort betrayed his conflicting allegiances with me and his company. "A common theme in the most bitter emotional accounts involves conflicting allegiances. In some accounts, the complexities of managing romantic and professional allegiances come to the foreground" (Waldron, p. 69). Tim doing me a personal favor as a friend gave him extreme dissonance when it came time for my workplace tour, as outsider presence wasn't allowed by the company. Although he was angry at the superintendent for not being amenable to giving me a tour, he also had an obvious loyalty to the company that gave him pause.

Tim reiterated to me again that even though the plant would be empty and the machines shut down, I had to wear the proper gear to enter. Finally, fully dressed, I was deemed acceptable (“You look like a guy,” Tim said, and that seemed to calm him), and we headed for the entrance.

There was one thing they all warned me about before I entered the plant.

“You never forget that smell.”

“It’s a terrible smell.”

“You can’t get that smell off you.”

And it was a memorable smell, but not in the way one might expect from a trash-burning powerhouse. Rather than the smell of garbage, it was a strong, sort of burnt odor. As I walked through the plant, there was no sign of the waste. There were turrets and tiny spots, temporary platforms, and a tiny opening on a platform that I had to hoist myself up onto, then roll under horizontally, Indiana Jones-style. There were steps and more steps, cramped workstations, machines, grinders, tubing...but no garbage.

I got to watch a machine in action as it fired up and down a wall, “beading” it with metal to patch holes. I picked up a grinder and was amazed at how heavy it actually was. My escort, Tim, noticed my difficulty lifting it. “Now imagine holding that over your head for twelve hours, grinding nonstop.” He seemed proud of the fact, and flexed, inviting me to feel his muscles. The circumference of his biceps definitely added to his credibility. Grinding, he said, and the group later agreed, was one of the worst parts of the job, but the muscles that resulted from it were clearly a point of pride. Welding, as in boxing, was a profession in which strength defined ability, and toughness was a quality prized above all else, whether that toughness was mental or physical.

Only when leaving did I pass it – a huge, cavernous, warehouse-style space. At least, it would be cavernous, were it not for the overwhelming amount of trash filling at least half of it. A bulldozer scooped and dumped load after load of garbage on a belt that moved it along the route to its eventual incineration.

The reason the boilermakers are in trash burning powerhouses so often is predominantly because of one main culprit: plastic. Burning plastic leaves an acidic residue that causes breakdowns in the equipment that must be fixed time and again. It's a strong argument both for recycling and against trash burning, although this kind of trash burning is ultimately a good thing, both as a less space-consuming alternative to landfills and as a means to provide energy.

It's a cold night in Maine, but not in the single digits this week at least, which was not the case the week before. Although the workers don't work outside (a blessing compared to many sites), there's hardly adequate heating in these plants. Layering is a must, and suiting up properly includes further requirements: sturdy work boots, coveralls, safety glasses, heavy leather gloves, a hard hat, and then, before the sparks fly, a welding helmet. Despite all of these coverings, burns are the norm, from sparks burrowing relentlessly through the layers of clothing and into arms to the sunburn-like appearance of necks and other exposed areas from the bright lights of the welds.

These shifts are 12.5 hours each, with an hour for lunch. The lunch break for the night shift varies little: the men bolt down their food, then try to spend the remainder of the time napping in the rental van. Talk is minimal; break time is for resting and regrouping before six more hours of repetitive and taxing work in assorted cramped spaces.

Identity

These men were entrenched in the occupational culture of the welder, regardless of where that week's job might be located or what kind of plant they were patching back together. Because of this drudgery, monotony, and the sheer number of hours, individual identities slowly became lost. "Particularly in oppressive work environments, low-power employees draw strength from their peer relationships (Waldron, p.70). That strength drawn bolstered the men's confidence on a daily basis. Talking about the work seemed to make them feel more connected to it, and maintaining strong networking with one another also served them well in terms of staying on the work rotation. It also drew them together to such a degree that they seemed to define themselves by their group, and not by their individual characteristics.

In the safety meetings and meal breaks, or virtually any time that the men weren't working or sleeping, they were discussing that next job. Self-worth was very much tied to having the ability to find not only that job, but to find the best one. In fact, the men seemed capable of little else but pinning their sense of self to where the next job would be and whether or not they were on it. Securing a regular rotation with the "A-Team" was ideal, but only if the places could be chosen; the ideal, to these men, was a job located on a coast, with the premium pay associated with those regions. One that contributed most to the vacation fund. One that paid double time on Sundays, or paid the men for mandatory fatigue days. The man who got the plum jobs became the alpha male, and the others promptly clamored for his attention in the hopes that he would get them on that job with

his “stroke.” First-line occupational identities were very much based on this type of pack behavior, but the overall identity structure had more layers than that.

Although the drive to find that best job every time seems to be the all-consuming aspect of identity, scratching the surface reveals a more deep-seated motivation. A second key point of the identity formation for these men lies in following the traditional gender roles of generations past. This particular occupational culture, imbued as it was with its mix of emotional labor, was a textbook example of Hondagneu-Sotelo & Messner’s 1994 assessment of the counter-image of the “New Man.”

These men wore their emotions on their sleeves, even as they strove to prove they didn’t have any. Part of that attempt to prove key desired traits of manliness and toughness was displayed in macho talk. Interestingly, the group sessions were full of one-upmanship and put-downs, as the men tried to prove themselves in a perpetual tough-man style contest in which the loser was anyone who displayed weakness in emotion. As the group narrowed, so too did the thickness of the walls these men had built around themselves. Two men speaking openly showed a great deal more emotion and vulnerability than the entire group displayed. One-on-one interactions with several of the men revealed deep-seated insecurities and vulnerabilities, fears and hopes, that made them seem to have mastered the art of wearing different masks for different occasions. In that sense, these men had just as firm a grasp of the “New Man” ideology as their white-collar counterparts. They knew their roles, and they performed them to perfection despite exhaustion and a complex range of emotions that were almost physically visible just beneath the surface as they spoke.

And part of that carefully crafted persona and resulting occupational identity was a range of vices that in many cases grew from a way to pass the time to a key element of the worker's makeup. Perhaps the men were drawn to this kind of traveling work because they knew they could have a lot of freedom on the road they wouldn't have at home. Perhaps they were drawn to it because of the money, and discovered later that they were able to indulge in a cocktail of trouble that made the pain of their absenteeism abate, at least somewhat. However the welders found these vices, three in particular pervaded their stories, and what seemed to hook them as a means of finding escape instead served as a means of causing more pain, trapping them in a vicious circle of thrill-seeking that seemed to perpetually fall just short.

One vice of the welder, drinking, was a topic Ames covered in his 2009 study, concluding that the work environment itself shapes drinking norms and behaviors through both organizational and regulatory structures of particular worksites (p.131). The study posits that workers who are predisposed to problem drinking are attracted to work environments that reinforce and encourage that behavior. The long hours on the job, combatting the boredom that sets in when the shifts are completed, and the use of alcohol to help sleep or to adjust to different shifts are all mechanisms used to deal with the long hours away from home with limited entertainment prospects. Those workers already predisposed to unhealthy vices tend to seek out careers in which those vices are encouraged. And vices were something with which these men were very familiar.

These workers are not all defined by their occupational stereotypes, but there are certain thematic qualities that come up time and again. First, although none of the traveling welders admitted to current drug use themselves, they all had stories of others

who used drugs, men who were in pain and couldn't or wouldn't take the time to see a doctor and so bought pills from other guys on the job; men who needed a pick-me-up to get through a long shift after a night out drinking, men who kept it professional on the clock but went out to party afterward, their weariness fueled by boosts from cocaine or speed. This hesitation to self-report was a topic covered by Gleason, Veurn, and Pergamit in a 1991 study of occupational drug use. "It might be that drug use at work is more socially unacceptable than drug use off the job, leading workers to not report on-the-job drug activity" (p. 4).

Drinking was the most common, across-the-board vice for this group. This was consistent with the findings of the 2009 Ames study that posited that workers who are predisposed to problem drinking are attracted to work environments that reinforce and encourage that behavior, although, again, it could be stated that these men are attracted to this environment because they could get away with a lot of things they might not be able to working at home. The long hours on the job, combatting the boredom that sets in when the shifts are completed, and the use of alcohol to help sleep or to adjust to different shifts are all mechanisms used to deal with the long days and nights on the road with limited entertainment prospects.

The reasons behind drinking on the road were all over the place: night-shifters drank in order to sleep. Some drank because it was there and there was nothing else to do. Some drank to help the time pass. Some drank because it was a habit so ingrained they were no longer sure why they did it. Some drank to forget. This is also a common response in other professions, particularly the law. In Drew (2007), one attorney she interviewed commented that, "Somewhere around '93 or so I started to have a real crisis

of conscience about what I was doing. It bothered me. I'd go out and get drunk all the time and commiserate to myself and to anyone who would listen...And you just reach a point where you either get over it, or you get out of it" (p. 28).

The men in Bangor reacted to drinking differently: Pee Wee and Gabe had one to two drinks per day, generally beer. Jamie drank whatever he could get his hands on, whether it was his own supply or not, until he became unsteady on his feet and highly agitated. Once the agitation began, he would try to pick fights with the other men. Nobody liked Jamie.

Cam drank to excess every day, occasionally passing out in whichever room the safety meeting was in, always cajoling another man to stay up with him and have "just one more." Mostly, though, the men drank until they were all laughing, and then tried to get to bed before "missing the window" of possible sleep. With the exception of Jamie, the drinking seemed relatively harmless and good-natured, but it was just as much a part of the day as work itself. There were no skipped days of drinking.

Alcohol is a drug, but recreational drug use also occurred on the job. This drug use also tied into the 2009 Ames study. Those men with casual habits soon learned that it was very easy to get their hands on drugs, as well as ways to pass the inevitable pre-job drug tests.

Of the men interviewed, only Cam admitted to continued personal drug use, although most of the men had stories about others. The experienced welder knew how to get around drug tests generally. "You'd have to be a real idiot to fail a piss test," one said. Any drug habit could be maintained as long as you weren't high on the job and as long as you could keep a bottle of urine warm between your legs on suspected testing days,

which were typically done the same days as introductory safety meetings and welding tests.

Hair follicle tests were the ones that caused the most trouble. One of the men, who was a sworn anti-drug crusader, had busted one such test after being off for several months with back pain and accepting a friend's offer of Hydrocodone, a Schedule Three controlled drug, until he could get into the doctor. He got a prescription from the doctor, but for a different medication. Two months later, he went back to work and got hit with a hair follicle test immediately. Because he tested positive for Hydrocodone, and because he didn't have a prescription, he was sent home, despite the fact that the test showed that it had been some time since it was in his system. He laughed about it as he told it, but said that it was a lesson to him that there was a reason he didn't do drugs. "I'm the type who gets caught."

Cam's favorite story was about a welder he called Gravy, who had gotten on a job by swearing that he was clean and could pass a urine test. Once there, the men were told that the test would instead be a hair follicle test. They all submitted a sample and left the testing facility. Gravy was nervous. He went to Cam and told him he was going to bust it. Cam told him that he was stupid to have submitted to the test, because if he tested positive, he would be banned from the company for a minimum of several months. Cam told him he should have refused the test, because even though he would be immediately fired, nobody could prove anything. Gravy decided to return to the test facility and take his hair back.

He came back and told Cam that he had gone in and asked for his property. He said that the man who took the samples was confused, asking him what he meant. He

again asked for his property, and repeated himself until they finally figured out that he meant his hair sample. It was returned to him and he was immediately fired, but Gravy was happy because “his property” had been returned and he wouldn’t be banned after all.

One of the interviewees, Jeremy, swore by a special, two-hundred-dollar shampoo that was guaranteed to pass a hair follicle test. He said that he had used it once after he had been smoking pot for quite a while, and passed with no issue.

Despite the various vices the men indulged in, they all agreed that it was rare to see a fellow welder so incapacitated by addiction that he was unable to perform his job. Although hangovers were common, the code was to work through bad times. The money was too good, and the competition to maintain footing with the companies was too fierce, to let addiction win over employment.

Another vice that many of the men on the job allegedly have is that of infidelity. Being on a job without a girlfriend or wife around, with a pocket full of money and extra time on their hands, proves to be too much for many of them. This was similarly an issue with the long haul trucker, as Mills (2007) mentioned.

Another image of the trucker is concrete sailor. The trucker has a “girl in every port” (city). It highlights the opportunities married or otherwise committed drivers have to be unfaithful on the road (moral taint). One trucker’s wife told me that she knew her husband was not faithful to her, but that it “goes with the job” (p. 84).

Perhaps they’re getting nagged from their significant others, perhaps they’re bored. Regardless of the reasoning, infidelity runs rampant in this industry. A lot of the

men admitted to multiple failed relationships – hearing them talk about wives four and five was not uncommon.

These vices also act as distractions for a group of men who are deeply dissatisfied in their work. Those in the occupation seem driven by a desire to fulfill antiquated gender roles; they feel that they alone must provide for their families. There is a masculine ideal, and they strive to fulfill it. The welder, both on and off the job, steps into a demanding script which governs the dynamics of identity construction. In the case of the welder with a family, the feeling was that he was alone in providing, that he could count on no one else to help him with that burden. This pressure built up within the men, regardless of the level of support they may or may have not had at home, and in many cases the tension release came in the form of using vices as a means of escape from those expectations, whether self-imposed or not.

How the men spent their off-time while away from home varied. Those men on the day shift have a little more of an opportunity to enjoy off-time than their night shift counterparts, and depending on the job location, they do that in a variety of ways. Those who are new to traveling like to go exploring, and companies provide rental cars to get back and forth to the job site. While those rental cars sometimes have to be shared with the opposite shift, or with two or three others on the same shift, the men generally travel together to go out on the town when the shift is done. Heading back to their rooms first for a quick clean-up, they meet up, much like the night shifters do, but rather than a safety meeting it might just be a pre-drink before heading out for the evening.

Those who like to get out might go to a restaurant first, but more often than not, a bar is the preferred location to congregate. One man, Tim, said that it was much cheaper

just to hang out in the room and drink, and when asked if he went to bars just to get out of the room, he replied, “Why do you think guys go to the bar?” He said he had spent the years between ages 19 and 24 going out frequently to bars for the sole purpose of finding someone to bring back to his room. Bars offered overpriced, watered-down drinks. These men didn’t go to these establishments for the alcohol.

“If I was honest with myself and said that’s why I was doing it, I wouldn’t have gone,” Tim said, “so I told myself I was just hanging out with the guys.” He was married at the time, and had a baby, and then another one. He was young, and pictures from expired safety badges he showed me confirmed that he had been very handsome. He found out, he said, that it was extremely easy for him to have his pick of women every night. He always brought them back to his room, choosing never to go to their houses because there was no telling what might be waiting for him there. He said in all the years of doing this, he only had two situations in which it was hard to get rid of the woman the next day. He would tell her to be gone by the time he got back from work that night, and on one occasion, the girl had gone home, gotten more clothes, and come back. Another time the girl did go home but then cajoled co-workers to let her know where he would be working next. She showed up in that town when he arrived. Both times he eventually got rid of them, but had to be rude first.

He also had one instance in which he was “pretty sure” the girl had gotten pregnant, but he never told them who he was or where he was from, so he never received confirmation of that beyond her friend telling him that she “really, really needed to talk” to him.

When asked why he did that when he had a wife at home, he said that she was the one who told him to go to welding school, saying that once he graduated, they would travel the world together. He was a homebody, so she had to sell him on the idea, but he went through with it. When he got out, he drove from his home in Nebraska to South Carolina for a three-month job. She and their baby son came to stay for five weeks. After that, she stopped visiting. She was angry with him all the time, and often accused him of cheating on her. After so many accusations, he said, he thought he might as well do it if she thought he was anyway.

“If she had followed through with her promise and we traveled the world together, who knows what I would have done. But I would like to think that things would be different now.”

These tendencies toward infidelity also speak to a deeper issue of expectations in identity. In Pruitt and Krull’s (2011) study of the male patronage of prostitution, the pair uncovered that the underlying desire in the infidelity was ultimately to project and prove masculinity, a quality very important to these traveling welders who were interviewed. Pruitt and Krull found that “another reason men visit prostitutes is to avoid emotional involvement, entanglements, and other issues that may accompany sexual relationships with other women” (p. 41).

This ties very significantly to the traveling welder identity in a couple of ways. First, the tie is to the lofty masculine ideal to which these men feel they must not only attain, but maintain. In finding and “conquering” these women, the men are able to prove to themselves that they are truly, by their own definition, men. Secondly, and perhaps more tellingly, these tendencies tie to the deeply-rooted disdain that these men hold for

women. This disdain was shown in their group sessions, in the men's derisiveness toward women in the workplace, toward spouses who were excluded very deliberately from safety meetings, and in their attitudes toward the women they conquered on the road. "They didn't mean anything," Tim said of his assorted encounters.

These tendencies to use women as both a means of escape and a method of release appeared again and again in the stories these men told. Sometimes the work provides opportunities to travel abroad, and initially, the men said, it seems like a great way to see the world. Venezuela was one of those locations. It sounded beautiful, the men said, and none of them had ever been anywhere like that before. The reality was a little different. The food and water made them sick, and it was dirty. There were prostitutes everywhere, but for many of the men, that was a dream situation. Thirteen dollars would get you anything, they said. All you had to do was promise to bring the women to the United States with you, and they were yours for the taking. It didn't matter that these women counted on these men to save them, while the men saw them only as a tool to be used and discarded. Several men contracted diseases from the prostitutes, and one continued to correspond with one of them after he went back home, eventually getting caught by his wife when she went through his phone weeks later.

One man, nicknamed Spaz, was legendary for his exploits. He had been a playboy before but decided to marry a woman mainly based on the fact that she made \$150,000 a year and her family was very, very wealthy. Shortly after the marriage, she lost her job, and didn't get another one. He began to work more to make up the slack. As he was away more and more, he began to cheat on her. The men said he had a new woman in his room every night; it was a game to him. He said that divorce was too expensive with him being

the only breadwinner. The couple barely communicated when he was on the road. Finally, he hit his personal jackpot upon discovering a phone app, called Ashley Madison, that was designed for married people to have casual hook-ups with other married people (tagline: Have An Affair - Guaranteed - At Ashley Madison. Life Is Short.) Taking jobs in big cities gave him a veritable smorgasbord of women to choose from – one day, he had four different women in his room. The men were shocked that these were all classy-looking women using the Ashley Madison site. On the four-women-in-one-day run, one was a teacher, one was a lawyer, and one was a nurse.

Not surprisingly, a couple of months afterward, Spaz decided that a divorce would ultimately be worth it, and initiated the process. He is currently still arranging casual encounters with women of all relationship statuses.

A venue that is popular with many, particularly those new to the road, is the strip club. While most of them eventually realize that, as they put it, the women don't actually love them, some continue to go and spend hundreds of dollars at a time on drinks and lap dances. One man almost left his wife for a dancer.

Prostitution is also a preferred way of securing a good time for some of the men. Although the reasoning behind obtaining a prostitute may seem obvious, the underlying issue may have little to do with sex. "Rather than approach male clients as a deviant social group, we should approach them as men whose behavior is shaped by dominant notions of masculinity and specifically masculine sexual expression and identity" (Pruitt & Krull, 2011, p.42).

Two of the men said they didn't want to waste time going out and finding women who would probably end up being crazy anyway. Their preferred method of securing a good time was through a site called backpage.com. They said the prostitutes were good and the price was right, and they never had to deal with drama. This was only a reliable site when the jobs were located in cities, however. Both of these men were single, and didn't like their chances of finding someone to come back to the room with them. Prostitutes were guaranteed, at least.

When these men say they don't have to deal with drama, they mean emotions. That reasoning is also in keeping with the Pruitt and Krull (2011) findings. "Another reason men visit prostitutes is to avoid emotional involvement, entanglements, and other issues that may accompany sexual relationships with other women" (p.43). There is drama in other forms in these encounters with prostitutes, however. One of the two men had gotten "rolled" once, after he got the woman back to his room and passed out before anything happened. He woke up and found his wallet, several hundred dollars, and his drug stash missing. Another time, a couple of men took the rental car and picked up a couple of women, bringing them back to their rooms. After they fell asleep, the women stole the rental car and wrecked it. The car was in the name of a third man, who was happily married and not involved in the encounter whatsoever. Eventually, he was able to convince the company and his wife that he had nothing to do with it.

There are also many, many day shift men who are good and faithful to their wives, or who don't have the urge to "chase tail" as they put it. These men generally travel in pairs to grab a steak after work, or, to save money, buy portable grills everywhere they go and grill in the parking lot when weather permits. They drink beer,

have steak on Styrofoam plates, and tell stories until they're too drowsy to continue.

However, many of them learned that lesson the hard way, after previous marriages ended in infidelity.

It's not always the men who are guilty, either. Cam's wife was also a welder. The couple was together 11 years and had two children. Their Local had a lot of work, so they were able to stay home and work out of those jobs. Eventually, though, Cam took a job traveling, and then another one. It wasn't long before his wife began to cheat on him. He got the word on the road and was back on the job the next shift like nothing had happened.

His long-time friend spoke about it.

He was the hardest worker I ever met in my life. Didn't drink, didn't do drugs, nothin'. And then he comes in that morning and I could tell something was off.

Finally he tells me his wife's been having an affair. And he just kept working like nothing. But he changed after that day.

The Cam of today hates women. He has never had a relationship with a woman since his divorce that lasted beyond a handful of encounters. He has gained a lot of weight, and drinks heavily every day. He dabbles with drugs and frequents prostitutes. He has a gambling problem. He does not participate in raising his children aside from financially, and, sadly, neither does his wife. For the last six years, the older son, now 18, has raised his younger brother. Now that he's a man, the boy is standing up to Cam and telling him he's going to have to come home and stay. He wants to move on with his life. Cam is resisting. He still loves to travel, and he doesn't want to stop. The two fight on the phone several times a week.

Qualities of Toughness: The Welder's "Sisu"

Perseverance

Much like the miners who exhibited the Finnish quality known as "sisu," the welders were no strangers to pulling themselves up by their bootstraps and doing what needed to be done to finish a job and get back home. There were several instances in the 2004 Lucas & Buzzanell study in which this quality was brought to the forefront of the mining occupation. The men earned respect by refusing to surrender to the rigors of the job. They did what had to be done and reported back to work the next day to repeat the cycle again.

Welders certainly have physical toughness, but it extends beyond the physical, as toughness tends to do. Showing signs of breaking in any sense of the word meant that the welder opened himself up to ridicule and a lack of respect from others, both on the job and off of it. Again, the expectation of the masculine ideal is at play. There were also outside factors that tested the strength of the men. Bouncing back after facing adversity was a hallmark of character in this profession, but what the men had to bounce back from was a wide-ranging list of tests. Tests are a vital component of male identity. These ever-cycling tests of proving both self-worth and worth as employees is necessary in the relentless jockeying for position that is a staple of success in this occupation. The first test for these men comes before the work really begins, when they have to prove that they have that "sisu" in perseverance and stubbornness. There are many little tests the men have to pass before they even qualify for the chance to prove their physical toughness.

All of these little tests are big in the eyes of the brotherhood, however. A man has to prove that he has what it takes in all facets of the work to make it in the eyes of the group.

Once the crew is chosen to man a new job, the company emails them itineraries that include flight and motel information. Although the flights are paid for, the men are responsible for finding their own way to the airport, and rarely does a worker live close to one. Because of perpetual job uncertainty, the wisest move on the way to a new location is to drive to the airport and pay for parking. Unfortunately, also because of job uncertainty, parking can end up costing hundreds of dollars. Getting a ride to the airport is a little easier than getting picked up from the airport. On the way there, there has generally been more advanced notice. The men have some idea ahead of time when they will be leaving, or at least what day. Sometimes they carpool and split the difference, sometimes a wife or family member will give a couple of them from the same town a ride.

Dealing with this career that offers no guarantees is what thins the crowd in the early years of the welder's life. The traveling welder is a prime example of the type of occupations Perruci and Wysong spoke of in their 2003 study. The authors posited that, with regard to outplacement services, blue-collar workers are at far greater risk of layoffs, strikes, overseas competition, and technology displacement than are other occupational groups (p.43).

This factor, combined with the stress that these men face in having to compete for jobs over and over again, year after year, results in some workers bowing out early in their careers. Some men can't deal with a career that has no guaranteed income; some had a difficult time repeatedly selling themselves to employers, even if they had worked for

the company with no issues numerous times in the past. Still more couldn't handle the clique-like ways of the companies and being bumped from jobs if some higher-up's family member or close friend wanted the spot instead.

This determination exhibited in those who stick it out and continue to battle for a spot in the field is very like the “sisu” quality of the miners in the 2004 Lucas and Buzzanell study. That combination of grit, endurance, and stubbornness, even to the point of seeming crazy to outsiders, is exactly what keeps a traveling welder working on the road in job after job. For every job offer, there are several rejections. The men in Maine were used to being turned down for a job, even from people they had known for years. They were used to being promised one thing and given another. They sacrificed personal lives and promises for 10 days in Texas at 85% scale just so there might be a better chance to go on a higher-paying job with the same company down the road. The welder has his own brand of this “sisu,” and to this group, it is all part of what qualifies them to be members of the brotherhood.

Coming home after a job is a different story. A group leaving a job in Denver had been told all along that the job would run one week exactly. This was a special case in that the plant had a specific deadline by which they needed to be up and running. Sunday was the day they were told, and Sunday was the day they stuck to throughout the week. Arrangements were made and airport pickups were planned.

Friday, however, things changed. The plant really needed to be cleared out completely BY Sunday, not cleared out completely ON Sunday. A one-word difference sent everyone scrambling. Flights into one smaller airport were already booked, so three men who had planned to fly together and ride back with the one who drove were

thwarted. The man who was parked there got the last seat on the last flight into Springfield, and the other two, the father-and-son duo, who had no such parking issues, were re-routed into Kansas City. The father usually depended on his son to pick him up, but now they were together and options were limited. Finally, his wife found two people to cover half of her double shift, and created a way to be there when the flight landed.

This is the kind of thing that happens on almost every job. The ideal situation is one in which there is that kind of hard deadline, and the flights are generally booked for a specific date regardless, but that date changes almost every time. The most common time frame for a job is “seven to 10 days,” but everyone who has been on more than a couple travel gigs knows that it’s a joke. Seven to 10 days generally means at least two weeks. Three weeks seems to be closer to accuracy. And then there are the jobs that drag past a month; there are jobs during which things continue to go wrong; there are jobs that were supposed to be a quick patch but instead revealed extensive underlying problems. The first rule of thumb is that you can’t plan anything in this line of work. Vacations are often on a whim, and forget about booking flights or motels far enough in advance to get a better rate, because that seems to be the quickest way to ensure that the trip will not happen. Trips are missed, kids’ activities are missed. One couple married in September despite his reservations, as it was on the cusp of busy season. He flew out the morning after the wedding and was gone for several weeks.

One man spoke of a time when his kids were small, and his younger son thought that he just worked at the airport. They would drop him off and pick him up there, and they did that so often that he just thought that’s where he worked.

“Maybe next year” becomes a familiar refrain. Often the schedules are so grueling that even if family comes to visit, they rarely get to spend time together. Sharing a motel room is difficult when daddy has to sleep, so there is a lot of sightseeing without him on these trips.

These men tell their spouses that they will get used to this life, but when the spouses do, it breeds resentment in the welder. When the children, too, grow accustomed to dad being gone, Mills’ (2007) “we-ness,” that “us against them” mentality, wedges in even more firmly.

Scheduling a trip and telling a company that he can’t work because he’s going to be with his family is something that just doesn’t happen much with these men. There is a rule that you can’t say “no” too many times, or you’ll get blacklisted by a company. A personal life takes a backseat to fear. If a company tells a worker too many times that there is no work, the fear spirals and the worst-case scenarios are imagined. “Employees sometimes describe fear in terms that highlight the importance of relationship networks in magnifying emotional experience. Typically fear stems from rumors. As time passes and the rumor circulates, fear grows until workers experience dread, panic, and emotional paralysis” (Waldron, p. 69).

With all of this uncertainty, when the the only thing you can count on is that you can’t count on anything, the level and depth of emotional labor seems completely reasonable. Coupled with that, the nonstop togetherness, followed by long periods apart, makes the dynamic of the group all the more curious. These men fight like brothers, push each other away like enemies, and then join back together shortly thereafter as though nothing had ever happened.

Repeated Assimilation

As the men in Bangor demonstrated, organizational culture assimilation was vital. Jablin (1987, p.712) identified the term as the set of processes by which individuals join, become integrated into, and exit organizations. In the case of the traveling welder, this set of processes has to be repeated on each job. As I previously mentioned, these men were fully assimilated in the Maine job, and all seemed to have achieved metamorphosis. This seemed particularly remarkable given all of the changes and uncertainty faced by these men every day, but to them it was “no big deal.”

An advantage of this career comes in the fact that these men are in close quarters both on and off the clock. They don't go home at the end of the day to their families; rather, they all go from sharing workspace to sharing motel space. Although it might be easier for them to have individual rooms in order to maintain some shred of private time, it's not very practical financially. This is one way that the assimilation process is significantly accelerated, as does the fact that the men quickly get to the point in which they know at least one other person at any given job. “Camaraderie is, interestingly, a kind of ‘group emotion’ fostered through rituals that emphasize common identity and interdependence” (Waldron, p. 70). In this case, the camaraderie, or the brotherhood, is a key element of the occupational identity.

Although the pay is very good in this line of work, the expenses are high. The men have to pay their own meals and own motel rooms, and although the union jobs provide them a per diem (or an allowance of additional money per day), it's hard to find motels for under 80 dollars per night. The solution is to pair up with a man on the

opposite shift. That way the day and night shift welder each has the room to himself when he is off work, and the men never see one another due to the nature of the shifts. This arrangement doesn't always work out, though. While many of the men get to know each other and repeatedly work the same jobs together, there are times when they pair up with an unknown.

There are unwritten rules of this roommate code. The first rule is to keep your things neat and on your own side of the room. The second rule is that the night shift person has to make arrangements with the maid (usually by heavily tipping her) to get her to come clean his room first on her rotation so that the beds get made, the trash gets taken out, and the towels get replenished (because these men can blacken some towels) before he turns in for the day. This is another reason for the safety meetings, and they often move from room to room so that all the rooms will get cleaned. This makes the day shift roommate happy, and although the night shift man ultimately loses sleep and is inconvenienced, it's worth it to keep the peace and not get a reputation as a difficult roommate. True metamorphosis occurs when a welder finds that balance between hard worker, ideal roommate, brown-noser, leader, and follower. In an average day, they have to do all of those things to achieve the ultimate assimilation. Cam mentioned this need to blend in both on and off the clock. "If you bitch too much, nobody likes ya."

And then, again, the dissonance. "I do not like my job. I just want you to know that. I do not like my job. At all. But where else am I going to make this kind of money and only work six months a year? I have no other options." This is the blessing and the curse. Making \$80,000 working four months out of the year with no education is the equivalent to living the dream. But the work is so physically taxing that no man can keep

it up for the long haul. And what price do you put on life? One welder spoke of the accidents he'd seen, and his face changed to dark as he recalled watching men he knew and worked alongside die on the job.

Physical Breakdown

The human body is only designed to take so much before it inevitably begins to rebel. Hard physical labor is great for building muscles, but it also breaks spirits. Add in ever-changing time zones and unpredictable shifts in sleeping patterns after going from day to night with little to no warning, and it makes for some interesting stories.

Again, the “sisu” of the miner is a quality seen in the welder. The miners admitted, in the 2004 Lucas & Buzzanell study, that their primary incentive to work was money. So too did those traveling welders who were interviewed. However, not just everyone who could do the physical work required in the mines was awarded “sisu.” Workers who cut corners to get jobs done in the mines were identified as villains, just as workers who did the same in the welding industry were deemed “miglets” and similarly vilified by those in the brotherhood.

The miners deemed one-upmanship as acceptable behavior and part of friendly competition. They defined this as a quality of “sisu.” So too did the welder. However, in both occupations, making the core of the competition based on individual pursuit of wealth was not acceptable. In both professions, teamwork was stressed and rewarded. Working to feed and provide for one's family was reasonable and expected, working for the almighty dollar alone assuredly was not. Those who worked for that purpose were ostracized in both lines of work.

An interesting way in which physical exhaustion manifested itself in the traveling welder was sleep patterns. Because of different time zones and different shift times, the welder differed from other professions mentioned. The worker most likely to identify with the physical confusion of the welder was the long-haul trucker. Mills (2007) noted this particular brand of exhaustion in the trucker driver, but the career welder seemed to exhibit a completely new and seemingly more intense layer of physical depletion.

Two welders had numerous stories about the ways their bodies reacted after countless straight weeks of little sleep. One counted off all the things he had woken up doing. Once he was outside his room, which had an exterior door, standing in the parking lot in his underwear with his face covered in toothpaste, shaving. Once he was in the car behind the steering wheel, also in his underwear. Another time he woke up when his roommate pushed him out of his bed that he tried to get into with him. He woke up in other beds several times. On one occasion, he had just gotten home that day and fallen into a dead sleep in his bed at home. At some point, he woke up without realizing it and set his alarm to go off - in the middle of the night. When it did, he slept through it, and his wife walked around the bed to shut it off herself. When she reached for the button, he grabbed her wrist and pinned it down, sure that someone had broken into his room and was about to hurt him.

Another welder came home after two back-to-back jobs on opposite shifts and coasts, meaning different time zones on top of night-to-day-shift switches. Arriving home at 3 p.m., he fell asleep and woke at 6:15 p.m., three hours later. In his mind, though, it was 6:15 a.m. the following day, and he soon discovered that neither his wife nor his son were home. He became convinced that his wife was having an affair and his son had stayed out

partying all night, and called them both, yelling. It took a lot of convincing by both before he realized that it really had been an elapsed time of only three hours, and not fifteen.

But the story to end all sleep stories came from Cam, a 20-year veteran welder who was full of tales involving drinking and drug use. It began when Cam's roommate asked him why the floor was always wet in the room. Cam had no idea, even when his roommate pointed out that it always happened when Cam had the room. The men were given fatigue days after that, meaning that both the day and night shift roommates were in the room at the same time. The first night of the shared rooming, Cam woke up in the hallway in the middle of the night after the door to his room was jerked open in his face. According to his roommate, he had been banging on the door. Cam had no memory of this.

The next night, it happened again, and the roommate was irate. Miraculously, the next night it did NOT happen, but the inside of the refrigerator was dripping wet. Cam's roommate thought he knew what was going on.

“‘You’re pissin’ in the fridge,’ he says. And I say, ‘No I’m not! It’s clear! That ain’t piss!’” Cam laughed remembering it. The next night, the inside of the fridge was again drenched. By this point, the roommate was furious. He was ready to read Cam the riot act. He told Cam that he was no longer allowed to drink before bedtime, because the drinking combined with the lack of sleep and hard work was obviously making him indulge in what might be termed “sleep peeing.”

The events culminated in one final incident, in which Cam woke up standing on his roommate's bed, peeing all over him while he sputtered and cursed below. Cam burst out laughing at this point in his tale.

“I guess it really was piss the whole time.”

Physical Dangers

When welding school administrators and teachers tout the benefits of the industry, one topic that doesn't make the final cut into those glossy brochures is the profession's danger, and there is most assuredly danger. This is similar to all of the other researched occupations, from the truck driver to the boxer. However, these workers know that there are severe risks, and that is, to some extent, why they get paid as well as they do. Driving at all hours with all kinds of different cargo and levels of exhaustion is the danger faced by the truck driver. Being hit at the wrong angle can mean long-term head injuries or even death for the boxer. The soldier can be killed in the line of duty, whether by an enemy or friendly fire. For the welder, there are myriad ways that injuries are sustained.

Loftus noted in his 2010 study that the police officer has to project an aura of power and toughness in order to gain respect (p.2). It is the same with the welder. Younger and stronger individuals come into the work force every year in both professions, and the competition is fierce amongst those who have been in the field longer to keep up with their younger counterparts, which in turn creates more competition within the current field of workers. Unlike the work of the police officer, though, which will frequently branch off into other types of law enforcement jobs that are not as demanding physically, the work of the welder remains taxing, and years of trying to maintain that breakneck pace eventually takes a toll on bodies.

This desperate need to rise above physical injuries to persevere parallels the professional boxer. "Out of the downtrodden have come the greatest fighters...an

education is an escape” (Weinberg & Arond, 1952, p.461). In both professions, strength equals success, and injuries equal weakness.

Injuries, however, are part of everyday shift work, but the severity is often downplayed. As previously mentioned, burns are common. Even suited up, even with safety goggles, even with weld helmets, sparks burn through layers or bounce up under protective gear. Sparks and metal bits fly into eyes. Those are normal enough occurrences to not even register as injuries to a seasoned welder.

Pee-Wee had been hit with an air line on the job when he was wearing no helmet. The blow was hard enough that he had gotten a few stitches, but, as he reasoned, “It’s a dangerous job.”

However, there are many more serious risks. These traveling welders are union boilermakers. Boilers are high-pressure containment units, and can explode at any time. Additionally, the men are often lowered into “the hole,” which is a narrow opening in the floor leading down to small platforms on which the men work, generally in pairs. Other men working above can occasionally be sloppy with their tools, sometimes accidentally, sometimes not, dropping them down into the hole and hitting the men below them. This happened once to Cam. He was down in the hole and a couple other guys were on a platform 80 feet above. One dropped a chain and hit him in the head.

My partner caught it off my head, like a lateral football. He looked at me. I just stood there. All the lights, I seen stars and shit. And then all of a sudden, I could feel the blood, but at first I didn’t know it was blood. ‘Cuz you know, we get hot all the time, so we’re constantly sweating. It was so runny, it felt like sweat. It filled my whole hat. So then we were trying to leave, because we got a bonus if

no one got hurt. It would have been the difference of like, five, six grand, so I tried to sneak out of there. And right when I come out of the hole, there stands the superintendent, the foreman, and the safety guy. And I got a whole welding cap full of blood.

Another welder had been part of evacuations, one fairly serious in which he was the foreman and stayed behind to make sure everybody got out, but at least in that instance, everybody did make it out safely. There were other times when that wasn't the case. He spoke of seeing co-workers killed. Once, a pick, or a heavy platform that goes up and down and opens and closes into itself, was operating as usual. All welders knew how to time their travel on the pick and how much time they had to safely get from point A to point B on it. One kid, a young man just starting out, had left his keys back at the starting platform and thought he had time to get back to them. He did not. Those on the job said it was the worst scream they had ever heard – for about 10 seconds. Then it abruptly stopped. He had a wife and new baby at home. He was 20 years old.

I've been in the worst situations and the best situations. I watched the world's largest crane fall on three guys and kill them in Lyndell, Texas. In Lacygne, Kansas, I saw a crane fall on two men and kill them. I knew all five of them. In Texas, [immediately after the accident] one of them wasn't dead yet. There was nothing I could do. I held his hand. I wanna say he said 'tell my wife I love her,' but I don't speak Spanish.

The long-term internal injuries don't seem to have a lot of documented studies, but the physical toll becomes obvious speaking to some of the veterans. One 20-year welder was trying to have a baby with his new wife. He had a low sperm count, and the

couple went to a specialist at KU Medical Center. After two surgeries to extract sperm for in vitro fertilization, the surgeons summoned them both back for the news. The chief explained that it should not have been possible for a man to stop making sperm; in fact, those in the medical field had never seen it happen. However, exhaustive efforts to retrieve them, as well as testing, had shown without a doubt that the man had no sperm in his body. The doctors were stumped, and said that he was the first recorded case they'd seen.

The metal exposure causes long-term ill effects, such as general aches and pains on a minor scale, up to the aforementioned reproductive problems and assorted types of cancer in a major capacity. Although the job sites require all kinds of protective gear, respirators are not always provided, and even when they are, the heat buildup from wearing it all is too much to maintain for so many hours in a row and they are often removed for the respite of the cool air.

“I fell, dislocated my right shoulder, got hit with benzene [a carcinogen], my heavy metals levels skyrocketed out of here.”

Safety men seem to be the arch nemeses of welders. There were several stories about safety men who had it out for a welder or a group and made sure they left a job. The safety man's job aside from making sure workers follow the rules of OSHA is to administer welding tests, which can be given arbitrarily. One story was about a group of eight who had down time on the job and were in the site office drawing suggestive pictures on the white board. The safety man came in and told them to stop and then left. They didn't stop. He came back, saw more pictures, and administered a welding test to all eight on the spot. Every one of them flunked it and were sent home.

Another man spoke of a run-in with a safety man the summer he had been smoking a lot of marijuana. He was hired on as the lone stainless welder, and the crew was put to work right away. He said he had brought a bottle of urine, anticipating the usual pre-job drug test, but by break decided that there wouldn't be one on this job and took it out from between his legs (where the bottles are stored to maintain proper temperature) and stored it with his things. After lunch, he said the safety man was waiting and announced that he may as well give them a drug test. There was no time to either retrieve the contraband urine or get it heated to the right temperature. Of the four men present, he was the only one who failed. The safety man called the superintendent to notify him of the test results. Cam laughed telling the story. "The superintendent goes, 'You dumbass, you fired my stainless guy!'"

Although the safety man has to be on the job for it to remain in compliance, to the workers, he is really only there to throw his weight around and be a "pain in the ass." The welders, more times than not, are the ones who notice a dangerous situation. The safety man is there to administer drug tests and demand paper trails, and therefore has earned no respect from the men who potentially put their lives on the line during every shift. Along with the miglets, the safety man is not granted the quality of "sisu," and definitely plays the role of the villain in Richardson's (1990, p.127) definition of cultural framework in occupational culture.

Ultimately, what often starts as a way to make quick money, save up for another dream, and then get out of the profession ends up holding the traveling welder hostage. First the incentive may be to save up for a hobby, like for the young dirt bike racer. Once a spouse and family come along, the incentive may shift to maintaining good benefits for

them. If a welder manages to stay married to the same spouse, then the problem is maintaining an ever-increasing lifestyle. One man had his original wife, and the only children they had were the ones they had together, but as the couple continued to make money, they purchased a vacation home and several expensive items to go along with it, so he “had” to work eight months a year to maintain that lifestyle. It all seemed like more of those dual qualities of “sisu” and “miglet versus member of the brotherhood” that defines whether or not these workers have staying power, both mental and physical. Although the men were working for money to have things, as long as those things were to benefit others as well as themselves, and as long as a welder exhibits good teamwork qualities, then he is a member of the brotherhood for life.

Mental Risks

More often than not, marriages don’t last, and welders have to work to dig themselves out of the hole they find themselves in as a result of divorce and subsequent child support. One man had a four-year, one-hundred-thousand-dollar divorce followed by a debilitating back injury, and was just getting back on top of his financial game six years later.

“As far as a family life, I’ve missed it all. It [the job] contributed to me losing my first family a hundred percent.” He said that his wife was initially fine with him being home more often than he was gone, but as he made more money, she started to find fault with the original plan. He put her through college, but then she wanted to stay home raise the children. He worked more. She started refusing to come visit him at jobs, even when he was nearby. When he would stay home in off-seasons, he fished. She started to

become angry that he was spending all the savings by being home. She called him selfish for not working more. Both of them were unfaithful. Eventually, the marriage spun out when she left him for his hunting partner.

It's good money. It's fast money. But it's lonely money. If you're single and got nobody at home missing you, it's the best job ever. If you've got a family at home and kids, it's the worst job ever.

Pee-Wee had been in the welding industry for nine years, but had worked out of a shop in his town until six months prior. He made good money where he was, at 23 dollars an hour. However, he said, he had maxed out, and couldn't make any more in that position. "If I'm going to be doing the same thing, why not get paid a lot more to do it?" That, added to the superior benefits, made the decision that much easier.

He had met Sam at a bar, and in that congenial drunk, glad-handing way, Sam told Pee-Wee he could get him a job with better pay that would enable him to be off work more. Sam kept his word after that night, and four of the last six months had been spent on the road.

"It sucks." He was blunt. "I have a little girl at home." He admitted that he got to spend more time with her now than he had working near his home, but, as he said, "When I'm gone, I'm gone." He had never been married, but had left a group of friends behind when he chose to travel.

"I miss my friends," he said. "Obviously, they stopped calling me because I'm never around. If I would make plans, I would usually have to break them for work, so I just don't make plans now."

Pee-Wee also challenged the notion that there was down time on a job.

“There is no off time on the road. You work and you sleep, that’s really about it.”

The Welder’s Trap

Regardless of the reasons behind it, whether they’re personally or financially motivated, the men are always looking for that next job, that next quick buck, that next opportunity with maximum pay and optimal working conditions. This vicious circle is what I came to term the Welder’s Trap, that endless cycle of wanting to get out of the profession, working hard to save money up to do just that, living off the savings while trying to plan the next move, realizing that another job means working all year for significantly less money, then going back to work to start the cycle over.

And the money really can be that good. The Local Area Wages sheet (Table A) has hourly pay broken down by region, then job title. The base pay for a Journeyman starts at \$23.14 per hour in southeastern states, up to a high of fifty dollars in New York, but the median pay is in the thirty-plus range. The next job title is that of Assistant Foreman, and the pay scale jumps, on average, a few dollars an hour, again with a low in the southeast areas that recognize the job title (\$29.32) and a high in New York (\$52.45).

The Foreman sees a slight increase yet again, ranging from a low in local unions in Texas of \$27.34 and a high of \$54.45. Beyond that, the General Foreman makes anywhere from \$29.34 in Texas to \$56.45 in New York.

Texas and Louisiana scales are bemoaned by the men as being the worst of the worst spots for money-making. Those are the jobs you take when you’re desperate for work and nothing else is “shaking.” Overall, however, the numbers would look very healthy for anyone job-seeking, even at a post-graduate level. The national average for a

basic-level Journeyman is \$34.49 per hour, An additional \$13.39 average per hour paid is added into the National Pension Fund. Seven to eight dollars per hour is paid into the Health and Welfare Fund (maybe the highest insurance premiums in the country, when added up). One to three-plus dollars per hour paid goes into the National Annuity Fund. Beyond that, a few random cents per hour goes into the fund for the Apprenticeship Programs and the MOST (drug testing) departments, but these are negligible amounts. Added together with the hourly wage, the amount these men make is staggering.

Although they only see the hourly wages in their paychecks, making it hard to appreciate the total package that the Union provides, it becomes easier to count blessings once a year, when the annual vacation check arrives (anywhere from several hundred to several thousand dollars). Or again, when a family member faces hefty medical bills and the out-of-pocket amount paid is such a tiny percentage of the overall bills. The Union Journeyman worker average hourly rate, with these fringe benefits added in, jumps to \$61.89. In New York alone, it is \$92.01.

When examining the extensive Wage and Fringe sheet, the columns and numbers begin to run together. Only upon continued examination do other expenses jump out, like the ten cents per hour to PACs (Political Action Committees). It was encouraging to note the code SF for Scholarship Fund on the key below, but discouraging to realize that it was not an actual deduction in any of the columns.

As incredible as those earnings look, though, the expenses just keep mounting. After all the dues, the pay is generally 32 to 45 dollars an hour. There are local union dues on top of that, that don't come out of the check automatically, but must be paid in to the Local that the welder is out of. Then there are the taxes. If a welder claims no

dependents, 58 percent of his pay goes to taxes. Many of the workers, after a period of trial and error, claim married with nine dependents. This allows them to keep the majority of their check, and due to all of the write-offs, they typically won't owe any taxes and even get refunds. The traveling welder's accountant has a lot to compile – so many jobs means filing in that many different states. Refund checks come in from all over the country.

The welders quickly come to know which states have the best- and worst-paying scales, but not only in hourly rates. Job locations are also rated by how high the unemployment payment is for that state. The East and West coasts and random states like Minnesota pay very well in unemployment, and since the men supplement their income with those checks in the off-season, the goal is to work in one of those states so that they'll qualify for the unemployment there. Even if a job in one of those states has a lower pay scale, a welder might take it just to qualify for 650 dollars a week, say, instead of 400.

Expenses include luggage fees, ATM fees, airport parking, mileage, motels, specialty work clothes, and even cell phone and internet bills since those communication methods can be used to find jobs. The Union provides workers with a pocket calendar each year, and many of them use those calendars to track expenses. Flipping through one will show a sea of “12.5's” penciled in, or “50 in ATM fees” quarterly. Motel receipts are typically kept and added at the end of the year, as well. One man spent almost \$12,000 for motel rooms in 2013, and that was just for his half of the room.

It is generally difficult to keep up with all of the receipts and expenses. One worker said he liked to have a wife around so she could stay home and keep his loose

ends tied. Others shell out the money for an accountant to keep their financial affairs in order. Cam had trouble when he dodged his taxes for a number of years and is suffering the consequences of it now, working out a payment plan with the IRS.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSION

The men I interviewed seemed like a good mix of the type of people who make this their living. They started at an early age, and worked hard, trying to make it to that magical age of 55, when they become eligible for union retirement and can draw from their pensions and annuity accounts. Few of them actively work to that age, though. Their bodies are simply too broken at that point to keep up with the breakneck pace and physical demands of a job that leaves little room for weakness. Those that do have secured the plum jobs of superintendent or safety man, doing little more than overseeing a crew or monitoring the job to ensure that no safety violations are taking place. The older welders I interviewed were generally at least the foremen on jobs they took, and rarely had to do real welding anymore. They left that to the rookies or miglets.

Overall, the money and traveling seemed as though they weren't worth the resulting depression and doubt in the long-term career of the traveling welder. Although many of the men interviewed had gotten to a place where they had struck that balance and made it work with their families, it seemed as though that balance remained a delicate one to maintain once it was struck. Stories of divorces, bankruptcies, and strained relationships with children were only a fraction of the costs listed by the men, but the toll

was evident in the slumped shoulders, the dropped heads, and the faraway gazes as they spoke of their lives on the road.

The physical demands of the work also broke them. The strain of working 12 to 14 hours a day, seven days a week, in extreme conditions, with varying shift hours, trying to run machines or grind while rivulets of sweat drip into your eyes, would be difficult for even the hardest worker.

The welding school pitch makes it sound like a life that is almost too good to be true, particularly for those who have grown up in lower-income families who chose the career because of a perceived lack of other options. It seems easy to choose such a life when the advantages are making thousands of dollars a week, having more time off than any traditional career, and seeing the world. But as a cliché as tired as the welder himself goes, if something sounds too good to be true, it probably is.

Limitations

The limitations uncovered in this study started early, during research for the literature review. Although many blue collar and traveling careers have been studied, there were none specifically about the traveling welder, or about welders at all. This made looking for past patterns and behaviors difficult, necessitating a branching out and studying of other traveling occupations that catered to the blue-collar worker.

Additionally, the amount of time spent on-site was a short three days. Although there was an adequate amount of time spent with the men in both formal and informal settings in that time, the sample size was still relatively small. The time spent in the plant was limited to one day's lunch break.

Suggestion for Future Research

Ideally, a more all-encompassing study could be conducted with unlimited time spent with the men and on different job sites. With more time, being present with the group might make the researcher more accepted and less of an anomaly in their eyes.

Another potential benefit would be traveling to as many different work sites as possible to study the shift in the kinds of work the men do. Gaining access to a much larger group and spending a lot more time in both individual and group sessions learning about them would be preferable in order to gather a more comprehensive look at the profession. Additionally, talking to students in welding academies as well as retired workers, those who actually achieved the golden age of 55, would help gain a broader scope.

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APPENDIX

RECORDED INTERVIEW OF CHARLIE

Taken on the 18th day of March, 2014, in Bangor, Maine.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. How long have you been a welder?

CHARLIE: I've been involved with this for seven years now.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Seven years, okay. Did you go to school for it or how did you get into it to start?

CHARLIE: I actually went to boot camp to be a marine after high school.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Wow.

CHARLIE: I'm epileptic.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh.

CHARLIE: Found out while I was at boot camp. Got home, landed in a shop, and messing around with welding, didn't like it, called up the union hall and here we are.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: So you are -- you have medication you have to take all the time?

CHARLIE: I don't have a problem with it any more.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, that's good.

CHARLIE: It is just something that they won't -- well, they cannot give you an M16 if you might go into crazy shakes they said.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CHARLIE: And I can find humor in it, it is what it is.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, yeah, that would suck. Do you work for the same company all the time, do you work for different --

CHARLIE: I think all three jobs I've been on this year have been with WSI.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh.

CHARLIE: It is the first time I've worked for them since 2008.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, really, wow.

CHARLIE: So I think last year -- last year I worked for two different contractors. The year before that it was four. The year before that I worked for nine different contractors.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Wow, that is --

CHARLIE: Something like that. Sometimes short jobs, a month or two, but mostly just little one, two-week long jobs and then on to the next one. So it just depends on the year really.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: You in a union?

CHARLIE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. Have you always been union?

CHARLIE: Yes.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: How often are you on the road?

CHARLIE: I've been home 14 days of this year so far.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Wow.

CHARLIE: I've been gone the rest of the time.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Wow, are you married?

CHARLIE: I am getting married in September.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, congratulations. First marriage?

CHARLIE: Yes.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: All right.

CHARLIE: Hopefully my only.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, I hope so. Any kids?

CHARLIE: Two.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Two kids. How old are they?

CHARLIE: Two and four months.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, wow.

CHARLIE: Got a little boy at home.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, that is so cool.

CHARLIE: He will be actually five months here in a few days, yeah.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh.

CHARLIE: This month is flying.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: So fast.

CHARLIE: Uh-huh.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Let's see, how supportive -- how supportive is your fiancée with you?

CHARLIE: She -- for a long time I was staying close to home.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh.

CHARLIE: And, you know, was within five hours of home for the most part.

We had our first encounter with how different doing this is, you know, because we are 1,300 miles from home right now.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Wow.

CHARLIE: We were out in Richmond, California.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh.

CHARLIE: And I think Billie was there actually.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, he's been --

CHARLIE: Emily got in a car wreck in the middle of the night.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, my gosh.

CHARLIE: So it took me 16 hours to get home to her, because of flight delays and this and that. I damn near could have driven it in the same amount of time.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Wow, where do you live?

CHARLIE: Eight more hours I could have drove home. I live in Marcilene, Missouri.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, you are in Marcilene, okay.

CHARLIE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: All right.

CHARLIE: That's partly how I ended up in this.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah. But she's okay?

CHARLIE: Yeah, she's fine.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Good.

CHARLIE: She likes that I do this work because, you know, summertimes can be home and I can just be home. It is not the ideal world. If we could do this kind of work right there at home and the (inaudible) would change all the time, I would do it. I don't like working in one place.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CHARLIE: I get bored with it. We've been here for almost two weeks and I'm ready to go.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, yeah.

CHARLIE: I want to go home for a couple days and then go to the next one. I just get -- I don't know where I developed that from, but I like to travel for work but be home when I'm home and that's that.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: I understand that for sure.

CHARLIE: In that case she likes it, she likes that I can be home. Like right now, she's not the most enthused but --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: How long have you guys been together?

CHARLIE: About two years. So the little girl is actually biologically not my little girl.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh.

CHARLIE: But I claim her and nobody is going to change that.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CHARLIE: But, yeah, the boy is mine, the spitting image of me so I don't doubt it.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That's cool. I mean two is just a good age anyway, you know, like --

CHARLIE: I don't know that is it good.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Well, maybe, okay I had a boy so --

CHARLIE: It is good for a personality, you get a lot of personality but this little girl is her mom and her grandma.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh.

CHARLIE: There is not a lot of good in that.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, yeah.

CHARLIE: So --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: I got -- I had a boy so it might be totally different but --

CHARLIE: Emily's dad is actually a boilermaker and her uncle and her grandpa was so she comes from a family of it.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: So she's grown up with it.

CHARLIE: As far as dating somebody, I think I'm the first guy she's ever dated that is gone this much but --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CHARLIE: As far as I know.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CHARLIE: She handles it well.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That's good. Well, I guess if you are used to the whole

CHARLIE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: -- lifestyle, then it would be easier to adjust.

CHARLIE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Let's see, what do you do in your off time while you are on the road, like you just hang out with the guys?

CHARLIE: Depends on what shift I'm working on.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CHARLIE: Night shift, I -- when I'm working 12, like we are right now, I will get back to the hotel, eat a bunch of breakfast. If I'm not getting interviewed that morning, I usually go take a shower and lay in the bed until housekeeping comes in.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CHARLIE: Get them out and then it is lights out. I try to sleep -- I was doing really good our first few days here, I was getting ten hours a day --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That's nice.

CHARLIE: -- damn near of sleep.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CHARLIE: Now I'm doing good if I get six so I'm in that bed.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CHARLIE: Trying to either be asleep or am already asleep. I don't do anything all night when I'm working night shift. Day shift, depends on where we are at. Here I probably wouldn't do a whole lot because there is not a lot.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CHARLIE: If there was a casino here, I would be there. When we are in Kansas City working or something, yeah, I'm a sucker for a casino.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CHARLIE: But I don't usually do a lot. Because if I try to go next door and drink, I won't be up the next night.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CHARLIE: I won't be making it to work. It is not going to happen.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Gotcha.

CHARLIE: Done it too many times.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: So you don't drink at all?

CHARLIE: I drink, I just don't plan on doing anything within 24 hours of drinking.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, yeah.

CHARLIE: So when I'm home and I go drinking, like my mom keeps the kids because we can get 24 hours out of her, and I'm usually boring.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, that is good

CHARLIE: That is mostly because I probably don't drink often enough and it kicks my ass when I do it.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Me too.

CHARLIE: Sure hope that cussing doesn't hurt your --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: No, no, no, just be yourself. Okay. How do you spend your off time when you are home?

CHARLIE: Oh, if you asked me that two years ago, it is a completely different answer. Now --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Got kids now.

CHARLIE: It used to be that I would sleep, I would stay up late and then sleep all day and then go out and drink all night and now that I'm with Emily, it is -- we go out maybe once a week, whether it be a day or just an all night drinking binge.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh.

CHARLIE: But the kids all day long, whether -- and we do a lot of stuff. I will take our two year old and we will go out in the field and play, get the four wheeler out or

the pickup truck and mess around. I usually get in trouble about ten times a day for something wrong. I don't do a lot. I'm kind of a home body once I'm home.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CHARLIE: I'm either gone or I'm home.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CHARLIE: Go see all my family. We live three miles from my grandparents, go down there.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That is cool.

CHARLIE: We don't do a lot.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: It changes once you get kids.

CHARLIE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: It makes a big difference.

CHARLIE: I mean I try to -- I try to take Emily out on as many dates as I can.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That's good.

CHARLIE: While I'm home. Summertime it is a little different because I know I'm going to be home for a while. Last summer we spent a lot of time at the lake. Whether we got in the water or not, we just went, we were there.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CHARLIE: Drive around the lake, regardless. We went -- but she was pregnant last year though too so --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CHARLIE: I was only allowed to do so much.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That's true.

CHARLIE: She would let me go but I -- it was not the same. I just didn't want to go out drinking without her.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah. Let's see, do you still enjoy the traveling?

CHARLIE: I love the traveling. I think that is probably why I still do this. That is not really -- the money is why we do this.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CHARLIE: Working for this outfit is the traveling, it is a blast. I mean, my last job I was on the West Coast and I was 18 miles from the east -- or from the Atlantic ocean, it was great. I've been to Mexico now because of this, but just because we were on the Mexican border.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CHARLIE: It is interesting getting to see stuff. The Golden Gate Bridge, that was the coolest thing I think I've ever seen of a monument or something of that nature. I like the traveling.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That's cool. Have you -- have you ever been hurt on the job ever?

CHARLIE: Oh, yeah.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, anything bad?

CHARLIE: Broke my nose.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, man, how did that happen?

CHARLIE: Well, there is three things that came from that. There is still a knot right there, I don't know if you can see it or not. My nose got broken. This tooth right here is fake. Had a hook. I was not being a very good boy and was trying to get

something to move just a little bit and I was actually working with a woman that day and I -- it was an air fall and she had the ropes to control it and I reached in there and hooked this bastard up and I come up a little bit and she came up, come up a little more. Well, the damn thing stuck and they do that, usually you are not in position like this. When it stuck, she tried get it to come undone and it just wanted to keep going and it popped loose, and that hook came out and wham.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh.

CHARLIE: Nailed me. Broke my nose over, knocked that tooth out, I bit through my lip.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh.

CHARLIE: Yeah, it was a good one. That was probably my best one I've ever had. On one job – that was just one job that just kicked my ass, got my tooth fixed that day and everything, nose was jacked up for a little while but it was already crooked so it worked out great. The job right before that one, I can't remember which hand it was, but I think it was this hand because at a point I had three out of five of these fingers broken.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh.

CHARLIE: I broke this one playing football on Christmas when I was home, broke this pinky, and then later on in that same job I broke the thumb, the knuckle right there.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Wow.

CHARLIE: Gotten stuff in my eyes but that is usually not a whole lot. If you've got the safety glasses on, you don't really get anything in there that is going to hurt you a whole lot.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Good.

CHARLIE: A little bit of dust, you can wash it back out but nothing life threatening, I guess. Could have been. I guess if that hook had hit me up, maybe it could have been a little bit of a bad deal but I've seen people get lucky. I watched a guy fall 25 foot and land on eight inches wide worth of tubes and there was nothing left under there. We were building a boiler and it was just the top side of it.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, man.

CHARLIE: And he landed there and it was 125 foot below that, he got lucky.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, no kidding.

CHARLIE: The harness that he would have been tied up with, had he been hooked up, is the only thing that ended up saving him. It snagged on some of these tubes and kept him from falling. I've seen some good stuff.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CHARLIE: Working back home, which is something actually every now and then I do when I'm home, I like to work under the table, if you will.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh.

CHARLIE: You may not be able to use my name in this book. My cousin has a sheet rock company and I work for them. The worst injury I've ever gotten in my life was working for them.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Really.

CHARLIE: I will never stand on a five-gallon bucket again.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, God.

CHARLIE: Ever, won't do it.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CHARLIE: Right Before -- hell, I got released to go back to work in January. I did it the day after Christmas, this most recent. Stood up on a five-gallon bucket and found out how far I can reach over before the bucket gives. Had all my weight on my right foot, bucket gave, this ankle I'm still supposed to wear a brace but I've been wearing the lace-up boots that we were required to get out in Richmond because they are just as good as that brace so --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh, wow.

CHARLIE: It still swells real good every day.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, so how long ago was that?

CHARLIE: That was the day after Christmas.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, man.

CHARLIE: So it has been a few months. I got bone bruising in there and stuff.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, wow.

CHARLIE: If I wasn't as big as I am, it probably wouldn't hurt but --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That sucks. That hurts thinking about it.

CHARLIE: So that's the worst I've ever had.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah. What do you like most about the job?

CHARLIE: Working with this outfit it is not quite the same, but diversity is usually my biggest answer because you never know. Even doing this, you don't know exactly what you are going to do when you go to work, unless you are just really good at one thing, you are going to do it all the time but I don't know. I'm still new enough in doing this exact part of it that I don't know what the hell I'm going to do when I get to

work, I like that. I like not knowing that I'm going to go do the same damn thing. Part of needing a new job or wanting a new place is not doing the same thing over and over again. When we work out of the hall over there, you never know. You might be on the rating gang but even if you are doing that every day, you are still doing something different. You don't move the same piece over and over again, usually.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh.

CHARLIE: It is a blast, you just don't know.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CHARLIE: You might work your ass off this day and then it would just be nice and slow the next so you just never know, I like that.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That's cool. What do you like least about it?

CHARLIE: Not knowing what I'm going to do the next day.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That's good.

CHARLIE: You know, whenever I would like to drink and stuff, if I knew I was just going to be welding on said component, I knew I could judge how drunk I could get.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh.

CHARLIE: Well, you don't know.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah. So it can be good not knowing, but sometimes it is just -- it is good to know but I really don't like to know. It is just best to not -- so that's the down.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CHARLIE: Attitudes, you get to -- you don't get to work with the same people, so you have to learn new people. Like our boss that we have here, I don't know him. I'm starting to figure out what I can and can't do or say. Sometimes you burn a bridge before you learn that, that's probably one of the worst things. Because you may work with 1,000 different people a year and may not remember until you get to the next job and then they remember, that is the one who didn't like doing blah, blah, blah or you just -- you remember people by that. That is probably one of the worst things because you make a reputation for yourself and will never know it.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CHARLIE: So --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CHARLIE: If you complain about one thing, you are automatically a cry baby.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CHARLIE: And it is not that you are trying to cry, you could point something out, that reputation follows you, it does. Even as many people do this, it follows you everywhere, it kind of sucks.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, I've seen that.

CHARLIE: It is interesting at the same time because you don't know who you are going to be on this job, you don't know what river they are going off so is he the bad ass here or is he the cry baby or which one is he, you just never know.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That's interesting. Is there anything I didn't ask you that you think is important to include in this?

CHARLIE: I think you might have asked it but I don't know. When he said something the other day that you were going to ask, I had it in my head that if you had -- if you were to ask me what the hardest thing about doing this is.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CHARLIE: The hardest thing is being -- being away, which is a blast but going and seeing these cool places lately and not having my kids there and not having Emily there, it is cool, it is great, but you would love to have that picture with them standing in front of whatever it is. That is probably the hardest thing about this.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CHARLIE: I mean he's lucky enough to get you to come out here.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, but our kids are older and --

CHARLIE: Yes.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: You know.

CHARLIE: I would love to be able to do that. She's crippled right now too, she wouldn't be a lot of fun. I would have to move her everywhere she wanted to go and I don't want to do that. I don't want to work while I'm off work.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, yeah.

CHARLIE: But it is -- that's probably the hardest thing.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CHARLIE: It is easier if you don't have kids.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: I'm sure.

CHARLIE: Or a woman or --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CHARLIE: Or a house.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CHARLIE: If you just don't have any of that stuff, this is the perfect thing to do.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. I will remember that. Well, we are done.

CHARLIE: All right.

(Whereupon the interview concluded.)

RECORDED INTERVIEW OF GABE

Taken on the 19th day of March, 2014, in Bangor, Maine

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: All right. How long have you been a welder?

GABE: I've been welding about two and a half years now.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. And did you go to school or how did you get started in it?

GABE: I went to school for it.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: You did. Did you know that's what you wanted to do in, like, high school?

GABE: Yeah. As soon as I got out of high school, I went straight to school for it.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Was there somebody you knew, like, that did it or how did you find out about welding?

GABE: My cousin, I seen him come home with all this cool shit.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

GABE: And so I was, like, I want to do what he does.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

GABE: And I figured it out and I was like go to school and try to get on and finally got on.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Good.

GABE: And been traveling and making money ever since.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Cool. Are you in the union?

GABE: Yes.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. Do you work for the same company all the time or different companies or --

GABE: Pretty much just this one company, WSI --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: WSI.

GABE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. How often, like in a year, how often are you on the road?

GABE: I just started traveling in this last year and I think I've been gone four out of six or three out of six months probably so half time.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay, cool. Let's see, so you are not -- how old are you?

GABE: I'm 20.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: 20, okay.

GABE: I'm fresh.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: You are fresh, so are you married?

GABE: No.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. Let's see, what do you do in your off time when you are on the road, safety meetings?

GABE: Safety meetings, a lot of safety meetings. I try not to get in too much trouble because they like to -- they call me "pup" and oh, we got to get the pup drunk, and I'm -- it is not as fun as it looks.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, really?

GABE: Yeah. I'm always the one that has to drink more than everybody else just because it is funny when I throw up, but, I don't know, I try to get out and see stuff too while I'm out on the road. But working as many hours as we do, you don't get to see a whole lot.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

GABE: It is still fun.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. So you don't, like, go out and party much or do you?

GABE: I do when everybody else does.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay.

GABE: I don't go out by myself and party but I will go out with everybody else.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Cool. Are there many other -- I mean, do you work with many others who are young like you or are you --

GABE: I'm pretty much the youngest by far.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, I wondered.

GABE: The only other guy that is close to me was, like, probably Wolf, he's 24.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

GABE: He's probably the youngest guy I work with.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: I didn't know how many, like, other single young guys you really got to work with that you would get to go out with or whatever so --

GABE: Yeah, not very many.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Let's see, what else? So when you are home, how do you spend your off time, your down time then?

GABE: Oh, I got lots of toys.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, yeah, like what?

GABE: Like, I race dirt bikes when I'm at home so that takes up a lot of money and time so --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

GABE: That keeps me pretty busy and I do a lot of hunting and do a lot of beer drinking.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Cool.

GABE: But -- and it is big around home to just go out country cruising, that is a big thing. And I'm from a small town so there ain't a whole lot to do.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

GABE: So you got to make stuff to do.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

GABE: We usually have a fun time.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Do you have your own place?

GABE: I did for a little while and then I moved all my shit back into my brother's house so we stay together.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Cool, that's good. Let's see, have you ever been injured on the job?

GABE: Not yet.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That's good. Ever seen anybody get hurt or had any evacuations or anything like that?

GABE: No, I haven't seen nothing too crazy yet.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That's good. Let's see, what else do I have? Have you ever busted a weld test?

GABE: No, not yet.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That's good, that's good. Well, so far, what do you like least about this line of work?

GABE: Oh, I get homesick every once in awhile and then working 84 hours a week everywhere you go, it gets kind of rough.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: I bet so, yeah, no kidding.

GABE: That would definitely be the hard part about it.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: What do you like the most about it?

GABE: The money.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

GABE: But I also work -- get to work with a great group of guys so that is pretty cool. They all take care of me being the young guy.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That's good. So they don't give you too much shit?

GABE: No, no, they don't. I mean, they give me shit but --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

GABE: But I can take it.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Good.

GABE: As good as anybody so --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That's good. Let's see, do you have any good stories about guys you worked with or anything you saw that you were just, like, oh, my God?

GABE: Yeah, I've seen -- I'm -- I was used to making about \$30,000.00 a year back home before I came out on the road and so, like, 1,000 bucks is a lot of money to me.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

GABE: Well, one of my first jobs was in California and we were going out to the bar and this guy bought us a round for the whole place and I just thought it was the most insane thing ever.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

GABE: But I was, like, huh?

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: So the whole bar, he bought a round for the whole bar?

GABE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, yeah.

GABE: So it -- that was probably the craziest thing. And all the strip clubs and shit like that, it gets out of hand.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: I bet so.

GABE: It does.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

GABE: But that's why I try to keep it just to safety meetings.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, yeah.

GABE: But you've got to cut loose every once in awhile.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That's right. Let's see, is there anything I haven't asked you that you think would be good to include in here or anything that just stands out to you working?

GABE: Oh, man. Hell, you probably just got -- how many places have you been with Billy?

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, oh, man, probably at least twice a year.

GABE: Twice a year.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, Texas and, you know, our kids are older now so it is going to change after, you know, like this school year but been to Texas a bunch of times and California and this place, Pennsylvania, and Baltimore, Louisiana.

GABE: So you've been --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Bermuda.

GABE: Oh, yeah.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Bermuda was pretty cool, I liked it a lot. I was there for, like, three weeks, that was good so --

GABE: You've been just as many places as I have.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, but you are going pass me, you are passing me pretty quick.

GABE: Yeah, a long ways to go.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, yeah.

GABE: Got 35 years left.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, God, that is -- you are just a kid.

GABE: But it's going to be a good 35 years.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, going to be fun, a lot of money to be made out there.

GABE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

GABE: And if I ever learn how to save it.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

GABE: I'm going retire early.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That would be the hard part for me to go from not having money to having money and managing that money.

GABE: Well, the thing is, like I say, I made \$30,000.00 when I got out of high school and started my first job and that sucks but once I started making that -- this big money, I still acted like I was only making 30,000 a year and it helped save me a bunch of money.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: So you've saved a bunch?

GABE: Uh-huh.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, that's good.

GABE: Oh, yeah, yeah. It kind of makes it hard to go onto the next job if you don't have to but you can't tell them no.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, especially when you are young and get those jobs in when you can.

GABE: Summertime it is always slow so --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That's true, yeah, so then you've got to live off that savings. Okay, all right. I guess we are done, was that bad?

(Whereupon the interview concluded.)

RECORDED INTERVIEW OF RAY

Taken on the 18th day of March, 2014, in Bangor, Maine.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. How long have you been welding?

RAY: I've been welding eight years.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Eight years. Did you go to school for it or how did you get started?

RAY: That was a year and a half of community college for welding.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. So you did like a whole program --

RAY: Uh-huh.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: -- thing for that. So you knew in high school or you decided in high school to --

RAY: My grandmother owns a welding shop.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh.

RAY: And I started welding when I was in high school.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, that's cool.

RAY: And then I continued doing it and then I figured that that is what I wanted to do when I graduated so I went to school for it.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: All right, cool. So are you in a union?

RAY: Boilermakers, Local 455.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Sweet. Did you get in the union right away?

RAY: That's how we got in, that's what I started doing.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. All right. Let's see, do you always work for the same company or are there different companies?

RAY: Always different. Well, the last nine months have been WSI but they have been most of the time. My five years of doing it has been all different.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: All over the place, okay. How often are you on the road?

RAY: Probably nine months out of the year.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Really, wow. That is a lot, okay. And you said you had a girlfriend so you are -- have you ever been married?

RAY: No.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay.

RAY: I'm 24.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, man, you are just a kid. Do you have any kids?

RAY: No.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Well done.

RAY: She's got a kid but I don't.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay, okay. Are you pretty close with her? How long you guys been together?

RAY: We've known each other for a real long time but we've been together six months.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Cool. All right. So you were friends first?

RAY: Oh, yeah.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That is good, see, I think that is cool. How old is her kid?

RAY: Just turned a year.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, that is so cute. Let's see, I'm trying to remember all these. What do you do in your off time while you are on the road?

RAY: Spend time with my family.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh.

RAY: As much as I can.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, that's good. Let's see, do you still enjoy traveling or does it -- has it gotten old?

RAY: Doing this?

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

RAY: Or like actually traveling for fun?

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: No, doing this, yeah.

RAY: Is it routine now. I mean I don't -- I don't think anything about it. I try not to because the more you think about it, the more you don't want to leave home.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: I bet so, yeah, I mean, I know that's how it is for --

RAY: The shorter the rest, the better it is to make, because then you don't have time to think about leaving.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That's true.

RAY: That's the way I look at it.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That's true, that's absolutely right. Have you ever been injured on the job or been part of an evacuation, anything, any near misses?

RAY: I haven't been part of an evacuation. I haven't really been badly injured. I've been involved in some stuff. Second job boilermaking, me and a guy were removing some grating and he pulled his side and it fell, it was 150 pounds, and it drug him in the hole, he had a harness on but --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, man.

RAY: But he fell in the hole right in front of me.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, my gosh.

RAY: So it kind of gave me an experience of how quick you can -- something can go wrong.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah. Oh, that sucks, man. Let's see, what do you like most about the job?

RAY: The money. I mean, I would have to say the money. Another thing is I don't like -- I worked in a plant, my grandmother's plant, I worked in it, and it is the same

people every day. You don't -- like, you don't get to see new things, you see the same people over and over and if you don't like somebody, you've got to deal with them.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh.

RAY: Doing this we only got to deal with each other a few months at a time and you might see them on the next job and you might not and that is -- that is what I like most of all because you get to meet a lot of new people and see --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

RAY: See a lot of places you'd never see.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: And change it up. So it is still kind of -- I mean, like, the traveling part, is that still kind of an adventure to you because you've been --

RAY: I like going different places, I find that fun.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah. And you get more down time, you know, like working, yeah, that is pretty cool. Have you -- okay, are there any stories like when you started out on the road or things you've seen where you are just like what the hell, like, that just blew your mind, anything that stands out in particular?

RAY: Yeah. I was an apprentice and, as an apprentice, all the older hands give you hell. Oh, and by hell, I mean they torture you.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, man.

RAY: And they do things that they shouldn't do, and you tend not to say anything about it. I was messing with them, I'm a smartass, I'm an asshole.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh.

RAY: I was being a smartass with a bunch of guys that had been in it a long time and they kept messing with me. Well, I lied to them, and it was something stupid, but I

lied to them. And so they said that they were going to get me for lying to them and I didn't think anything about it and we were standing in a hole pretty much, and there was big metal pipes coming by us and I was leaned up against it and it was only my second job. I was new, I didn't think anything about it. They kept messing with me. Well, I backed up into the corner and next thing I know, they are holding me down and they duck taped me.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, my God.

RAY: And that ain't the bad part. Another guy come running off the scaffolding and undid my pants and pressed my face on the end of my dick.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, my God.

RAY: Yeah.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Wow, that is awesome. I mean it is not but it is.

RAY: I mean it was pretty funny.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

RAY: So then -- if you say it can't be done, they will do it to you. They can -- there is always enough boilermakers to have whatever they want to do done.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

RAY: I've seen people -- I've actually got a video, I don't have my phone with me. We were on a job. Out of my local, if it is your birthday, you bring a cake in. If you don't bring a cake in --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, you got to bring your own cake?

RAY: Yeah.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, man.

RAY: That is the thing, I don't know why. If you don't bring your own cake, you either get duck taped or spanked.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: So that is a thing -- duck taping is like a thing, I never heard it before.

RAY: Yeah, it is a punishment. They duck taped a kid up and dumped water on him in 15 degree weather.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, my God, oh.

RAY: He said it couldn't be done, it was done.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Wow, that is crazy.

RAY: So, yeah, you see -- you see a lot of crazy things, people getting locked in game boxes, just you got to have fun somehow.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, yeah. So how long did you say you've been doing this, the traveling?

RAY: I've been doing this for five years.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay.

RAY: I've been a boilermaker for five years.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: So when you got started, I mean, like, in your off time, like when you were -- you work and you would be, you know, like, once you got off the shift or whatever, did you go out, did you party or have you always just kind of --

RAY: When I first came in, I was only 20.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: 20, what is that?

RAY: I was 20, 20 years old.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: You were 20, okay, sorry.

RAY: So I didn't do much partying. Now, yeah, we go out. We go to strip clubs, we go to bars, raise hell.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, cool. Let's see, what else? Is there anything I haven't asked you that you think is important for me to include?

RAY: Life on the road is hard. Being away from family and friends, you miss a lot. I've got a 12 year old brother, an eleven year old sister.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, yeah.

RAY: I've got a three year old nephew, I've missed birthdays, sporting events, I've missed all kind of things.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That sucks.

RAY: It does.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That sucks.

RAY: The hardest thing is hearing them call and asking me to come home.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: I bet so. Yeah, God, that is -- I know that is hard. I mean, I just know from the other side of it, obviously, I don't know from -- okay. We are done.

RAY: All right.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: I really appreciate it.

RAY: No problem.

(Whereupon the interview concluded.)

RECORDED INTERVIEW OF TIM

Taken on the 19th day of March, 2014, in Bangor, Maine.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: How long have you been a welder?

TIM: 20 years.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: What made you decide to get into it?

TIM: Living in Nevada, Missouri, there was no other choice other than working a crane the rest of your life or leaving.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: How did you hear about it or decide that that was like a viable, like, career choice?

TIM: Vo tech.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Vo tech talked about it?

TIM: Yeah.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. Let's see, what kind of training did you go through to get into the profession?

TIM: I went through four and a half months of MWI.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: What is MWI?

TIM: Missouri Welding Institute.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: And then after that how did you get started on like working and --

TIM: I picked the phone up.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay.

TIM: Made a phone call.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Did you go through an apprenticeship or --

TIM: At that point, no, my instructor was pro union. I hired in a five-year non-union pipe welder.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: So when you picked up the phone and started calling, how did you -- like, how did you know where to get started, who to call?

TIM: It is called Industrial Hot Sheet.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay.

TIM: All the employers that need people, they pay some money, get their name in the hot sheet and that's how I got in.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: So you paid your money and got your name on there?

TIM: No, I didn't pay, the employers paid.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh.

TIM: And I found a job that was close to home, which is in Nebraska. That was my very first job and that's how I got started.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: So were you union all the way. When did you first get into the union?

TIM: 1999.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay.

TIM: I worked almost two and a half years Local 798 Pipeliners but they won't sell you a book.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. So how -- how was the pay with non-union versus union?

TIM: If you are in a pipeliner, you get paid for your welding machine and your time. The welding machine makes about 30 bucks an hour, you make \$25.00 an hour, that was back in 1996.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: So you made 55 bucks an hour?

TIM: Back then, yes.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay.

TIM: And all you had to do was give the gas man a 12 pack of beer and he would fill your tank up for you.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay, okay. So what made you decide that union was better if, like, 55 bucks an hour is pretty incredible so, like, what made you make the switch, what made you decide to do that?

TIM: Well, it was kind of luck of the draw. I had tried and tried and tried to get into it and couldn't. I mean nobody would take me, because there wasn't much work back then. We are talking in the late nineties.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh.

TIM: As far as union work, and actually it started with Tom Hollins. The company I work for now they wanted the foreman's son who was going through Nevada Welding Institute. And Jamie Williams said hey, you want to -- you want to go to Minnesota? I said to do what, he goes I don't know, I was like sure. So I didn't go to Minnesota, I went to Washingtonville, Pennsylvania, but they paid me \$1,750.00 to drive from Nebraska to Washingtonville, Pennsylvania, on a Sunday.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: How long did that take you?

TIM: About 19 hours.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Wow.

TIM: And I drove straight in and I got there at 6:00 at night, I went to work at 7:00, no sleep.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Wow, 12 hours.

TIM: 16.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: 16 hour shifts.

TIM: No. Working time, yeah, thirteens.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, wow, wow. Okay.

TIM: But to work one day and make 1,750 bucks, what would you do?

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

TIM: And it is legal.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, that's true. That's a good point. Okay. Are you married?

TIM: Now?

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

TIM: Yes.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. How long have you been married?

TIM: Oh, two years.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, yeah?

TIM: Yeah.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: You sure about that?

TIM: Nope.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Is this your first marriage?

TIM: Nope.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: How many times have you been married before?

TIM: Twice.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Twice before this?

TIM: No, once.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. How long were you married that time?

TIM: I think 14 years.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay.

TIM: I think.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. And, let's see, how many -- do you have any kids?

TIM: Two boys.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Two boys, how old are they?

TIM: 20 and 17 -- 16.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay.

TIM: He will be 17 in July.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. How supportive is your family about what you do?

TIM: Which family, the ex-family or --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Both.

TIM: Or my mother and father family?

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, I don't know. You could also include your current family but if you just want to include your ex and your mother and father, that is fine.

TIM: It ain't me you are talking to. Uh-huh, my ex family, they don't give a shit. My mother and my father, they don't give a shit. I'm pretty much on my own.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. So you don't have any support, like, in your current situation? I'm treating you like any interview.

TIM: My current situation, yes.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. How long -- in a typical year, how much are you usually gone?

TIM: Four and a half months.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That's good, that's good, so you are home a lot. How do you spend your off time when you are not on the job?

TIM: Normally I fish and I hunt.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh. When you are on the job?

TIM: I do nothing. There is no time.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. So you just work and sleep?

TIM: You miss out on sleep just to have a life.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: I see. So, like, what do you do to feel like you have a life, I guess, when you are --

TIM: Stay up until 10:30.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay, what do you do though, like, you just stay awake, you just, like, watch TV?

TIM: We drink.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay.

TIM: We drink and tell stories and we argue about the job that we just left five hours ago.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. So a lot of work talk.

TIM: Yeah.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Basically.

TIM: Yeah.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. Let's see.

TIM: But we are all counselors, shrinks, doctors. If you ever -- if something is ever wrong with you, call us.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay, all right. So you guys are a pretty close group would you say?

TIM: 90 percent, yes.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. What do you like the most about what you do?

TIM: The money and the guys.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. What do you like the least?

TIM: Being gone.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. What do you feel like you've missed out on by being gone?

TIM: Everything.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Could you, like, go into more detail?

TIM: As far as a family life, I missed it all.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. Do you think that contributed to losing your family?

TIM: 100 percent.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. Let's see, is there anything you feel like is important to include in this that maybe I haven't asked you?

TIM: What do you want, you want health risks, do you want --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah. Like, have you been injured on the job?

TIM: I have.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. What kind of injuries have you sustained?

TIM: I fell, dislocated my right shoulder.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh.

TIM: Got hit with benzene

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Benzene is a chemical.

TIM: It is a car --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Carcinogen.

TIM: Yeah.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay.

TIM: It's -- let's see, what else. Stomach ulcers right now which maybe that is what it was, maybe not. I took a heavy metal test and mine are skyrocketed out of here, you know, I mean there is pros and cons to all this, there really is. There is good and there is bad but the guys are great. I mean, they are kind of your family on the road. But no matter where you go, home is home. I been in every state but Hawaii.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That's pretty good. Do you still like to travel?

TIM: I hate it.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: How come?

TIM: For the same reason I just said. I'm tired of being gone. I've seen it; I've done it. There is nowhere you can take me I haven't been.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. Have you ever busted a weld test, had any inspector issues or anything like that?

TIM: Yeah. You want the whole story?

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

TIM: I busted one weld test in my life.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh.

TIM: And the reason why I busted it is because -- you want the whole story?

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

TIM: Okay. Because the safety man had to leave that was giving us our safety class, whatever you want to call it.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh.

TIM: And these guys are drawing on the board. This is a job by the house that I could have stayed at 18 months and not had to travel, that's what I was getting for it but, anyway, they were drawing some pictures on the chalkboard and the guy walked in, we had no clue who he was and he's like what the hell you guys doing, we go what, you don't like puss? I can say that; right?

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

TIM: And he slammed the door and walked out. Well, two hours later come back in and they are drawing football plays on there and he come back in raising hell that we are drawing on his board again. At this time we didn't know it was his board, so finally the safety man come back in and then he's like time for your weld test. Well, the guy that his office was (inaudible).

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh.

TIM: Yeah, all eight of us busted it.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, wow.

TIM: All eight.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: All eight.

TIM: Uh-huh.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Dang.

TIM: Easiest weld test ever, busted it.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Wow. Have you ever busted a drug test?

TIM: Once.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: What happened there?

TIM: Five Hydrocodone pills in a week.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay.

TIM: And then two and a half months later I busted a hair follicle drug test.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Hair follicle drug tests I've heard are different than like urine tests and how is that different?

TIM: Well, a hair follicle can legally go back 90 days.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay.

TIM: So --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: So it was covering the same -- do you like habitually take Hydrocodone pills?

TIM: No.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. And it was -- you busted it because you -- did you not have a prescription for it or --

TIM: My back was killing me. We were working 13 hours a day. I did not have time to go to the doctor, and there was a lot of people on the jobs that have, quote, quote, prescriptions.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh, got you. Okay. Let's see, have you -- okay, like as long as you've been on the job, you said 20 years.

TIM: Yes.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Are there any stories about other people that you've worked with that you think -- that kind of blew your mind or things that just stood out to you as being particularly crazy or noteworthy in any way?

TIM: Well, okay, what exactly do you want to hear here? I mean, I've been in the worst situations and I've been in the best situations.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: What was the worst?

TIM: Lindale, Texas, I watched the world's largest crane fall on three guys.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Did it kill them?

TIM: Dead.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh.

TIM: World's largest crane, what do you think happened?

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Well, you know, I just need to make sure.

TIM: LaCygne, Kansas, I watched a crane there fall on two guys, killed them dead.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Wow, wow, that's --

TIM: Problem is I knew all five of them.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That sucks.

TIM: And what happened is -- Lindale, Texas, is a chemical plant. The crane, the wind got it and, I mean, the lift itself wasn't heavy. He was just swinging over and

then what little bit of wind he had, his calculations were wrong. It tipped the whole fucking crane over and it fell on top of three boys, Mexicans.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Wow.

TIM: And one of them wasn't dead yet, he was pinned down. There was nothing you could do. I held his hand, I didn't -- I tried, you can't pick it up.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: So he died while you were there?

TIM: Yeah.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh.

TIM: Right there.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Wow.

TIM: I want to say he said tell my wife I love her but I don't speak Spanish.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, that sucks. How about best stories, any funny stories? Anybody you worked with that was just out of control in a way that --

TIM: Well, Clint pissing on everybody is pretty funny.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

TIM: Are you talking what I've pulled or --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Anything. And it doesn't have to be funny, just anything wild or anything guys do on the road that they would never, like different sides of them you'd never seen.

TIM: Herby the dildo salesman.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: What is that?

TIM: Guy named Larry Gilford. He walked out one day, he goes boys, let me show you

something and he come out with two hands on it, and it was still that far out. I was like Larry, that is something, and back then he was like 60 something, he's dead now. So I worked with him for ten – probably five, ten years, and I mean he had a horse on him. And he would answer the phone this is Herby, he was a dildo salesman and he always featured the 10 inch and all that stuff and he would get people to bite on it. He could just sell it, it was so funny. He just -- oh, he cracked me up, and he would prank call people. We are talking a 70 year old man and he would prank call and he would get their credit card number and everything and they are all in on the 10 inch. One of them wanted a 17 inch and he goes well, I got that, but I -- what do you look like? Just so funny and what is funny was the three old guys which, you know, when I started I was 24 as far as the boilermaking stuff. Greg Lindsey, a good buddy of mine, his dad wound up having cancer. There was three of them, Gary Merit; Schlenger, his name was -- I can't think -- Gilford, Larry Gilford; and Gary Merit, Larry Gilford and we just called him old man but his last name was Lindsey. And Lindsey was dying, he had lung cancer, and fatal, no fixing it and he just took it -- he kept working. I mean, he was going to die, and what was funny was we was having a safety meeting one day, and those other two bastards, just to try to cheer him up a little bit after chemo and stuff like that, they are like well, you know what -- oh, Jerry Lindsey, that is his name. He goes Jerry -- Jerry said guys, I'm thinking about confessing and we were like, you sonofabitch, we ain't dying, you ain't confessing nothing. And they all laughed, you know, I mean, they grew up together, went to school together and worked together and here he is, I mean, he died two months later.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, wow.

TIM: Lung cancer.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That sucks.

TIM: You ain't supposed to say that in an interview.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: It still sucks.

TIM: Yeah. And all his boys I know. I worked with all three of them.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: They are all in the same field?

TIM: Yeah.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Let's see, is there anything else that you would like to tell me that you feel like I should include?

TIM: Life is what you make out of it.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh.

TIM: There's good points, there's bad points no matter what you do. I mean I'm sure you hate your job sometimes and I hate mine. But you've been here for two days and you see what I do every day. Is it great, no. Does it suck, yeah, but it goes on. The hardest part about being married doing this is having somebody else that understands it.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Not having somebody else who understands it?

TIM: Yeah.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

TIM: That's the hardest part of this. Because it is good money, it is fast money, but it is a lonely money. I mean you've been here two days and you found out that you don't sleep much.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, yeah. Do you think you sleep any more on day shift than night shift?

TIM: No.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Do you find that like the things that you do in your off time are any different like from day shift to night shift?

TIM: It depends. Am I home longer than a week?

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: I don't know. Just like an average job, I guess.

TIM: Well, I mean usually after being on nights and jet lag and time zone changes and all that, it takes a week just to get back on schedule. And if you don't have nothing to do, then you miss that schedule, then you are falling way behind again.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

TIM: I like nights better, it seems like that it goes by faster.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh.

TIM: Maybe it does, maybe it doesn't, but to me it does.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. We are done.

TIM: No, we ain't.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. What else you got?

TIM: What do you want to hear?

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: I want to hear all the stuff, I mean I want to know --

TIM: I don't like Jeff.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay, good. Why don't you like Jeff?

TIM: He talks too fucking much. He interrupts everybody, he drives me fucking nuts.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Do you work with Jeff a lot?

TIM: No.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay.

TIM: No.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Well, that's good.

TIM: Second time I ever met him.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: So are there Jeffs on every job?

TIM: Oh, you can find them. They are pretty much where the boss is, they are.

We going to do it yet? No, I don't want to do it.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, my God. All right. We are done.

(Whereupon the interview concluded.)

RECORDED INTERVIEW OF SAM

Taken on the 18th day of March, 2014, in Bangor, Maine.

SAM: So you are actually doing this for a thesis?

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, yeah. My master's thesis.

SAM: And what are you -- what are you studying?

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Communication but what I want to really do is write about cultures, like different cultures and nobody has ever written about you guys. Like

there is -- people have written about truckers, they have written about military, you know, different, like, jobs where people are on the road for --

SAM: Right.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: You know.

SAM: Right.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: But nobody has ever written about welders.

SAM: All right.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: I mean there is no -- I mean, at least not that I've ever found so I thought, you know.

SAM: Cool.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: You guys are really cool like that, you know, as long as I've been with Bill, I just thought somebody should write about you guys so --

SAM: That's awesome.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: All right. Are you ready?

SAM: Yeah.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. How long have you been a welder?

SAM: I've been welding since 1993.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Wow, all right. What did you -- when did you decide you wanted to be a welder or what --

SAM: 1993.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: The same year, did you go to school for it or --

SAM: No, no. Basically, I had a football scholarship out of high school.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh.

SAM: And talked myself out of it and went into the military and got out, got a job, and they taught me how to weld so that's how I got started.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Cool, all right. So do you always work for the same company, do you do different companies or how does that work?

SAM: No. WSI keeps me pretty well hooked up so I work primarily for WSI. As long as they treat me well, I treat them well, and that's going on for about eight years now so --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay, cool.

SAM: No reason to jump back and forth.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. Who were you with before that or just a bunch of different places or --

SAM: Yeah, I've only been a union member ever since I worked for WSI.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay.

SAM: So before that I was jumping around because welding -- welding is a hard thing to make money at if you are not in a union or doing pressure welding or anything like that, I mean, so I was jumping from job to job, you know, \$12.00 an hour, \$15.00, \$18.00 an hour, just, you know, working my way up --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh.

SAM: -- the ladder and all kinds of different places.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay, cool. How often are you on the road, like, how much do you travel per year?

SAM: I am on the road about 30 weeks a year.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Wow, yeah, that is pretty good, that is a lot. Okay. So you are married?

SAM: Yeah.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: How long have you been married?

SAM: Four years.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Is this your first marriage?

SAM: No.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: What marriage is it?

SAM: It is my third.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, yeah, okay. Let's see, so how is this one as compared to --

SAM: The first one was a -- just a young kid, dumb ass thing, really.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, I know how that is.

SAM: The second one I was boiler making and we just didn't get -- I mean, things just didn't jive with me being on the road, but the one I'm with now, I mean, she's really -- she has a good job, she's very well -- I mean, very down to earth, a little older than me, so she's very set in her ways and she's fine

with being home, you know, as long as I'm not gone for 13, 18, 26 weeks at a time.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Wow, yeah.

SAM: But I'm on a -- it will be nine weeks by the time I get home.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Wow.

SAM: And --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Nine straight?

SAM: Yeah.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, my gosh.

SAM: And she's a little -- she's -- she wants me home.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Well, yeah, I don't blame her. I mean, that is a long time.

SAM: So it is.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay.

SAM: But she's -- she's a little older. I mean, I think it is -- I think it is a lot better when you get, I mean, to our age. I think you are about my age.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh, probably so.

SAM: You might be a couple years younger than me but it is a lot better at our age than it is like kids, you know what I mean?

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh, yeah, I imagine so.

SAM: Yeah.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: I imagine so.

SAM: It is because --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Do you have kids?

SAM: Yes.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. How old are they?

SAM: I have one that is graduating this year.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, yeah.

SAM: Like Billy's oldest and I have one that is -- he will be a junior next year.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay, cool. So similar to ours?

SAM: Yeah, yeah.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. So -- okay. So when you are -- well, I mean, obviously we are sitting here right now but when you are on the road in your off time, is this kind of what you do, you hang out, you don't like go out, party or anything like that anymore?

SAM: No.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Did you do that early on?

SAM: Yeah. But I can't, I mean, you know, I can't do -- I really can't even hang out with those guys over there. I'm getting to the point where I can't -- I can't function.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah. I mean as much as, you know, seven twelves or seven fourteens, that would be hard.

SAM: Right. Especially nine weeks into one.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Sure.

SAM: You get tired.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Like no time off.

SAM: Right.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: You are just going straight from one to the other.

SAM: Yeah.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: See, this is amazing, I can't imagine that. How do you spend your time when you are home?

SAM: Well, I will fly home Sunday and I probably won't do anything until Tuesday.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh.

SAM: And then I will catch up on some work at the house, you know, that has been neglected since I've been gone, and actually our pool broke a pipe so my wife -- I'm already going to another job on April 2 so the wife said all you have to do while you are home is fix that pipe and then you can lay around and do whatever you want to do.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Well, that is not bad, that is only one job. So do you own your own home?

SAM: Yeah.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: And you have an in-ground pool?

SAM: Yeah.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Nice. So what do you think about like -- off the record, but how has that been for you?

SAM: We just put it in last year.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. I grew up with one so I didn't, you know, like maintenance wise, you know, my mom was always griping about that because --

SAM: Oh, my wife does too.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

SAM: It is a pain in the ass, it is

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

SAM: And I think -- because we own a condo in Panama City, Florida too.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Nice.

SAM: So I think she got used to the pool life down there, we go down there about four times a year.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Sure. Where are you from?

SAM: I'm from Detroit.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay.

SAM: She's born and raised in Georgia, we live in Georgia.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. I didn't know, okay.

SAM: But she's born and raised in the small little town that we live in and we bought -- we bought that condo I think just before we were married. I got a good deal from a buddy of mine so --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, okay.

SAM: And it works out good because she's got a good job so she pays -- she pays the house bills and I pay the condo bills.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That's nice.

SAM: Yeah.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: What does she do?

SAM: She's a district manager for a hair cutting place.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Nice, okay.

SAM: She's got 15 salons.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Wow, yeah, so that is good, that always helps when it is not all on you.

SAM: Oh, yeah.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Do you still enjoy traveling? I mean, does it seem like an adventure any more or is it just the same?

SAM: No, getting back to like the --

(Knocking on door).

SAM: All right. Let's go over there.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay.

SAM: I'm getting a beer before we leave too.

Okay. Let's see, so I was at do you still enjoy traveling like or –

SAM: I was about to tell you that --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Let's get right on here.

SAM: My second wife.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh.

SAM: I couldn't wait to get on the road and get to working, because we didn't really get along. I don't even know why we got married.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: How long were you married?

SAM: We didn't even make it two years.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, wow.

SAM: But my current and the last one.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Nice.

SAM: Her and I get along so well.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That's good.

SAM: I don't -- I don't enjoy it as much.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

SAM: I want to be home, but the thing about it is though, the profession that I chose, the only way that I can make the money and be comfortable in the way that I like to live is --

(Phone rang).

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Is that her?

SAM: Yeah, hold on one second.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay.

SAM: Where were we at?

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: We were talking about like you want to be home more.

SAM: Yes. I do -- I would prefer to be home more but with the condo in Panama City and the house, I mean, it is just not feasible for me as a welder to make -- I mean because at home, you know, I might be able to make 18 to 20 an hour, and from where I live I would have to go an -- I would have to drive an hour and a half to Atlanta to make that kind of money, and then I wouldn't see -- I would see her less -- I mean, I could be home every night, but it would be, you know, leave early, get home late, eat, go to bed, not very much quality time.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh.

SAM: Now, doing this kind of work, it sucks being in the hotel and missing her but when I'm

home, I know, like, I already know that I'm leaving April 2 for my next job so I know when I get home, I have a week and a half to spend with her and have a great time so it gets tiring living in hotels but the reward is awesome, I think.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Great.

SAM: Yeah.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: So what do you like -- what do you like most about the job?

SAM: Besides the money?

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Money can be the --

SAM: I mean people would be surprised that we make \$7,000.00 a week to weld.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh.

SAM: And travel all over the world to weld, but the -- but that's a huge plus but going different places and meeting different people and working with the guys -- I mean, there is a hell of a lot of good guys on the job that I, you know, I love spending time with, I mean, and really you spend -- I mean, you spend a whole lot of time with these guys. So, I mean, I like all that -- all those aspects. It is a good -- not a good, it is a great way to make a living, I think.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: What do you like least about it?

SAM: Time away from my wife.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

SAM: Yeah.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. Yeah, I understand that for sure. Have you ever been injured on the job?

SAM: No.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. And you said you were in a union?

SAM: Yeah.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Just trying to think of everything I was going to get. And what is -- what is one story about somebody you worked with that -- just something completely wild or something that just blew your mind or something you hadn't, you know, hadn't seen.

SAM: Well, we were getting ready -- there was a superintendent in Minnesota that we were heading and we were in this big, you know, we were in this big building and there was a bat flying around in the ceiling, and that bat ended up coming down and someone captured the bat in a coat.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh.

SAM: And a lot of the guys didn't like the superintendent so they took the bat and put it in his truck.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh.

SAM: And apparently about three-quarters of a mile down the road, the bat started flying around and it freaked him the hell out.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That's awesome.

SAM: Yeah.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That would have been cool to see.

SAM: Yeah.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. And is there anything I didn't ask that you think is important to mention?

SAM: Well, yeah, actually. This is a big thing to me, and I think this is a problem in our country.

I think when I was growing up, probably when you were growing up, they had a wood shop or a metal shop in high school.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh.

SAM: And they don't have those anymore.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, you are right.

SAM: And, you know what, they got an influx, I mean -- I mean, I don't really necessarily want my -- I mean my kids are -- I have my oldest is getting ready to go to Georgetown.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, cool.

SAM: But not every kid in this country can go to college.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh.

SAM: And succeed.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: You are right.

SAM: And there is a lot of blue color jobs like we do that people are not aware of that you can make over \$100,000.00 a year doing and mom and dad don't -- they don't know either. I mean, I just think that we are -- we are teaching kids the wrong thing, I mean, there is a lot of good jobs out there and they don't all have to -- you don't all have to go spend a gazillion dollars at school to get a good job. I mean I -- this is a great job to me, and, you know, there is not that -- I made 112,000 last year.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Nice.

SAM: And I worked 30 weeks.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh, yeah.

SAM: So that is just over half a year. And people don't realize the money that can be made on skilled labor.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: You are right, that is really good, okay. All right.
Well, we are done.

(Whereupon the interview concluded.)

RECORDED INTERVIEW OF ZAC

Taken on the 19th day of March, 2014, in Bangor, Maine.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. How long you been a welder?

ZAC: Probably about 13 years. I've been a boilermaker for 15, not really welding all that much for the first couple years.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. What is your -- what got you into welding, what is your background?

ZAC: A friend of mine was a boilermaker and just something that, you know how friends are, you know, you talk about your job and stuff like that and they had an opening and I went down and joined up.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Cool.

ZAC: Yeah.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: So you didn't go to school for it, you just started on the job?

ZAC: Well, I had to take a four-year apprenticeship program.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, yeah, okay, yeah, the apprenticeship.

ZAC: Because I did take the apprenticeship.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay.

ZAC: And there is other -- there is other ways of getting in where you could just pay \$50.00 and like made up locals and stuff but if you go to the apprenticeship, and it is not necessary four years, it is so many hours. It is like \$6,000.00, I think it is.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, yeah, I think I've heard that.

ZAC: Sometimes you can do it faster than others, like when I was -- when I did it, it was real busy, and I did it probably just a little over a couple years because of the hours.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Cool. Do you work for the same company on all jobs or do you --

ZAC: No.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Different companies?

ZAC: Different. Yeah, different companies and travel.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Travel, okay. How often are you on the road?

ZAC: Whatever I work pretty much.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: So this isn't normal, I mean, for you to work close to home, that is --

ZAC: Well, I'm still on the road. I'm not home.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, okay.

ZAC: My house is like almost two and a half hours from here.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, okay, all right. So --

ZAC: I've never -- I never drive from the house to a job ever.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. Well, the way they said it, I thought you lived next door.

ZAC: It doesn't work out like that.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: All right. So you are not local local, you are just in the area.

ZAC: Just a local union.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, I got you, okay. Are you married?

ZAC: Yes.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: All right. How long have you been married?

ZAC: You would have to ask that.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah. I'm going to tell her too that you didn't know.

ZAC: It has been five -- hold on a second. It has been four years.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Cool.

ZAC: Four years, yeah.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Is that your first marriage?

ZAC: No.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: How many times have you been married?

ZAC: This is the second one.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Second, me too. Do you have any kids?

ZAC: Yeah, I do. I have two boys.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: How old are they?

ZAC: One is going to be 18 and one is 24.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: When is he going to be 18?

ZAC: April 12.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: I have one that is going to be 18 this year too so cool.

How supportive is your family with your career?

ZAC: Very, I guess. They -- they never seem to say anything.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, okay, that's good.

ZAC: You know, people get homesick a little bit. I do, you know, they wish I was there but it is one of them choices that you have to make, you know.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, I know. What do you like to do in your off time when you are on the road to unwind or relax from a job?

ZAC: Not a whole lot. I usually stay right at the hotel. I might have a few drinks with the -- I usually go to a partner that I travel with and I've known him -- I've known him since I've been boilermaking so usually we room together and stuff and after work we usually just have a few drinks and what not or watch TV or whatever.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Cool. How do you spend your off time when you are home?

ZAC: I like to hunt and fish, go for drives and stuff like that with my wife and stuff, you know.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Cool.

ZAC: Just little things like that.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah. About how often would you say -- like in a year, how often are you gone?

ZAC: Used to be quite a bit. I used to be gone at least eight months out of the year.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Wow.

ZAC: Things have slowed down, so it has been like five to six and --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That is still quite a bit.

ZAC: It is. But I'm kind of hoping to change that a little bit. I like -- I need to work like eight months out of the year. Four months home would be fine, you know, I mean, but I got to work eight months.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Just for bills and stuff or just for you?

ZAC: Just, yeah, just to be happy.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, you like working that much then?

ZAC: Well, I don't like working at all, but, yeah, for bills and to have things that you want and things for the kids and whatever.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, cool.

ZAC: No one likes working, do you?

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: What?

ZAC: Do you like working?

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: I work a lot. I have, you know, I have three jobs but I -
- I hope it is not always going to be that way.

ZAC: Yeah.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: You know.

ZAC: It is not fun, is it?

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: No, no. I mean it might be different, you know, if I was traveling like you guys do but working at the same --

ZAC: It is not because --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: -- thing every day, it is --

ZAC: It is not like -- it is not like a vacation where you can go and enjoy yourself. It is like -- it is the same, you know, the same shit over and over and over again.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Just different places.

ZAC: It is not glamorous at all.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

ZAC: It is just something that you've got to do, you know, a choice you make to make the money, you know, that's it.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, yeah. Do you -- well, let me see, have you ever been injured on the job?

ZAC: No, not really.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That's good, that's good. What else do I have?

ZAC: I'm very cautious.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

ZAC: I try to be.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That's good, that's what you want. Have you ever, let's see, what else do I want -- what would you say you like least about the job?

ZAC: Probably as dirty as it is with the respirators all the time and just the fly ash and stuff like that, because after a while if you are in it long enough, usually you will like break out, you know, on your neck and stuff.

(Interruption as someone entered the room.)

ZAC: Yeah, you know, that's about it, as dirty as it because, you know, you wear your respirator and it gets really dirty and stuff, and that fly ash has got like -- it kind of turns to like -- like acid or something like that, you know, a little bit or whatever.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, yeah.

ZAC: And it irritates your skin.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, yeah, I've seen that.

ZAC: Very hot, very hot.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: What do you --

ZAC: You know, because you've got to wear all that stuff too, you've got to wear a suit, you've got to wear your respirator. A lot of jobs you've got to wear your hard hat plus a welding shield and a harness, and, you know, gloves, you know, like leathers or something to keep you from burning up too. Sometimes it can be very hot.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, yeah, I can't even imagine. What do you like most about it?

ZAC: Well, I like the part, like, when I first started, that you could pretty do anything you wanted. If you didn't like a job, you would -- you could quit, you could what they call drag up, you could drag up. Or say if you got fired, which I haven't been fired off a job yet, but if you got fired, whereas in a regular job you are done, with this

job here you could go back to the same contractor on the next job and it is like it never happened, you know what I mean?

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh, yeah, yeah.

ZAC: So I mean there was a lot of freedom like that. You could -- you could drag up and go to another job or if you got fired, went somewhere else or -- it was kind of nice.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, let's see.

ZAC: Because a lot of companies will, not so much just non-union, but a lot of non-union companies they figured they -- they have got control of you and if you don't do what they say, which this could be a little bit like that also, that's why you could probably get fired or what not but in a non-union job if you had a foreman that didn't like you, and you got fired, that's it, you are done, you've got to go find yourself another job. Whereas this you are still in the union, if someone doesn't -- dislikes you or whatever and you can always get another job.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, yeah. Let's see, what is a story or a couple stories maybe about guys that you've worked with over the years that just really stuck in your mind or something you saw maybe that just blew your mind? I'm sure there is, you know, a bunch but anything in particular?

ZAC: I -- no, I really don't have no --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Really?

ZAC: No, I don't.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Wow, okay. Is there anything I haven't asked that you think is important for me to include in this?

ZAC: No.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: All right. We are done.

(Whereupon the interview concluded.)

RECORDED INTERVIEW OF CAM

Taken on the 19th day of March, 2014, in Bangor, Maine.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: All right. How long you been a welder?

CAM: 22 years.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: No shit, really?

CAM: Since 15.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Wow.

CAM: Something like that, year, 15 16, about 22 years.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: 22 years. Okay. What got you into it?

CAM: Third generation welder.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, all right. I didn't know. So you are in the union, I know that. You don't -- do you work for the same company on all jobs?

CAM: Never.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Never. You are all over the place, aren't you, okay.
How often are you on the road?

CAM: Oh, I don't know, it varies. In the last six years?

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yes.

CAM: 50, 60 percent.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay.

CAM: Since I've lived in Vegas, I've worked a lot right at the house.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, just driving back and forth?

CAM: Yeah.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, that's good. Let's see, how -- you were married; correct?

CAM: Uh-huh.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: How long were you married?

CAM: I was only married like six years, we were together like 11.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: 11.

CAM: Yeah.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Damn, okay. Let's see, what do you do in your off time while you are on the road?

CAM: In my off time while I'm on the road?

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CAM: Drink beer in motel rooms mainly.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That's good, that's good. How about when you are -- when you are home, what do you do in your off time?

CAM: Golf and fish.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: All right. Let's see, do you -- you still enjoy traveling?

CAM: Yeah.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Do you?

CAM: The longest job I've ever had is a year.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: A year straight?

CAM: Yeah, intentionally.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Wow, did you hate it?

CAM: That is about the max I can do.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah. So you like the variety in this, where you are doing different things and you have off time and or --

CAM: Yeah. Or I fuck up and make stupid decisions. The grass ain't always greener. I've done that about a half dozen times.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Have you ever been injured on the job?

CAM: Besides nicks and cuts?

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh.

CAM: Just once.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: What happened?

CAM: Some guys were running a chain horse about 80 foot above me and there was an oak block behind it and they lost it.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: And hit you?

CAM: Hit me on the top of the head.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, what did that do, made you smarter?

CAM: Well, it gave me like 28 stitches.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Holy shit.

CAM: My partner caught it off my head like a lateral football.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh.

CAM: And he was looking at me and I stood up and took my hood up and all the lights, I seen stars and shit. And then all of a sudden I could feel the blood but at first I

didn't know it was blood, you know, then he was like because, you know, you are in hot shit all the time so you constantly sweat.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, wow.

CAM: But it was so runny, it felt like sweat.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: It was blood.

CAM: Yeah.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh.

CAM: It filled my whole hat and then I tried to leave because we were getting a bonus if no one got hurt.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, my gosh.

CAM: Like five bucks -- I mean, it would have been the difference of like five or six grand so I tried to sneak out of there. And right when I come out of the hole, there is the superintendent and the foreman and safety guy.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Like the worst.

CAM: And I got a whole welding cap full of blood and I'm trying to --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, my God, oh.

CAM: But that's really the only time I ever been hurt besides like you are always getting nicks and burns.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, yeah.

CAM: Been burned a million times and still ain't into it.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Have you ever busted any weld tests, had any issues with inspectors, anything like that?

CAM: Yeah, a couple.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: A couple and then do you have to, like --

CAM: Pretty low percentage though, considering I have probably taken thousands of tests. I think I only busted two.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: And then do you have to like pay your own way home when that happens?

CAM: Yeah, actually they tried to fire us.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Really.

CAM: Fire the guys that flunked the --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Wow.

CAM: -- not the drug test but the weld test.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Ever busted any drug tests?

CAM: One.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, that sucks.

CAM: It is a cool story though.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Well, let's hear it.

CAM: You want to hear it?

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, I want to hear it.

CAM: It was when I was working for the pipefitters.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh.

CAM: I never been a huge weed smoker but here and there but that summer I was. So, anyways, I went to see my kids that were living in Northern Nevada and I got called to come back to work for the southern cat because I was working on the (inaudible) lines there. So I'm like, yeah, so it was, like, three weeks of seven tens and it

was like perfect timing and everything. So I go in there and I'm thinking oh, shit, I've not worked for this cat before, maybe I gotta test. Because, see, back in the day you never had to test, you know, it was a rarity.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CAM: So I had a bottle, I was prepared, so I thought. So me and my friend were working together and shit and welding and I don't know if you've ever packed a piss bottle but it is fucking annoying.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: I bet.

CAM: Because you gotta put it under your nuts all day.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, yeah.

CAM: Because it is a temperature game. So I'm like, fuck it, we already filled out all our paperwork. The superintendent come and gave us paperwork and then we just went to work. So I'm like I'm going to put it in the backpack, I'm sick of this shit. So we go to lunch, here is this cocksucker in the lunch tent. Well, there is only -- in the trailer. Well, there is only four of us and the guy introduced himself as the safety guy. So here blah, blah, blah, he's going to pay us an extra time and a half, we call it a nooner if we work through lunch.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh.

CAM: But you still get your lunch but you get paid.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Right.

CAM: Well, he's sitting over my backpack. Well, he goes, oh, by the way, is everybody's test current? We are like yeah, yeah. Well, there is one guy that goes I'm not, you might as well haul me to town right now. So he kept saying that and the guy is

like well, I will just look you guys up on the computer tonight and whoever needs one, I will be back around.

Well, this guy insists on him taking one because he wants to go to town, because we are like an hour from town. So he figures by the time he does that, gets back, it is time to go. So I'm looking at him like shut up, go take it tomorrow.

Well, anyways, so he goes well, you ain't gotta go to town, he goes I will just test all of you, I got

the shit in the truck. Well, he has the other guy go get the box. Well, I can't get to my backpack, so, anyways, yeah, about an hour later.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That sucks.

CAM: He come over and he sat down and he goes, hey, Clint, why don't we stay here and I'm like oh, yeah. And he asks me do you know what THC is? Yeah, I've been smoking it, why do you think I'm here and no one else is. Well, see, my buddy -- everyone there were dirty, they just all had a bottle.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh.

CAM: So, anyways, here is the funny part. He calls the superintendent. He goes, yeah, I'm over here at Grainger, I just UA'd these guys, he goes one of them didn't make it and he goes who, and he goes Diba, a guy -- and he goes you dumb motherfucker, that is my stainless welder. And he chewed this guy's ass up and down, why are you testing them?

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That's awesome.

CAM: And then he puts me on -- he goes when can I get he him back and he's, like, at least a month and then he has to pee clean again and so the guy he talked to me, he's like hey, man, I'm sorry about that, he actually apologized to me.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Wow.

CAM: He's like there ain't nothing wrong with burning one out at the lake, man. He's like an old hippy, I could tell when he was talking.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Burn one out, yeah.

CAM: And he's like, hey, I'm going to call you back as soon as I can, and that's the only time I ever flunked a drug test.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Well --

CAM: I never cheated. I popped two Breathalyzers though.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, I never thought about that, Breathalyzers.

CAM: That is becoming real popular about the last probably six, seven, eight years.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Really, they make you do a Breathalyzer?

CAM: Yeah. I got to go do one in the morning tomorrow.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Really, huh. That sucks, I've never heard of that.

CAM: I blew a .29 at 10:00 in the morning. The lady wouldn't take \$500.00.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Wow.

CAM: Cash, me and her alone, because what it was, was I was late to the safety class.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh, oh.

CAM: Uh-huh.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CAM: And my cousin saved me a seat in there and I snuck in, but he didn't sign my damn name on the sheet.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh.

CAM: And the guy kicked me out.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh.

CAM: So then the superintendent met me on the way out and he's like well, you've got to come back and do this tomorrow but he goes but you can do your drug and alcohol test today and I said alcohol, I just went to bed at 6:00 in the morning.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, man.

CAM: I was partying with the secretary.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh.

CAM: So, yeah, I didn't even make it to the drug test on that one.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, man.

CAM: And then Billy, that is the job I met him on was two years before that in that plant.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh.

CAM: And so I got run off that job because I was -- it was a good little spree at the house, it was like three jobs. And then I couldn't go back out for Billie. I called -- because Billie was going there a second time. So I called my BA and he hooked me up with this fucking Indian and you gave him 750 bucks cash and all of a sudden you were rehabilitated. Well, it worked for the other guys in my local that are -- test for meth.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh.

CAM: They got to go back in the plant two days later. Conoco Phillips said I'm not allowed in the Conoco Phillips for 365 days.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: What?

CAM: For popping a breathalyzer.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: But drugs are fine.

CAM: And in Montana if you pop like a piss test for meth, that's a felony possession.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Wow.

CAM: Of a controlled substance.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Wow, yeah, no kidding.

CAM: So, yeah, I've had my jams, had jams. That's why I stay with the union, not the company.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, yeah. Because the union will take care of you.

CAM: Well, you know, you can go to a different company.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, that is true.

CAM: I've never been partial to companies.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: So what is your favorite story, what is your best story about guys you've worked with or something that you saw on the job or somebody you worked with that just -- I know you've got them.

CAM: My favorite story?

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah. Or something that --

CAM: Of someone else?

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, either one.

CAM: I don't know, there is too many good ones.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. Pick one.

CAM: The funniest story is probably the pee story.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, that is pretty good.

CAM: Have you heard the pee story?

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, this is a different pee story?

CAM: Where I peed on Motto?

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, I've not heard the pee story.

CAM: Well, that is a long story.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: All right. Well --

CAM: Went on for about a week. We are in Chicago, and that was a fun job.

See, that's why I like working with Motto because we always had fun jobs. We have a lot of fun, like this out here is what -- this shit we are doing, you can't have any fun.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, yeah, how come?

CAM: Well, for one -- well, you didn't go in there when it is -- but it is 145 decibels in there.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh.

CAM: And you can't even talk.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That sucks.

CAM: Yeah. And it is smoky. Regular boiler jobs aren't like the overlay shit. So, anyways, we are in Chicago and I'm working for my buddy Lloyd. Billie was actually on that job.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay.

CAM: I don't think you guys were dating then, probably not, that was like '08.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, actually I think I was in Chicago then too.

CAM: On that job?

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: I was there visiting my sister, she lived there then.

CAM: Oh, but I don't think you guys were dating.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay.

CAM: Because it was like a year and a half before I --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, yeah, then no, no.

CAM: Anyways, I got to drinking a little too much and working like seven
fourteens and my buddy was like stay another hour or two for me blah, blah, blah. So
finally I'm getting worn down but I start sleep walking. And so -- but I'm not leaving the
room every time. So my travel partner, he's a real neat little fucker. He's like you,
everything is -- like when he moves in the room, like me and Bill throw our suitcases in
the corner.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CAM: He puts all of his shit in there and the closet.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CAM: It is his home away from home.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CAM: So first night we are there the window is open because it is humid there.
Well, the floor is all wet. Well, he don't think nothing of it because he left the window
open. Well, the next night, he gets in the sock drawer and his socks are all wet. So he's
like Cam, he always says it like that too, Cam. He's like did you piss in my dresser

drawer? And I'm like fuck no, why would I do that? Anyways he's like well, fuck, give me a pair of socks, you got some clean socks. So I loaned him a pair of socks. Well, this was an extended stay so it had a kitchen.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh.

CAM: Well, the next night I wake up -- well, he wakes up to me beating on the door, I'm out in the hallway with nothing but my drawers on. Come to find out later I had been going to the -- there was a garbage room mid hallway. I had been going down there and pissing in the garbage. And so he gets up and Moto has got a fucking temper too, and he's like this when he opens the door, you know, he's got a swing on him. And with me, I'm in my boxers. And he's like what are you doing, I'm like I don't want to talk about it. See, a lot of this I don't remember, it is just I've heard them tell the stories so many times I know it.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CAM: So, anyways, the next day he gets up to make us lunch, because he's always the morning guy and I'm the night guy, like I do all the cooking and shit and then he gets everything ready in the morning. Drives in the morning, and I drive home. Me and Billy do too that too but it's a little more organized with Billy. But, anyways, so I guess we had a bunch of food in the crisper. Well, the crisper is all wet, you know, he's like you pissed in the fridge, you motherfucker, and I'm like no way I would do that. But I'm blacking out, I don't know none of this is going on.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CAM: But, you know, so you got to deny.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, oh, yeah.

CAM: And he's like bullshit, come and look at this and I'm like well, it ain't even yellow and he's like well, you drink a case of beer and I was like well, it don't smell like pee, it would smell like pee, and he's like beer pee don't stink. So the next night, I remember this night though, because when I -- after I pissed in the garbage room, I must have took a left instead of a right and we are the very last room and I'm beating on this fucking door and no one will open. Finally this dude opens it up and goes who in the fuck are you and there I am again in my boxers, and I like tell him, I'm like who in the fuck are you, I tried to go in the room and I'm like where is Moto. And this guy is like I'm going to call the cops and all this shit. So me in the fucking hallway and I'm realizing fuck, this was like 392 instead of 302, so I cruise back down and I'm beating on the door and he just opens the door that time and he's like goddammit and fucking jumps back in bed.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: So you remember that one?

CAM: Yeah, I remember that -- that was the night I do remember.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That's hilarious.

CAM: Anyway, so here is the next night. I wake up in the middle of the night or no, there was -- I missed one night. One night before that I guess I fucking crawled in bed with him and we were like spooning and I remember that one too. Those are the two ones I remember. Because he goes Cam, what, like this, and I had any leg threw over him and everything and he goes what are you doing and I go what do you mean, and he goes you are in my fucking bed, and I go oh, and I guess I got up and went and jumped in my bed. So, anyways, the last night, I guess I woke up and fucking here I am pissing all

over him and he's asleep, and I remember that too because he mule kicked me. So he kicks me, he's like what the fuck, you are pissing all over me, and I'm like I go oh, my bad. And he goes go to the fucking bathroom. So I guess midway there was a garbage can somewhere laying over there so I start pissing in that and he goes hey, and I go, get off my ass, I'm pissing straight, and he's like go to the bathroom, that's the garbage, man. So anyways then after that, he made me quit drinking for like five fucking days, he is like you can't drink no more, not even one beer. That is the pee story, it was pretty funny.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That is a good story.

CAM: He's a pretty good cat though to let me do all that.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, yeah, that is a good guy, I don't know anybody who would, okay. What do you like least about the job?

CAM: Least?

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CAM: Oh, you can't ask specifics like that, man.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay.

CAM: You got to have a list (inaudible).

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: I know, okay.

CAM: I know. No, what do I like least?

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, what do you bitch about the most of everything?

CAM: Conditions. Mainly like assholes.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh.

CAM: Bosses.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Bosses, authority.

CAM: That aren't good bosses. No, douchebags, like, I don't know, I'm not saying guys -- I'm not saying like I want to, like, fuck off or nothing but there is like -- like this guy running this job has got a real bad reputation for being a huge prick. Well, like, he won't go buy us any more safety glasses.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, yeah.

CAM: You know, and the company they will fucking -- this company is loaded rich.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CAM: They -- all these tools they have.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh.

CAM: Every job they go they get paid for them.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Wow.

CAM: They will actually throw them away.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Wow.

CAM: But you get a guy like this, he -- see, because these superintendents get bonuses. I guess -- I guess I hate overlay the worst, overlay jobs.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, just the work.

CAM: No. Well, no, it ain't the work. It is the miglets.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, what about the miglets? Miglets are Mig welders; right?

CAM: Yeah. Well, not necessarily, they are not real boilermakers.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: What are they?

CAM: They just go buy a book and, like you said, they are a Mig welder, an operator. A lot of them can't even Mig weld, they can run that machine.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: So they just buy the book, they don't go through any apprenticeship?

CAM: Yeah. They don't have no union ethics. To me it is a brotherhood, you know.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CAM: I mean I was raised in it.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, okay.

CAM: They will purposely like tattle on someone for something or jam someone just to get ahead, you know what I mean?

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: I see.

CAM: They are shitty people.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, I see. Okay. So it is not just that they are Mig welders?

CAM: No, it is not that. They don't have -- I don't respect people without a skill set. See, I don't think they should be able to have a book.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, just buy it.

CAM: They should have to earn it like I did.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, I agree. Yeah, that makes sense.

CAM: I mean the union -- see, that is the fucked up thing about a union though. A union has got a -- a union is supposed to make everybody equal.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh.

CAM: But everybody ain't equal. People got different skill sets, people, you know what I mean?

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, yeah.

CAM: Different work ethics.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CAM: So --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: I got it.

CAM: Our union is a lot like this country is a union so look how fucked up our country is. So it is kind of like a sovereign nation.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That is true, that is true.

CAM: Just like our union, you know, it is a good thing but there is a lot of bad apples in it, you know. It is like the international president is under indictment right now for smuggling money out of all of our funds. So, you know, that is one of the main things about unions, you know, it is all the benefits, your pension, your annuity.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CAM: You got these assholes trying to steal it.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That sucks.

CAM: Happened to the fitters in '06.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: So the international, like, the union president you mean?

CAM: Yeah, like the president of the union.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, I got it.

CAM: And the two main dudes under him, the international secretary and the international vice president.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Huh, did they not know that, wow.

CAM: And it happened to the fitters in '06. Like, my one uncle -- most of my family is boilermakers but some of them are fitters.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CAM: Well, my one uncle that just died, my dad's oldest brother, like, when he retired he was making 14 grand a month.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Wow.

CAM: My uncle that is a fitter was making, after he paid his insurance, was about 2,500 a month.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Wow.

CAM: So --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. So what do you like most?

CAM: Oh, I would say the freedom of it, I guess, is addicting.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CAM: I've gotten used to it over the years.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay.

CAM: Coming and going when you want, when you please.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CAM: It has gotten -- they have crimped it down real hard.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: They have?

CAM: Oh, yeah. Now we have what they call international bench. See these -- these overlay contracts don't have it in there but now if you work a hall job and you drag up or quit or get fired, they can actually bench you nationwide so when I was an apprentice, I ran with a prima donna welder.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh.

CAM: I drug up 17 jobs in one year.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CAM: And usually it is unheard of for an apprentice to drag up. People think that is a bad thing but they force you into it. Because maybe you stay -- all those jobs it was all for money.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh.

CAM: It was to hit a better job.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CAM: Because like you stayed here three more days you might be laid off three weeks and miss out on it so --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CAM: You just go and --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CAM: But now they have ruined that, one of my bitches.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Is there anything I haven't asked you that you think is important for me to know?

CAM: You need to get better interviews probably. Well, I don't know, your book really ain't about boilermakers, it is about traveling welders, right, so --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, maybe. If it is a book, it might be about more.
My thesis is kind of just about traveling welders but --

CAM: See, what is a thesis?

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: What is a thesis?

CAM: Yeah. You are dealing with someone that has got like a soft porn high school education.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah. It is just a really long paper about a topic that you do a lot of research on and then you kind of get to where -- and then you have a committee and they -- you have to defend your thesis to them. They fire all those questions off at you, I guess, and then you have to prove that you have learned enough about the topic to have mastered it so this is the topic.

CAM: Did you ask me a question what is the best thing about it?

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

CAM: The money.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. Yeah, that is pretty good.

CAM: Yeah. No money, it would all be over.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That's true, okay.

CAM: It is fast money though.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That is good.

CAM: That is the thing about the overlay.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, fast money. Can't really find that. We are done.

(Whereupon the interview concluded.)

RECORDED INTERVIEW OF PEE WEE

Taken on the 18th day of March, 2014, in Bangor, Maine

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. How long have you been a welder?

PEE WEE: Nine years.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Nine years, okay. Did you, like, go to school for it or -

PEE WEE: No, your last interviewee --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh.

PEE WEE: -- got me a job in a weld shop.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, cool, and that's --

PEE WEE: It was a temporary deal.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh.

PEE WEE: I was out of work and I didn't want to be out of work.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

PEE WEE: And he's like I can get a job.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Cool. So you knew him before like --

PEE WEE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Did you guys go to school together or you just knew him like -

PEE WEE: I met him in a bar.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Cool, nice. Nice contact.

PEE WEE: Well --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, that worked out.

PEE WEE: We like to do the same things, drink beer, shoot pool.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

PEE WEE: He was all right.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Good. So nine years is that you've been a welder and so he just kind of said hey, I will get you a job, it is not like you decided hey, I want to be a welder, it is more like --

PEE WEE: No. Well I don't know anybody that -- I take that back. There is very few people that I've met along the way that have decided that that was what they wanted to do with their lives.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That is like a lot of, you know, you just fall into stuff.

PEE WEE: Yeah, you just end up being a welder.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Exactly, yeah. Do you always work for the same company, do you move around a lot or --

PEE WEE: Well, I worked for the same company for that nine years in their shop, just the last six months I've been out on the road.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, okay, all right. So you are still fairly new?

PEE WEE: Yeah, really.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. So do you still enjoy it? I mean, like the traveling, does that still seem like new to you or --

PEE WEE: It sucks.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: It does?

PEE WEE: I got a little girl at home.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, how old is she?

PEE WEE: She's going to be eight.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, such a great age.

PEE WEE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: So you have one child?

PEE WEE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, man, that is tough, that is tough.

PEE WEE: But I actually get to spend more time with her now.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah. I mean, I had two months off.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh. Yeah, there is a lot to be said for that.

PEE WEE: I mean, when I'm gone, I'm gone.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

PEE WEE: But when I'm there I get to see her whenever -- well, not whenever I want but a lot more than I would otherwise. Working in the shop was -- it is the same. I mean they tell you you got to work. It would be Friday afternoon at 4:00, you think you are going home and they are like no, you got to work all weekend.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, that sucks, okay. So are you married?

PEE WEE: No.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. Have you ever been married?

PEE WEE: No.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Really? All right, good for you. Hey, you are pretty smart. How often are you on the road per year, like, how much would you -- well, I guess you just said you'd been doing this six months.

PEE WEE: It is hard to say, yeah, but during the busy time which is the fall.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh.

PEE WEE: I will be out and then off in the winter for a couple months and then busy in the spring and then slow in the summer again

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. Let's see, what do you do -- well, I mean, I guess, you know, we are here now but like in your off time on the road is this kind of what you do?

PEE WEE: There is no off time on the road.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, that is true.

PEE WEE: You work and you sleep and that is really about it.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That is true, yeah, I guess you are right. How about when you are home, what do you like to do in your off time when you are home?

PEE WEE: Well, I work on my house.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh.

PEE WEE: If it needs it. I like to shoot. That's about it. I mean, that takes up a lot of time. If I'm not spending time with my kid, not working on my house because I'm gone, whatever, then I'm probably out shooting something.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Cool. Do you own a home or do you rent?

PEE WEE: Yeah, I got a house.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Nice. How does your -- like this job, like, traveling, welding and stuff, are you in a union now?

PEE WEE: Yeah.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: How does that compare money wise to like working in a shop, is it crazy difference or --

PEE WEE: Yeah, I mean -- well, I was making \$23.00 an hour at the shop.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That is pretty good though.

PEE WEE: Which is decent.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, yeah.

PEE WEE: It is not bad but I maxed out, there was no potential to go any further, and it was just basically doing the same thing that I had started doing nine years ago.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

PEE WEE: So if I'm going to do the same crap for the rest of my life, I might as well get paid a lot more money to do it.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Absolutely.

PEE WEE: And that's basically the benefits of being a boilermaker are that much better.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, no kidding, okay. Let's see, have you ever been injured on the job?

PEE WEE: Nothing major.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Okay. Just little like burns and stuff?

PEE WEE: Yeah, that is -- it happens. I mean, I split my head open once, got four stitches but --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: How did that happen?

PEE WEE: A hydraulic line blew -- no, actually that wasn't a hydraulic line, that was an air hose that went. The hydraulic line didn't hurt.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: So there was two different, the hydraulic line --

PEE WEE: Yeah. But that didn't get me, the hydraulic line missed.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, good, that's good. Would you --

PEE WEE: The air line didn't, it blew off and started flopping around and it came up and caught me in the head.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, my gosh, that's so scary, and did you -- I mean, like no helmet or you did have --

PEE WEE: No, I wasn't wearing any helmet.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Wow, man, that is crazy, okay. That is just so scary, I mean, to just think that --

PEE WEE: Well, it is a dangerous job.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

PEE WEE: Everything you do out there is potentially hazardous.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, I know and I mean I know that but you still hear these stories and you just think, you know, of different things that can go wrong and -- okay. So what have you -- what have you missed by being gone? I mean, obviously, you have a daughter who is young and --

PEE WEE: Yeah, I miss seeing her, that's it. Well, I miss my friends, obviously.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Sure.

PEE WEE: They stopped calling me.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh.

PEE WEE: Because I'm never around.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That sucks.

PEE WEE: We don't -- so they just stopped.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

PEE WEE: Because if I would make plans, I would usually have to break them for work and I would just -- I just don't make plans.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, yeah, I understand that, believe me. So, okay, what do you like most about the job, about traveling?

PEE WEE: Honestly, I'm here for the money.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

PEE WEE: That's really the only reason I'm here.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: I don't blame you.

PEE WEE: I'm going to retire one day.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

PEE WEE: And I'm going to have -- I mean, that is my goal. I'm going to pay for my kid, make sure she's taken care of, and I'm going to be able to not work someday --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Good.

PEE WEE: -- by doing this. Whereas if I worked in the shop for the rest of my life, I would still

have to work for the rest of my life.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, no kidding. Okay. What do you like least about it?

PEE WEE: Well, it is hard work, I mean, they pay us a lot money but there is a reason they pay us a lot of money, physically it is taxing.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh.

PEE WEE: I'm not a young man anymore and I just don't like the pain every day.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Sure, yeah, it wears you down.

PEE WEE: Yeah. You do what you've got to do.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That's true.

PEE WEE: But I would prefer to do something less strenuous.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, yeah, absolutely.

PEE WEE: Not breathing in fumes and --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh, I know.

PEE WEE: It is just not a very healthy profession.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, you nailed it. Do you have any stories about anybody you've worked with, anything crazy that you've seen or that blew your mind maybe about some of the guys?

PEE WEE: Well --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: I mean, I'm sure you --

PEE WEE: There is lots --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

PEE WEE: -- of stories of -- a lot of the guys out here are crazy.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh.

PEE WEE: I mean really wild, and I can't say that I wasn't a wild kid but some of these kids never grow up --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

PEE WEE: -- out on the road. You have -- and I'm not going to use any names but you have people that are superintendents that are getting blow jobs and wrecking vehicles while they are doing it.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Wow, yeah, that is pretty crazy, yeah.

PEE WEE: You know, a group of, I don't even know how many, rent a limo, go out, and they

come back and apparently have picked up a hooker somewhere along the way, and the hooker steals one of the rental cars and wrecks it.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, man.

PEE WEE: So -- and this was just in the last couple months, this is --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

PEE WEE: And this is not even like the old days where, like, the old time boilermakers would be out and they say what happens on the road stays on the road and that's pretty much the code they all lived by so --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

PEE WEE: And I'm not saying all of them are like this.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Oh, yeah, yeah.

PEE WEE: But, I mean, it is --

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: I bet, yeah, I bet is it an eye opener.

PEE WEE: I'm not saying I'm a saint but I'm pretty close now compared to the rest of these guys. I am, I am definitely. I've gotten a lot better, I was not good when I was younger.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh.

PEE WEE: And then once my daughter was born, I gave up drinking, I gave up pretty much everything. I mean, I think this beer -- in this week I've probably had maybe six beers total which is more beers than I've had in a long, long time.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah, all right. Let's see, is there anything I haven't asked you that you think that I should know or you think that it would be good to include?

PEE WEE: No. I mean there is nothing special about me personally, I don't think, about doing this.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Uh-huh.

PEE WEE: It is just something I fell into. It was supposed to be a temporary job. I figured I would do it for a couple weeks while I found another one.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: Yeah.

PEE WEE: And here I am nine years later, I'm welding and I'm a boilermaker so this is what I do.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: I --

PEE WEE: I never considered myself a welder, even up until just recently, but now I'm pretty sure I'm locked in.

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: All right, okay. We are done.

PEE WEE: That's it?

JENNIFER SHEPHERD: That's it.

(Whereupon the interview concluded.)

