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S.D. Warren Company

Stories of Maine's Paper Plantation

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## Interview with Barry Kenney

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**Barry Kenney**  
**8/15/00**  
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MH: Tell me that again, what you were just saying.

BK: Well, prior to 1988 or just before 1988, the various mechanical crafts, with the exception of the inside machinists, were all grouped together as millwrights. And there was a bunch of training they had to go through, and I can't speak to that as well as maybe Howard can, but the riggers, the welders, the masons, the carpenters and the oilers were all . . . became millwrights. And they had to go through various training to become that. And you had a choice if you were a welder to become a pipefitter where you welded on pressure vessels versus structural welding. And it was quite a mess, so everybody then split into various locals. And they signed an agreement with . . . keeping the same percentage of new hires as belonged to them, to begin with, so no one local would be, over time, be stripped of all their members. So that's how I . . . I went to the fireman [?] while I was . . . They had a choice. Until one slot was filled up and nobody else could join, say. When I got hired, there were sixteen of us. Too many people decided to join the machinists, which they did, the I.M. They had to stop the line somewhere. We spent a few thousand dollars in court, going down to the N.L.R.B. to straighten that out, but that's another story.

MH: That all started it then. So, just to finish up about Howie Parkers, why don't you [??] give him a call and pass his number along to me.

BK: Yes, I'll give you his number. And he's a character, too. So. He's got a lot of . . . But, like I said, he came in as a coal man. I can't remember what they called them. They used to break up the frozen coal in the boxcars. That's all they did, all winter long.

MH: So he worked his way up into being a skilled worker [??]?

BK: Worked his way up into being, yes, into a skilled worker. And I'm not sure how they did that, at the time. In most of the mills and some still today, that came in as an out and they called it the outside crew, and worked on, you know, as a laborer, and then moved up to being equipment operator and you kept putting a transfer in to get into the mechanical side.

MH: And then you'd go through an apprenticeship.

BK: And then you'd go through an apprenticeship.

MH: Yes. I wanted to just spend a little bit of time doing some background stuff about your family background, how you grew up, how you got your job—all that kind of stuff. So, what did each of your parents do for a living?

BK: Both my parents were teachers. My mother was an elementary school teacher, my father was a junior high school teacher back then. I guess it would be middle school now. And that's what brought us . . . I was born in Presque Isle and my father taught in Ashland for a couple of years, and then decided to come down south. And he actually was hired to come to Portland where . . . That's why we moved here.

MH: And were either of your parents involved in teachers' unions then?

BK: Yes. And my mother still is. My father's retired from teaching but, yes, my mother is still a—they don't call them stewards in the . . . I forget what they call them. Some kind of representative for the—I think it's the N.E.A. I'm not sure what branch they belong to, in the City of Portland.

MH: So she's very active.

BK: Yes.

MH: Was that something that was shared in your household? Was there any kind of talk about the importance of unions or their own individual experiences?

BK: Um, not generally. I think, since I went to school, that not much was said. You know, because I was in the same school system, everything was kind of . . .

MH: [???

BK: Yes.

MH: Not that they would share with you. O.K.

Did either of them ever experience unemployment?

BK: No. Not at any time I can remember. They always . . . My mother had to switch schools a couple times because of whatever—numbers or just the demographics. But never unemployed.

MH: You never had that issue.

BK: No.

MH: What were your parents' expectations of you when you grew up? Did they have clear expectations?

BK: Oh. Sure. I mean, they wanted me to go to college. They wanted me to get good grades. They were fairly strict. I don't know if I . . . I thought they were *very* strict, at the time, but fairly strict. You know, and expected me, at least, to put an effort forth, which didn't always work [LAUGHS]. We didn't get along so well along those lines, but it was very clear what was expected.

MH: Were there certain things that you were brought up to consider important in life?

BK: Probably, but at the time, I probably went just the opposite. You know, went to church. Religion was fairly important. My grandparents, all of them, and . . .

MH: What denomination?

BK: We were Protestant, United Methodist, I grew up as. I don't know. It's hard to say. But, being teachers, they both were very . . . I don't know. They expected me to behave well. And they didn't put up with any . . . I didn't get to put up with much nonsense. You know, there's no back talk, no . . . You just didn't do it. It wasn't as open as I think some parents are, at least, today. More reserved, I think, from up north and, I don't know, very . . . not an open . . . , not a lot of discussion.

MH: And this was the '70s. There was a lot of rebellion amongst kids.  
And was it Portland that you moved to?

BK: Yes. Right to Portland proper.

MH: Were your parents interested in politics?

BK: I can't say as I remember them being interested in politics. I don't know . . . I know a good friend of my father's was a state representative for years and years. And I don't know if they were really interested in politics or not. I can't . . . I would have to say: my mother, definitely not. My father may have been. He watched the news religiously. You know, had to watch the local news and was interested in city politics, I think, more than . . . I remember it, anyways.

MH: Was there a particular party he voted for?

BK: Oh, he's a Democrat. Definitely a Democrat. I think both of them still probably are, to this day. Maybe not, because of Bill Clinton, but . . . [LAUGHS]

MH: Going back to church, did your parents participate actively in the church?

BK: Yes. Yes. Protestant little more formal in church, but little less informal afterwards or for . . . Like being—I can't remember what they called them—some social gatherings, like once a month with, you know, group probably there, same age, probably at that time, their twenties and thirties. We were friends with a lot of people. A lot of people they knew, I think before—I don't know how they all went to the same . . . but were members of the same church.

MH: So you met people through the church.

BK: Um hm.

MH: Were there any kind of community institutions you and your family participated in, you know, sports, school activities . . .

BK: Oh, yes. All the . . . YMCA stuff. We'd always go to the Y. Took swimming lessons at the Y. Played basketball at the Y. Boys Club, basketball and swimming lessons there, actually, also. And all the Little League, the Cub Scouts, Boy Scouts—that whole nine yards.

MH: And did your parents sort of sign you up for all of that, pretty much? Or . . .

BK: No, I think it was pretty much left up to us. Because I left like the Boy Scouts early, when I wanted. I had to finish my year out. And I didn't leave in the middle. There was no leaving in the middle. But, pretty much, it was up to us what we wanted to do. I did more than my sister and brother did, but, as far as the sports and stuff like that. And then, they expected you . . . expected me and my brother probably to work. Always had to have a job. Which was good.

MH: When you were teenagers?

BK: Oh, yes. In my teenage years. Had a paper route before, when I was very young, back when they delivered them by hand. When there was still an evening paper, too. I had an evening route, and the Sunday morning. And my brother did, also.

MH: You start that pretty young?

BK: Yes. I must have been eleven, ten, eleven?

MH: And, after you did that, what did you do [???]?

BK: I worked at Shaw's which was the typical grocery store. Started out bagging and then moved out to stock shelves and stuff during the day, which was a better . . . I thought it was a better job, you know than out front all the time. So. And I worked at Seltzer & Rydholm in Portland, loading trucks.

MH: Hm. While you were still a teenager.

BK: While I was still a teenager.

MH: You were just picking up heavy boxes?

BK: Yes. Throwing them on the truck. Until I got to be a senior in high school, and then I could drive a fork truck by that time, and loading pallets full.

MH: So you had quite a bit of work experience [???].

BK: Yes, I worked quite a bit.

MH: Right through high school. And so, I know that you went in the military. Did you do that right out of high school?

BK: No, I went to Orono for a semester and decided that wasn't what I wanted to do. And didn't know what I wanted to do. So I came home. I worked in the lumberyard in Portland as a lumber grader and general laborer, I guess.

MH: Do you remember how you got that job?

BK: I knew the general manager of the yard, and kind of just dubbed around. And then I . . . I don't know what made me think of joining the military, but I did that, shortly after that—four or five months after that.

MH: So you would have been about nineteen or so when you did that?

BK: Uh, I still . . . I graduated when I was seventeen, so I was still eighteen, actually, at the time.

MH: Well, tell me about being in the military.

BK: I signed up for six years. If I completed my training that I was eligible for, then I'd have to do those six years, and it was prorated backwards, if you dropped out, in between. And I went to nuclear power school and prototype training and that left me between boot camp and various other schools with about four and a half years to spend out in what they call the fleet, on a ship. And I spent that time on a carrier, *The Eisenhower*. And I did mechanical work, maintenance work and typical log-taking, equipment-operating work, also. I went with watch-standing for . . . in a nuclear plant on board the carrier for four and a half years after my school.

MH: Did you have any memorable incidents while you were on the carrier?

BK: Work incidents?

MH: Yes.



BK: Oh, yes. We had a couple of reactor scrams and go dead in the water with planes in the air at night. When I was on watch, that was a major emergency because there was nowhere for them to land and there were no lights and there was no power to . . . So there were some scrambling times, but never any real, real incidents. I think we went . . . There were some . . . We were in the Balearic Islands off the coast of Spain, in Palma, Mallorca, and we had an emergency recall while we were on liberty, actually, and we had one reactor down for repairs and we had to steam over to Beirut. And I can't remember the incident now, but . . . and throw together one while we were on our way over there with about two-thirds of the crew because they left the rest behind. Anybody who wasn't close enough just got left behind. So. There were some . . .

MH: And that was for a kind of quasi-wartime situation.

BK: Yes. I can't remember . . . My time frame's all messed up. I can't remember if that was after the barracks were bombed in Beirut or another incident at the time. I'm not sure.

MH: It would have been sort of the tail end of your time [???

BK: Fairly . . . No, it would have been fairly early '80s, maybe. '83? I want to say?

MH: Yes. Yes, my brother was in the Navy and got sent over there at the same time.

BK: I would say, somewhere around then. I didn't get out 'til '87, so it was . . . fairly early.

MH: Yes. I see.

So when you got out, did you get the job at the paper mill first thing, or did you do any other jobs?

BK: I just . . . I didn't . . . I was trying to unwind. I didn't really do anything. I helped my brother build a house and hung out down the street at Forest Gardens and didn't do

anything. And, one day, I decided to go to Maine Job Service and look for something, not knowing what I wanted to do, still. And got . . . you know, applied for the job at S.D. Warren.

MH: So that's how you got the job. You went to the Maine Job Service. They sent you . .

BK: Yes. That's the only way they hired. No, that's . . . They hired through the Maine Job Service. They had a . . . I don't know how much . . . They had to pay so much—whatever, a fee and that's . . . They did all the testing for them. I had to go through a whole battery of tests—manual dexterity and reading, writing and aptitude, and so on and so forth.

MH: So you went in. When you first got your job, did people say that that was a new practice, or was that something [???]?

BK: That was brand new. We were the first group that was hired under that type of situation.

MH: And this would have been around 1987, then?

BK: Yes. Or the beginning of '88, I think, at that time.

MH: Beginning of '88. That's interesting, because people who were hired before then, it seemed to be generally the family connections [???].

BK: Yes. Oh yes. And had worked their way up. Very rarely did you find anybody before us that came in hired as that, unless they had some connections high up.

MH: That was fairly well known?

BK: Yes. Oh, yes. Yes.

MH: So, when you first got your job, and you were hired in what? You were hired into an apprenticeship program?

BK: Hired into an apprenticeship program, yes, as a . . . They took your experience and whatever and slaughtered you within the program, that they had just registered for the State and had gone through all the paperwork, so it was an official apprenticeship program. And . . .

MH: So how long were you in apprenticeship, then?

BK: Three and a half years. About 7,000 hours is what is put . . .

MH: And it was specifically to be a millwright.

BK: Right.

MH: What kinds of training did you get?

BK: A lot of welding. You could get kind of what you wanted out of it. If you signed up to get . . . be more advanced, get more advanced training, you could do that. But, at the same time we did it, they were also training everybody like I talked about earlier who had been lumped in as a millwright, who may have been a mason before, or whatever. They were still trying to train all them in the various other things that they hadn't been doing, prior to that. So it kind of took awhile. But I learned to rig a lift, build stageings and kind of the general, the general big picture stuff.

MH: So what were you being . . . With those skills, what were you being trained to do? Repair the paper machines?

BK: Repair paper machines and any number of other different, besides from what most people would consider paper machines—finishing machines. Mostly that's it, though. It was basically that and of the . . .

MH: Machine repair.

BK: Yes. Machine repair and some . . . not any . . . no, not really any troubleshooting. You had to come up with that on your own, basically. How to balance equipment . . . and that's pretty much it. It was very basic.

MH: So, a lot of the skill that you eventually developed, you developed out there on the job?

BK: Most of it on the job. Or I had developed it when I was in the Navy, or they had . . . I had been to school when I was in there. We just read out of a book and . . . or a tech Manual, and figured it out on your own.

MH: Figured it out.

O.K. We'll come back around to what you did in your job in a minute.

When you first came, was there any discussion from fellow workers about how things worked in the mill, in relationship to management or pace of work or anything like that?

BK: I guess it depended on who you worked with. Sometimes yes. I mean, there were always . . . and you knew who they were . . . people that just wanted to take it slow and easy, "Don't work too fast; they'll expect it all the time." Then other people would just, you know, go right at it and thrash and tear and . . . So it was kind of a mix. There wasn't a pervasive attitude, I wouldn't say, one way or the other. It all depended on the individuals that you were working with.

MH: Did you notice any difference between people who were right in your occupation, a millwright, versus, say, production workers or versus other skilled maintenance workers?

BK: No, I think . . . It was about the same way. Like, some machine tenders, you knew, just wouldn't do anything. And they didn't care if the thing blew up. And then, other

ones, you knew would be after you all the time to fix the littlest problem or to come do this so they could run faster. And there was a . . . I think there was a mix of people.

MH: Was that partly because of the bonus? Because I think they had the bonus [???].

BK: Yes, they had the bonus back then. Yes, partly because of that. And some people just . . . Some of the older guys were just very push, push, push, push, you know? I don't even know if they knew why they did it [LAUGHS]. I knew a sludge press operator who just . . . There was no bonus associated with the job, but he just wanted to do, you know, three presses an hour. And if his pump couldn't keep up or something, he'd call you down and you'd have to go down and work.

MH: Was his job as a press operator?

BK: A sludge press. He'd just take the waste water and squeeze all the water out of it and what was left, the sludge, we had these big hydraulic presses and he operated them. And if he couldn't get three an hour out of each machine, there was something wrong. And he was about seventy, at that time. He didn't retire until he was seventy-five. So it just depended . . . Some of the guys were just . . . And the bonus jobs were, though. Those guys never wanted to stop.

MH: And were they kind of anxious or impatient with support people?

BK: Oh, certainly.

MH: Do you remember any experiences like that?

BK: No, I was . . . Most of the guys who management sent to work on those jobs, they sent because they knew they'd go right there and fix them. And if there was a problem, like, they weren't impatient. If there was something wrong and you couldn't figure it out, they weren't as impatient as if you just didn't get there for half hour, forty-five minutes or whatever, because you were, you know, dubbing around.

MH: So people on maintenance were slower than others to get . . . ?

BK: Oh, yes.

MH: And so, the supervisors were mindful of that?

BK: They'd assign . . . Oh, sure. Yes. They'd have what they called babysitters that would take care of all the little problems that came up. They'd be assigned to, say, the trimmer presses where they actually trimmed the reams of paper to size. And that guy would stay out there all day. That's all he'd do is tweak and play and just get everything to run just right.

MH: It could be a slow performer, or somebody not as . . . ?

BK: He'd be . . . He wouldn't leave. He'd be around. He'd be somebody who was dependable to be there, and who would be conscientious enough to at least fix it in a timely manner instead of, "Oh, I'll be back in a half hour" or "I'm going to lunch," or whatever. And there were plenty of those around.

MH: So I guess I'm trying to get a picture in my mind. There were some people who were considered the most responsible, and they would be sent for the big jobs. And there were some people who were allocated to be associated with a particular set of machines.

BK: Right. They used to call them babysitters. That's basically what they'd do. Just like in . . . you know, take care of the little needs and . . .

MH: So, if there wasn't any problem going on, did they have significant time when they could sit around and kill time?

BK: Yes. Oh, sure.

MH: Do you have any sense of how people killed time?

BK: They'd read the newspaper, go yack with people. Most of them. Then there were some that were hyper, that would, you know . . .

MH: Just looking for something to do?

BK: Yes. Look for something to do. And . . .

MH: And were there some people who . . . Is there another category of folks who were even less dependable [???]?

BK: Oh, sure. They wouldn't even give work to some of them. Unless it was . . . there was just nobody there and they needed somebody to go lift something, or, you know, to help lift or do something. Oh, sure. There were plenty of them.

MH: And what did those guys do?

BK: Sit. [???]

MH: Was there a central place [???]?

BK: No, no real central. It was really broken up into . . . Say, the paper machines had one maintenance area and the finishing department had another maintenance area. There were actually a couple in the paper machines. And then the coaters had another release, they used to call it—had another area. It was very decentralized, very satellite-oriented.

MH: I know the mill is spread out over 13 acres, all these kind of jerry-rigged buildings everywhere.

BK: Yes. Little tunnels and passageways to and from.

MH: So I imagine there were places to hide.

BK: Oh, yes. But most people knew where they were. It wasn't just, did you want to take the time to go find them? To bother, or was it worth the bother?

MH: I would imagine, though, over the time you were there, that people got cut down, right? Where they did the layoffs that . . . ?

BK: Yes, but not due to performance, but strictly on seniority. So there was . . . Most of the . . . As a generalization, probably most of the ones who did that were older employees or had . . . longer-term employees, put it that way. So they were still there. And they still hid.

MH: So that continued.

When you first came into the mill, or since then, did you learn . . . Did some of the older old-timers tell you about how things used to be? Were there memories that people had?

BK: Oh, yes.

MH: What did you learn from . . . ?

BK: Well, it was a much . . . I thought it was fragmented. Most people did. But I guess it was even *more* so, back in the older days. And they'd walk around saying, "Well, that was where number 1, 2, 3 and 4 paper machines were"—where there was nothing anymore, you know. "And this is where this, that and the other thing was." **And a lot of them talked about how hard they used to have to work—like just manual labor. There weren't fork trucks back then, so they'd be pushing rolls or they'd be pushing carts of paper, instead . . .**

MH: These are both production and maintenance?



BK: Both production and maintenance. Because a lot of the maintenance guys, the older ones started out in production and worked their way up. And then they'd talk about there used to be 200 masons working here, for the mill. And that's all they did was go around and build brick buildings. That's all they did. You know, and they'd talk about that.

MH: [???]. Was there any recollection of the era before Scott owned the mill?

BK: Oh, yes.

MH: What did people have to say about that?

BK: That would be prior to the union being there.

MH: Also. Yes. Right.

**BK: And how they used to get their raises. And that everybody's wages were secret. You know, top secret—or, at least, a lot of people's were. And you curried favors with your foreman to get a raise and very . . .**

**MH: Cut individual bargains?**

**BK: Yes, oh yes. Cut deals. There's a lot of memories of that.**

**MH: And when they conveyed these memories, was it critical or was it . . . ?**

**BK: Yes, pretty much critical. Or, actually, laughable sometime, you know.**

**MH: Because what? Certain people might not get jobs?**

**BK: Right. Would do.**

**MH: Not get raises under other conditions?**

**BK:** Yes. And, you know, what people . . . what lengths they'd go to to either make themselves look good or make other people look bad. You know, no real long-term . . . Most of the guys were gone, by that time. So, you don't hear too many. But some of the older ones . . . Like Howard has all kinds of good stories about how people would get their raises and how people tried to find out how much they made and tried to look at their paychecks [LAUGHS].

**MH:** So, was there a sense that you'd get in trouble if you talked about your . . . ?

**BK:** I don't know. I never . . . I don't know. I don't know if there were any repercussions if it was known what you made, and became known that you'd discussed it with other people; I'm not sure.

**MH:** And, in the stories that you got from the old-timers, was there a sense of, you know, why the mill unionized at the time it did?

**BK:** No, I don't . . . I can't . . . I don't remember if there was . . . My sense was that it was because they were owned now by a large corporation. That they felt that it was time for that. And they fought. And they have some good stories about, you know, it took over a year to get . . . from the time they voted. They went to court and had to go testify before the N.L.R.B. and all kinds of stuff. But I'm not sure if there was any specific . . . I don't remember them saying any specific reasons why they decided, when they decided to unionize.

**MH:** Did they have anything to say about what it was like when there was the original ownership?

**BK:** Not so much. You know, the cutting the deals with the foremen. That was from way back. And that, you know, it was a family. You had to know somebody to get hired there. Of course, it was much larger, at the time. Many people would just not even

finish high school; once they got old enough to work, at sixteen, they'd go right into the mill. And . .

**MH: There's that expression, Mother Warren, I've come across. Did they use it that much?**

BK: Not so much. I never heard it that much. I've heard it more . . . I don't know when I heard it more. **I think I heard it more in recent years when people would say, "It's not Mother Warren anymore," than, you know, prior to that. I don't know if it was . . I think**

**. . . Implicitly, though, people that work there thought they would always . . . there would never be a layoff and they would always have a job. So I know they, you know . . . and the mill did . . S.D. Warren, you know, supported the hospital and the library, you know, paid probably more than their share of taxes, which the City of Westbrook found out since, but . . so there was . . . Implicitly, there was that sense that they were a mothering company.**

MH: But it wasn't a lot of specifics, at that point.

BK: No.

MH: Let's talk a little bit about your experiences on your jobs. What kinds of jobs did you get put on?

BK: I actually got put on a lot of good jobs. I had a bunch of experience in working on steam-driven turbines and working in a power plant from the Navy. And so, initially, I got sent over to work. They had quite a large power plant there that made a lot of money selling power back in those days, back to C.M.P. And so I spent a bunch of time over there. That was hot and heavy, it was hard, nobody wanted to do that kind of work.

MH: You enjoyed doing that?

BK: Oh, yes.

MH: What was it about it that you enjoyed?

BK: I don't know. I was . . . I don't know what I enjoyed about it. I liked doing the big, heavy . . . I didn't like doing the menial, trivial work. That was not my—I don't know—not my strong point, the tedious stuff. And . . .

MH: So there were big problems you had to solve over there?

BK: Yes. Yes. And big equipment. Everything was much larger over there than at most other places in the mill. Except for the paper machines which, I, actually, as an apprentice, spent a bunch of time doing some big work on those. And, you know, not a lot of people wanted to do it anymore. A lot of them were hurt and lame from years of beating on themselves. And everybody kind of found their own little niche where they liked to go, especially the new guys that got hired. And so I did a lot of work in the power plant.

MH: Tell me a little bit about what the conditions were, like you were on a standard sort of five day a week?

BK: Yes. We were on a standard five day a week. 7:30 to 3:30 was the official hours.

MH: What were your real regular hours?

BK: Probably 6:00 to 6:00, probably. I probably worked 12 hours a day, 75% of my time there. And, during bad periods of just, you know, bad luck, breakdowns and stuff, you'd be working Saturdays and Sundays, too. And at night. They'd call you in at night and work. You know, you'd be home at 6:00 and go back in at 9:00 and work until 3:00 the next day. Or you worked 24 hours a day sometimes. It just depended on . . . You know, sometimes there were good stretches where nothing broke. Other times, there were bad stretches where nothing worked.

MH: What was it like, to put in those real long hours, when you had to work around the clock?

BK: I didn't find it that bad. You're pretty beat the next day, but I was young. And I'd worked long in the Navy—worked really long hours. And so I didn't find it that difficult. Some people did. Some people would work and . . . And, in our contract, we had language, you didn't have to if you didn't want; after so many hours, you could go home, or whatever. And some people would. Or they wouldn't come in at all if something . . . if they got called at night, and they'd just say "No, I'm not doing it."

MH: Did the overtime pay make a difference for you?

BK: Sometimes. But a lot of it was a challenge. If you got called in to do stuff like that, it's because it was broken. They needed somebody to do it. So it depended. Sometimes it would be . . . Like, I didn't sign up to work a lot of weekends because I hated just the . . . They didn't have any . . . unless it was big work. If I knew there was good work—what I considered good work—then, I'd do it. But, if it was painting or putting together some foolish things or fixing an office, I'd rather not bother [LAUGHS]. So it wasn't always . . . The money was nice, but that's not what, I don't think, drove it—not even 50% of it, I don't think. I enjoyed doing what I . . .

MH: The more challenging working on big machines.

So, you worked the long hours. What about just the physical conditions? You said heat was an issue.

BK: Oh, in the boiler house, it was definitely . . . In there, in the Spring, Summer and most of the Fall, it was probably—where everything broke down—in the high 100 and teens, at least. And just as dusty as you could imagine. Dirty, because we burned coal and wood, so it was nasty. And it was hot.

MH: How did that affect you, over a long period of time?

BK: You get used to it.

MH: What about noise levels?

BK: Loud. Very loud. But, from the time I was there, I think we were actually required to wear ear protection, always. From the time I was there. And I always wore it. Because you couldn't hear. You couldn't hear without it.

MH: And was there any sense . . . because you must have worked with some older maintenance workers.

BK: Who wouldn't wear it.

MH: Yes. How was their hearing?

BK: Bad. They said it was worse when they had them in. And I don't know if that's true or not. Maybe they'd lost so much that when they had those in, they couldn't hear anything.

MH: And did you see any dangerous things take place? Did you see accidents take place?

BK: Yes. Probably now . . . If I saw it, it usually happened to me [LAUGHS]. A friend of mine was killed, just up from where we were working, it would be '96—probably '96. An A-frame who drove through a . . . just happened to bad luck, and a floor plate moved and he was on the floor [??] fell through, and was killed.

MH: And you knew this person?

BK: Yes. Fred McKeenan was his name. He worked . . . We had been working up there the day before, with a fork truck.

MH: [???]?

BK: Yes. In the same spot. And we drove over it twenty times. It never even . . . And he drove over it once and that was all it took. And, you know, I had . . . A guy I was working with cut a bunch of tendons in his toe. While we were working, a plate fell on him. I never really saw anybody get sucked into a paper machine or anything, like you hear the stories about. Probably . . . You know, I cut my finger off; I got it smashed off, working. A few broken, cracked ribs, but that was about it. If I ever saw any . . . never really saw any bad, bad accidents.

MH: I understand a pretty large number of people would be injured at any point in time.

BK: Yes.

MH: Does that make sense? Like, you know, in the crews that you worked with?

BK: It seemed like more so the guys that had worked there longer. Where I ended up working the last seven years probably I was there—eight, maybe—we had a . . . in the power plant, we had a small shop and it was very young guys. I was probably the oldest or the next to oldest. And two other young guys and one guy my same age. There was five of us, and then there was a couple of old guys who didn't really do anything—oiled and just . . . They didn't do any of the hard, physical labor. And mostly, it was the guys that were in their forties and fifties that were . . . you know, had carpal tunnel and bad backs and . . . That was about the extent of it. Carpal tunnel is a bad one—it seemed to be. A lot of people had it.

MH: Pretty widespread amongst the millwrights?

BK: Yes. Yes.

MH: And so, when you'd be working on the steam turbines, you said, what kind of tasks would you do?

BK: Oh, go as far as to tear them right apart, take them right down, take the rotors out of them, put new bearings in them, you know—have the rotors . . . check the rotors for, you know, being in balance, and check them for being straight. You know, basically, tear it right down to the foundation, besides for the casing. Those drove light pumps and stuff and we'd repair pumps all the time—rebuild pumps, put new bearings, new [???], whatever they needed—new seals was a lot, to keep the water from leaking out of them, or whatever they pumped. Pretty much got to do whatever I wanted [LAUGHS].

MH: There'd be a series of things that needed work on?

BK: Yes.

MH: You could pick a job?

BK: Yes. Or, if something was broken, you had to do it. But then, it went as far as what I said because there was really nobody else that knew what to do. So, whatever I said . . . Or, if it got to be too much, I'd say, "You've got to call in a guy from Dresser Rand [?] and get a factory rep guy to come in and work, you know, who had more experience, more knowledge and more prints and everything else and work with him on it.

MH: So what was the best feeling you had about the work you did?

BK: I liked the sense of accomplishment that I got, from being able to fix something that nobody could fix. That was my . . . That was always my big thing. "Oh, we can't fix it, we can't fix it. It won't work. What're we going to do?" And then I'd go fix it.

MH: Who would be saying it couldn't be fixed?



BK: Oh, any number of managers, you know. I could almost always . . . There was always some way to get them running—pretty much.

MH: So, doing something that people said couldn't be done.

BK: Yes.

MH: You had a chance to do that.

Did you experience any practical jokes or see either on you, or did you see other people?

BK: My shop, it wasn't that bad. Probably when I first got there, I'd been there working a week, I can remember I was reading the newspaper one day at lunch, and one of the guys lit it on fire. And I didn't notice it for a little bit, and then I noticed it. Instead of jumping and throwing, I just flipped the page, and they *grabbed* it out of my hand and they stamped it out. So that was . . . I didn't get . . . It wasn't that prevalent where I worked.

MH: So it was kind of a rookie thing, when you first got in?

BK: Yes. Yes. It wasn't . . . We didn't . . . I don't recall that much of it at all going on. I heard stories in the old days, but I never . . . I didn't see that much of it.

MH: Do you remember any of those stories?

BK: Oh, how they'd just play with people's heads and tell them, you know, that one day they'd work, about four guys had worked half the night getting this thing fixed and get it running, and one of the guys was really highstrung. The other three got together and said, "Look, this is . . . we'll tell him this story." So they said, "Chief Engineer said me, Joe and Tom did such a good job last night that we could get the day off." The odd guy out, Ed, who'd been with them the whole time, said, "What about me?" He said, "No, he didn't mention you. You'll have to go talk to him." So they sent him up there

[LAUGHING] to talk with him. It was a completely fabricated story. So the guy went up, and kind of made a fool of himself in front of him.

But, a lot of . . . I think, a lot more playing with people's heads than actual physical practical jokes.

MH: Any sense of people playing those kinds of jokes on supervisors or foremen?

BK: Not so much the one . . . I know. Not really. I know . . . When I first got there, there were a couple that had been brought up, probably shouldn't have been where they were, that used to get used up pretty bad. You know, excuse this, excuse that.

MH: I'm not sure I'm following you.

BK: Get caught outside of the mill and, for example, with . . . One guy got caught and got a speeding ticket and the foreman heard it on his scanner. He had the name called in, so, you know, he came in the next day and said, "Look, what happened? Your time card says 'accident'. I heard you got a speeding ticket at X minus 2." So the guy says, "Geez, Mike, my boiler blew up and I had to go home, fix it and then come back. And I came back and worked." Well, the guy had electric heat in his house and the foreman should have known that because he'd talked about putting a new boiler in, but he didn't. You know, there were always foolish little stories. But probably a lot of them are exaggerating, because I think the foreman knew more than most people gave him credit for.

MH: So that was kind of a theme about the foreman not being . . . ?

BK: Yes. They probably were in spots that they didn't . . . I wouldn't necessarily put them in. Without the experience or the training.

MH: Did you have any experience of that, yourself, of people in supervisory positions knowing less than the workers?

BK: Oh, yes, I think that was pretty common, just because, once you got used to doing something, if you worked in one area, which we ended up doing, and you got very familiar with it, you knew exactly what was going on. If something happened, you knew why it happened because you'd been working there so long. And, you know, those guys, by . . . You know, that wasn't their job. So, often . . . I didn't hold an expectation if a foreman didn't know how to fix something. I would never have done that, though there were more than enough people who did that. But I didn't expect that. That wasn't what . . .

MH: So, the foremen that you dealt with weren't necessarily promoted up out of the ranks of . . .

BK: A bunch of them were. Yes. Bunch of 'em were.

MH: [??] different part of the mill?

BK: Right. They'd worked in, you know . . . They might have worked in paper machines for twenty years. Or, you know, they had done something else. Or they'd worked at different mills. Actually, some of them came up through the ranks in a different mill, came down here and got jobs. There were a few like that. So, no . . . Very few of them that I worked with were, you know, came up out of the ranks of, say, the mechanical people.

MH: Did that give you any kind of independence?

BK: Oh, yes. But it took awhile to gain . . . I think, over the years, they'd probably been used pretty badly by some of the people and set up, probably, and just . . . It took awhile for them to gain . . . to trust you enough just to let you go and do whatever you were supposed to do.

MH: In the meantime, were they, like, pressuring you or riding you to get work done, in any kind of way?

BK: Yes. No. Yes, I suppose, but . . . it depends on . . . never to get it done fast. Or, I was never pressured to get it done faster . . . or I never felt any, because I'd just tell them it would take as long as I thought it would take and then add an hour or two.

MH: When you say "add an hour or two," meaning . . . ?

BK: You know, I'd say, "All right." In my head, I'd say . . . They'd say, "Do you got any idea when this will be done?" In my head, I'd say, "I should be done at 4:00." "6:00!" You know?

MH: That was just to give you the space to get it done?

BK: Just to get the space, so I wouldn't have to see him again. You know? Put them at rest for awhile. And they'd take that and there was never, "Well, you've got to have it done by this time." And I didn't work in the paper machines with some of those people that much, so . . . You know, a lot of people put the pressure on themselves, I think, that, "Oh, they're standing there, looking at me! I got to get it done." But I didn't . . . I could have cared less. When it got done, it got done. As hard as I was working on it, I felt I gave them more than . . . We wouldn't take breaks, we'd, you know, work right through, to get something fixed. So, I never had a problem. I never had anybody give me a hard time over that.

MH: Is there anything more you could say about how you were treated by your direct supervisors?

BK: I had . . . I was pretty lucky. I had a couple that were . . . I didn't take anything from them. You didn't have to. You know, you could . . . They weren't held in very high esteem by anybody, including their supervisors, I don't think—some of them. So it was . . . You could set them in their place—or you could try to, anyways. You know, it would be just . . . There was no . . . That sense of hierarchy really wasn't there. You know, there was no . . . In the military sense, you would never give anybody who had a higher rank

than you—or much higher rank, anyways—you wouldn't give them a hard time, for fear of repercussions, but there was not that. So . . . and they knew it. And, you know, I never really had a hard time. I think they had a hard time with some people, because they considered them lazy and wouldn't do anything. And so, those people got . . . you know, and there was always friction between them. But I really didn't have . . . You know, I had a couple of blowouts with some guys that I didn't think were, you know, doing what they should be doing. That just happens. But, it was never anything . . .

MH: Do you remember what they were over?

BK: Oh, probably trivial stuff. I can remember one . . . I had a big one with a guy probably . . . If he hadn't been such a good supervisor, probably would have fired me over a foolish thing like not having . . . You know, he was like, "I don't know. I don't care." Just giving me a non . . . He didn't . . . You know, I just had enough of "Fft! How do I know?"

MH: He was being disrespectful to you, or . . .

BK: Yes. I said, "Well, what are we going to do about getting that thing fixed?" He said, "Fft! How do I know?" And probably we'd been working long hours, and him and I had a great big blowout, screaming, shouting, in your face mad. He went and told his supervisor who came. He didn't tell him the whole thing and he says, "You can't be screaming at my guys anymore," and that was the end of it. I was kind of lucky that I didn't have any . . . But, as a general rule, I was pretty . . .

I had a couple . . . One guy accused me of stealing something, and I had to have it out with him, with my shop steward and my union president, at the time. And that was pretty much it. I never liked him and still don't. He's still there. And that was pretty much it. I didn't have . . . I had pretty good experience the whole . . . with the direct management.

MH: Did you have any sense or experience of the non-direct management?

BK: The higher-level management I had some . . . We had an H.R. guy who was . . . Him and I didn't get along at all. And I don't think anybody got along with him that well. All of two people would take him to task, but he was a real antagonist. It was what he started out to do, and I'd go right at it with him every time, so he'd [???]. So.

MH: What kind of situations were you having these discussions or conflicts?

BK: Well, we'd have all kind. Any grievances that were filed . . .

[SIDE A ENDS.]

MH: So you were the vice president of your local for a few years.

BK: Yes.

MH: Did you handle, then, shop steward responsibilities?

BK: Yes. I ended up being a combination of both. Most of the people in the Firemen and Oilers were boiler operators, and they were on shift work; they weren't . . . so there was not somebody around all the time. So I'd end up handling . . . and high-level management's only there in the daytime, which was when I worked. So I'd end up handling most of that stuff. And so I had plenty of chances to interact with Human Relations department, who I didn't have much use for.

MH: What were the kind of things that you had problems with, with them? Do you remember specific incidents?

BK: I can remember a bunch of specific incidents, but I always felt that we were being talked down to—or I was. The guy'd try to use great big words. And we had a couple of guys that were pretty good about making fun of him for doing that. And it would get him going. And I could get him going by questioning anything that he said. You know, like, "You've got to trust us on this one." I don't know how many times I heard him say that,

and just disagree that we had to trust him ever, and why would we? And, you know, on and on. It just . . . See, he never . . . He didn't show us any respect, so he virtually got none—at least, not from me, because I refused to deal with him on the level that he wanted to deal with me.

MH: What year was this? Was this somebody brought in by Sappi or sometime like that?

BK: Just before that. He was brought in before Sappi took over. He was a former production line foreman for Ford out in Michigan somewhere, and he was . . . he was a . . . I don't know what his degree was in. I forget what he was by his first trade, but he was kind of a hardliner and he was very arrogant—I felt. I just didn't . . . And we had a mill manager who was a complete moron, for the first few years I was there, so [LAUGHS].

MH: So, this would have been after Howard Reiche had left?

BK: Yes. Charlie Rose was his name, and he wasn't much.

MH: Yes. I heard he was kind of a strange person.

BK: Yes. He's kind of a dingbat. Somebody you would never pick [LAUGHS] . . . you would never imagine in a million years that he'd be the manager of a paper mill, but he was.

MH: So, what did it mean to you that there was this point in time in the early to mid '90s, I guess, that a lot of the top managers weren't people you necessarily respected. Is he [???]?

BK: Most of the time, no. Not most of the time. Unless something bad was happening. You know, somebody was getting fired or . . . But usually, in those situations, they were more . . . it was less so. The more serious, I think, the situations were, usually the more

sensible everybody became. You know, and some of the trivial stuff is when it got really nasty—more serious.

MH: First, second step of grievance type situations?

BK: Yes. The more serious stuff—somebody getting fired, somebody caught either drinking or with drugs or under the influence of either, where you didn't . . . Those were pretty . . . handled fairly well—professionally on both sides, I think, than some of the other stuff.

MH: When you saw the plant, you probably saw a number of different parts of the plant, even though you specialized. Do you have a sense of what the good jobs were and what the bad jobs were?

BK: I thought my job was a good job but you couldn't get anybody to take it [LAUGHS]. I honestly did. And, actually, the few people that came over—that got sent over, because it was a bid system, and if it didn't get filled, then they assigned a junior person. And, actually, the people that'd get assigned there, the junior people, ended up (well, some of them—probably half of them stayed and half of them took off as soon as they could) actually really liked it. It was very independent work, it was hard work, but you were left alone and it was gratifying. Because when something was broken, you needed to fix it. There was only major boiler in the whole place, and only one boiler that could keep the pulp mill running, so it was pretty important stuff. So it was . . . You know, to be able to fix it or whatever was pretty gratifying.

And I don't know what people consider good . . . It all depends on your . . . You know, some people considered good jobs the jobs that you could sit down and not do a thing all day. They thought those were great.

MH: And that would be what—paper machine operators?



BK: Yes, paper machine operators. But even some of the maintenance guys. If you were a babysitter or if you were a dub, they didn't even want you even going near anything like a [???].

MH: What was that word?

BK: A dub.

MH: Is that your word?

BK: Yes, that's my word. You know. They had a lot worse words than that." "Yes, you can sit around all day, but that wasn't what I, you know . . . And the guys that stayed clean all the times; the electricians and the instrument people, you know, didn't get dirty and work in the environment, you know. Their chosen environment. It was too . . .

MH: Let me see if I understand what you're saying. The instrument tech and the electricians, they had cleaner work.

BK: Oh, sure.

MH: Many of them probably preferred to be . . .

BK: Oh, couldn't stand to get dirty! Many of them. You know, some of them didn't care; they'd go right in, but many of them were . . .

MH: Is that something you teased them about?

BK: Oh, yes. Yes. And their screwdrivers. Teased them about the size of their screwdrivers. They wouldn't be any longer than 3 or 4 inches, and that's all you carry in their pocket, you know, and that was their whole tool bag.

MH: Was that kind of a machismo kind of a thing?

BK: Yes, because they'd kind of sit around and make you do everything and then, when it got ready for them, they'd, you know . . . they'd do it. Then they . . . Even if it was hot, they'd complain. Even if it wasn't dirty and nasty. So it was kind of trying . . . actually, trying to shame them into doing something, rather than doing nothing. Because we'd more than gladly accept their help, but, you know, they weren't going to have any of that—some of them.

MH: Was there ever conflicts when you were in that situation, where you had a couple of trades working together to try and fix a machine? Were things clear enough from the contract that everybody knew what to do?

BK: No. But if it was . . . It depended on what it was. If it was something that was planned, then that was a problem. If it was something that broke down and needed to be fixed, then the lines got blurred without . . . Most people wouldn't make an issue out of it. And, every once in awhile, you come up with one or two who'd say, "I'm not helping lift that motor. I'll wire it, but I'm not lifting it," or "I'm not helping lift it." But, most of the time, if it was . . . There were very distinct things, things that were planned, that line became a problem, but things that weren't, it wasn't. But there were, oftentimes . . . Things were planned, they'd try to get away with saying, "Oh, well, these two electricians can work with this one millwright and one pipefitter to do a millwright job, since they're going to have to wire it up anyways"—which had nothing to do with nine-tenths of what was going on. And then there became problems.

MH: How did they get straightened out?

BK: File grievance. You know, or they'd get done, usually, and then file a grievance, argue that, never get an answer. You usually didn't get straightened out—probably still not straightened out today [LAUGHS].

MH: How did you get involved in the union?

BK: They just talked me into . . . I worked with a couple of guys who were involved with it, and the involvement rate's pretty low there. And so I just kept doing it. They needed somebody to be a treasurer first, so I did that probably five or six years. And . . .

MH: Tell me again, you were with the carpenters' unions?

BK: International Brotherhood of Firemen and Oilers, at that time. And then I picked up the steward's job, and I was good at arguing, so I could do it well enough, and that's what I . . . and that's how I started. They needed somebody [LAUGHS].

MH: And you got talked into it.

BK: Yes.

MH: And, among the grievances you dealt with, are there any that stick out in your mind?

**BK: Oh. Probably . . . I don't know . . . I did a ton of them.**

**The one that really irritated me was when we had specific contract language, if part of the power house was shut down, those people who were in a laid-off status would first be offered work, if there was any doing this other stuff. It was very specific and clear cut. It even had parentheses in the contract, stating exactly what work we had for these people.**

**So when, the week before, they were getting laid off, I went to the department manager and told him—showed him. I went to Human Relations, to the H.R. manager and told him and showed him. No. “Nope, not going to do it.” So I filed a grievance.**

**After three or four months, it'd finally get through the . . . Nobody would touch it with a ten-foot pole. First step was waived, second step was waived, and finally go to the third step and had it out with the H.R. guy that I didn't like. I wanted 40 hours' pay. He said, “We'll give him 8.” I said, “You won't give him 8. I came in here, I talked to you specifically about this issue, I've got the letter I sent**

you, the e-mail I sent you, I got the department manager here—who, if he doesn't tell you that I talked to him first, is a liar. And then you guys want to say, 'Well, we don't know how much there was.'" And he got all mad at me, and he had another guy there with him, and I had my International rep there with me, and he stormed out, "I'm not going to pay anybody for 40 hours of work they didn't work." I said, "It's your fault they didn't work." So he stormed out, came back, "Well, maybe I was a little hasty. We'll settle for 24 hours a person." I said, "No. We're going to go for 40." He got mad, and my International rep's kicking me and beating me, and he comes back and says, "32's the most I go." I say, "I'll take it." And so. So I got 16 people 32 hours' pay for something that I had no . . . for doing nothing. But I had known there was work to be done, and I had notified them of it well in advance, as soon as I found out that they were getting laid off and . . .

MH: Why do you think they didn't [???]?

BK: Arrogant. They'd thought they'd get away with it and not have to pay them.

MH: And, in the end, they knew, if they went to arbitration, they would lose.

BK: They would have lost then. Probably would have got 40 hours, but it would cost us, you know, \$5,000 [LAUGHS].

MH: So that was sort of the best possible resolution.

BK: Right.

MH: What did that kind of arrogance tell you about the management? You had the sense that management had been like that, in the past, or was this just a particular group of people?

BK: Oh, I think they'd probably been like that. They weren't . . . I think a lot of them used to be buddies with one another. Because the previous H.R. manager to this guy had been president of one of the locals, who they hired right after a strike. Curt Pease.

MH: So there was some animosity between him and any of the union leaders?

BK: At some of them. Some of them. Some of them were still his buddies who would let him get away with, I think, more than he probably should have. And so, they just said that . . . I didn't feel they . . . especially the H.R. guy. He could have cared less what your opinion was or what your stand was.

MH: But sometimes you'd make him pay for that.

BK: Yes, sometimes. I'm sure he made us pay sometimes, too, but . . .

MH: Did you work with any female employees?

BK: A couple. There was one millwright, Candace Crabtree. She got laid off. She went back to school. Cheryl Kimball, who was an electrician, who you talked to. I worked with her a bunch. And there was another woman who was a millwright, but she was a temporary; she was from the union hall. But I worked with her for a year or so while they were training everybody else.

MH: How did men and women get along?

BK: It seemed like they got along fine, at least, you know . . . There was one woman who I never really worked with who was kind of a pain. But, for the most part, I think they all . . . they didn't . . . no animosity between most of them.

MH: So, did you experience anybody being sexist?

BK: Oh, yes! [LAUGHS] Sure.

MH: Well, how? Was it just how some men would address a woman?

BK: Yes. Or how they . . . No, they probably wouldn't say much to their face, you know. But, you know . . . "Yeah, she's . . ." You know. You know, the typical . . . You hear it all the time. You know. "She can't do that. She can't work here. She can't work there. She can't do anything." And stuff. But, some of them, you would never hear them say that about . . . a couple of them . . . you'd never hear that . . . none of the guys.

MH: Some, and not others?

BK: Certain ones, right. Yes. And it depended on—basically, how much . . . or how good of a worker they were. For the most part, it did. That's what it depended on.

MH: So, if they were successful enough and strong enough? I imagine that probably had a lot to do with it.

BK: [MAKES SKEPTICAL SOUND]

MH: These were all maintenance people, [???].

BK: Yes, but a lot of them weren't that . . . A lot of them probably couldn't lift their own weight, using a chain pull. I don't know. There wasn't so much . . . You know, the easiest way to do things was the way they elected doing them, you know, and that was . . . So there was not so much, "I can lift that up." It was like, "Oh, she can't work on that because she's allergic to this." There was one woman who was allergic to everything and couldn't go but only certain places and so she got . . . sometimes. She was a good carpenter, though. But there were other ones who could do anything and would do anything, and never heard . . . You know, some of the ignorant guys might say something sharp to 'em. They're lucky they didn't get their head torn off." [LAUGHS] Verbally, they did.

MH: Do you remember any anecdotes about it?

BK: No, not really. No. Actually, one of the women was a girlfriend or live-in girlfriend of one of the guys I worked with. So, of course, nobody said anything, you know, even if they'd wanted to, and they didn't because she was a good worker. She was very smart. And . . . No, there wasn't. And there were only like . . . Probably, if there were 300 of us when I started, probably when *I* started, there was only one woman. And then, the other two got hired afterwards. So there weren't that many. I mean, you didn't see them.

MH: [??] Did you see women in other production parts of the mill?

BK: Very few. There were some, but not that many. Not . . . There just weren't that many women. I take that back. When I first worked there, before they shut a bunch of the old finishing equipment down, they had these inspectors and these other women that ran these punch presses. And there were a bunch of women that worked in that room.

MH: And were they mostly much older women?

BK: Most of them, yes. Very few young . . . Nobody my age until after I got hired, is when I started noticing, you know . . .

MH: [??] women got laid off when they shut down [??] operations in the finishing department, pretty much?

BK: Yes. Yes. Most of them in the finishing department. And probably all of them got laid off. I don't know. There's probably one woman left, I think. In the maintenance department. Probably Cheryl Kimball got laid off, Shirley Joy—I don't know if you've ever watched any of the news, but she worked for the Maine—not the Maine Job Service, whatever it's called down on Kennebec Street and wherever it is—as a peer counselor and she's . . . She got laid off and Cheryl Kimball got laid off and this other girl, Candy, got laid off, all at the same time. So there's probably fewer and . . . And the girls that worked in production that were left were very young. So probably they're all gone, too.

MH: Yes, I think I heard there's five or six. But not that many. That's what others have told me.

Let me talk about some of the events that took place while you were there. I guess the first one had been . . . You came in, like, a year or two . . . Well, you came in right during the I.P. strike, right?

BK: Right. Yep.

MH: And did you . . . How did you experience that strike? Did people talk about all the time?

BK: Oh, yes. All the time. And we used to have a 50-50 raffle every . . . They'd sell 50-50 raffle tickets every week and also pass the box around every week for the, you know, donations to the strike fund. And, you know, people could see—and the older guys who'd been around could see the same thing happening to us.

MH: There was active worrying . . .

BK: Yes.

MH: . . . about them trying to provoke you into striking.

BK: Exactly.

MH: Having to go out.

So, did you sense that that changed how the next couple of contracts were made?

BK: Oh, yes.

MH: How?



BK: Forever. Because nobody dared . . . There was no such . . . It wasn't even an *option*.

MH: Yes. To strike.

BK: They would have *never* gotten a strike vote. Never! There were too many people that was everything depended on it, and they weren't about to, you know, give up what they had to lose their jobs like they had, up in Jay. That was never . . . You had nothing to bargain with, as far as that went. Kind of, whatever we get was out of the goodness of their hearts, because we didn't have anything else. And that was pretty much a well-known fact.

MH: Did you have the sense that the company was taking on more of a hardball stance?

BK: They knew they could—then. They weren't facing . . . They had nothing to face. There were no consequences, you know, for their hardball stance.

MH: Do you remember changes in contracts that seemed to really represent that shift?

BK: Not so much the changes, but we weren't getting any gains.

MH: So, no significant wage increases.

BK: Right. The wage increases . . . We weren't getting any language protecting us from layoffs that we'd been trying to get. We weren't getting any language protecting us from outside contractors. And, in the last one, we got really undermined, both sets of that. Being that they had their lawyers and wrote the language up and . . . you know . . . it turned out a lot different than what we thought it would turn out. In reality.

And so now, they just did, you know, whatever they . . . keep the peace, or wouldn't, you know . . . Nobody would actually quit working altogether, but . . .

MH: Did that affect morale?

BK: Oh, I'm sure. I'm sure it did. To people that were worried about that kind . . . and there were plenty of them that were, who had, you know, everything in their life invested in working there.

MH: So it was really the job security that was the most important concern.

BK: Yes. And that wasn't even, you know . . . We didn't get any of that, either.

MH: Do you remember anything about what I've heard described as the enabling efforts that took place in the early '90s?

BK: Yes. I was a staunch [LAUGHS] . . . I was staunchly against anything to do with that.

MH: How come?

BK: Because I didn't think . . . I knew we were going in. It was just like going through a whole set of negotiations again, where we were at their mercy, pretty much. And it . . .

MH: So you felt like any discussion about your organizing work was . . . ?

BK: It was one-sided.

MH: . . . under duress.

BK: Very one-sided. And it never changed. It was that way to the end. Reorganization efforts were as one-sided as you could get.

MH: And what do you think the middle [?] management was after?

BK: I think they wanted to do the same amount of work they could with the fewest amount of people possible.

MH: Do you think others shared that perception? You know, [???]?

BK: Most of them, I think. It's hard to say. But I would say most of them, yes. But most of them saw no alternative. That enabling language was part of the contract which we had signed which forced us, supposedly, into going there, and at least, putting on a show. And some people were really into it—thought that it was . . . We had a couple of guys that thought, you know, it was the greatest thing ever, but . . .

MH: How come?

BK: They liked going to meetings and liked thinking that they had an input, I guess, into . . .

MH: So, did you see a direct impact from any of those enabling efforts, in terms of . . . ?

BK: No, I don't think they ever got anything accomplished. It never . . . Nothing ever came of it. I don't know if it was too difficult to implement anything, or if they were . . . if the company was . . . didn't know what they wanted to do specifically, and therefore, nobody would bite on it because they didn't know what was going to happen.

MH: Did you participate in any of the negotiation around that?

BK: Yes. And I was . . . I didn't want to have anything to do with it, and I couldn't believe, at the time, that . . . but most people thought I was just [???]—and they were probably right, in the end [LAUGHS]. It probably didn't make a bit of difference. You know, they probably got nothing out of it, we got nothing out of it, wasted a bunch of people's time.

MH: Was there a sense that . . . One thing I've heard in a couple of my previous interviews is that people said that the way the mill has been set up compared to, say, the Somerset mill (is the obvious contrast)—that the mill was laid out in such a kind of crazy

quilt way over the years, that there's such a large number of people that have to just move stuff, than other mills that are laid out better. You don't have to have so much . . . I guess the number 9 machine I was talking about [??] backwards and all of that. So I've heard this kind of description that the mill, because of its history and being an old mill, it seems kind of inefficient, and that it was necessary to cut costs to hang onto markets. Was that presented to you by the management as a rationale?

BK: Yes.

MH: And what was your take on that?

BK: It was obvious that . . . I mean, it was a problem. Everything did have to . . . Number 9 paper machine headed right out to the road there. They had to haul all the finish rolls all the way back down and across the river, down a series of alleyways to get to where they'd be, you know, either slit or rewound, or whatever had to be processed to them. [LAUGHS] So it was. It was fairly obvious to even the most casual person that, you know, nothing worked the way it should work.

But, on the other hand, who was, I guess . . . I wasn't ready to take the, you know, the brunt of the responsibility for the place being inefficient. And I didn't feel that we *should* take the brunt of the responsibility. Because they weren't laying *them* off. They weren't talking about, you know, the office being inefficient and they weren't talking about . . .

MH: Did you sense that the mill was top-heavy, at that point, in terms of . . . ?

BK: Oh, sure. Probably still is.

MH: And where would it be top-heavy?

BK: It was really top-heavy when I got there, with low-level management. Really, really bad. There would have been probably a foreman for every four people, at one time, I'll bet. There were just *piles* of 'em.

MH: No kidding.

BK: Yes.

MH: Did they do anything?

BK: They were supposed to, you know . . . No. A lot of them didn't do anything. Some of them were real good. They didn't have any responsibility because everybody had their own little thing that they had to do.

MH: A couple of things came up during that period of time. I guess I'm thinking about the first half of the '90s. One was just the fact that Dunlap took over. And then, later, there was the sale of the plant. What did you see? Did you see a difference? Did people talk about Dunlap becoming the CEO of your company?

BK: Yes, sure.

MH: I know, a couple of times the mill was put on sale. Did people talk about that?

BK: Oh, yes. They were worried to death about it. A lot of people did nothing but worry. For years, probably the last six years, they did nothing but worry about, you know, what was going to happen. Was the mill going to be shut down altogether, you know, or what was going to happen. A lot of people did. And especially with him and his reputation, coming in. There was a lot of talk, you know, and a lot of worry. [??] Nobody knew anything, but . . .

MH: So there was rumors, but you never knew anything until something happened.

BK: Right.

MH: I know, at one point, I don't know if it was just the production workers, but there was an effort to buy the mill? Did that seem like a serious effort? Do you think that would have been a solution?

BK: Not from what I know of how those things go, no. I don't think it would have been a solution. Because a bunch of the people that were doing it were probably their own worst enemies, you know, that were leaning towards it. It probably wouldn't . . . I can't see how it would've helped any.

MH: And when the mill was sold, how did things change, once Sappi came in? Or, did they?

BK: I don't think they changed much for the . . . I was kind of isolated. It's hard. Some people really felt like they changed a lot. But I was kind of isolated and we had our own little world. And a couple of spots in the mill—the pulp mill being one and the power plant being the other—and the rest of the stuff was production stuff which was really . . . I think they put some people in charge that were go-getters. They brought a couple of people in from Alabama and brought some people in from different parts of the country to push, push, push, cut, cut, cut—and, you know, you could see that coming. **They'd never done that, and everybody'd been hired from within. They, all of the sudden, they started bringing . . . or from, at least, locally. Even the mill manager now came from upstate, from Millinocket. But when they start coming from away, you know something [LAUGHS] bad's going to happen.** So, in that respect, there was a change. **Much more production driven—at the time. I think they were freer than I thought they would've been, with the information that they gave out. Whether it was true or not, I don't know. The financial figures and . . . I thought they were fairly accurate. It was easy not to . . .**

MH: What were they trying to tell you?

BK: Just to . . . You know, in this age of, you know, telling your employees and just showing you what's going on, what the budgets were, what the production was versus,

you know, budget, why . . . You know, you had some guys who gave the presentations who were really good. They tried to do it once a month. And some guys were really good and knew what was going on, and could tell you where the shortfalls were. If you were having a good month, they'd tell you, you know, "We had this, that and the other thing." So I saw a lot more information come out of them than I thought I would—much more than with Scott. But that was before . . . That was in a different era. Even a few short years made a huge difference. Nobody told anybody anything, back then. You know, 'til the annual thing came out, and then, "They made 50 million dollars," and whatever it was.

MH: Through the whole time you were there, did you have a sense of how profitable the mill was because they didn't report your mill separately?

BK: No. I don't know if we really had a sense of the whole mill, overall. I don't know if anybody did. I don't even know if they did. They knew where they were . . . They knew they were making money, overall, I think, for many years. But they . . . I think they were losing it in some areas and making a ton in other areas, and, you know, when you added it all up, it looked good, but . . . When we lost the power contract with C.M.P, then that cut off . . .

MH: When was that? Do you remember when that happened?

BK: Late '97 or '98, we lost that. That was, you know, \$25 million a year. So, when that went away, geez [LAUGHS]. There's nobody making any money. And then pulp prices went down again and they couldn't stay up. And it was just . . .

MH: There was the slide towards the big downsizer.

Let me ask you some questions that have to do with the decline of the mill. First, was there a time, during the time that you worked there, when people were optimistic about the mill's future?

BK: No. I can't remember . . . I don't ever remember a time when they were. From the time I got there, they said they were going to shut a couple of paper machines down. Eventually, they did, but that wasn't until '95 or '96, you know, before they did that. All in all, it was always something.

MH: Did you ever sense that . . . Because, I imagine, one thing is that I don't think that they put any money into the mill during the whole time you were there, right?

BK: Well, they did. They built the recovery in the pulp mill, which was undersized, to start with. But, at that same time, they were thinking about building number 3 paper machine which is up in Somerset now. And it was up for grabs who was going to get it, at the time. The mill manager, Charlie Rose, went to a big meeting in Philadelphia and they asked him—I've heard this from some management guys, so I don't know how true it is because they don't like him, to start with, but—you know, for why it should go there, and he said, "Oh, we got hard workers and we're a good place." You know. And so, then they asked mill management in Somerset who got up there with a big presentation and handed everything out and . . .

MH: So that's how you lost that machine.

BK: . . . so it went up the road. That was the only one time when they thought we might get that paper machine, that—you know, that anybody had any optimism.

MH: In your own perspective, who is to blame or what forces are to blame for the mill's decline?

BK: Well, I don't think any one person. Probably years of inefficiencies that were never corrected, personnel-wise and equipment-wise that was probably almost impossible to, you know, correct. I don't think there was a focus, an overall focus. For the first, you know, eight years I was there, I think they just ran by the seat of their pants, spent money like it grew on trees. And so there was no real focus on what to do. And when it became



so competitive, they just . . . that was the end. Plus it was small, it's in an urban area, it's tough to operate.

MH: How so?

BK: Because you got to be a lot more careful with your emissions, even just the . . . --not even anything that's covered by the E.P.A.—the smell, the color of the water people notice because the river's very small, the noise that the plant generates, the traffic that it generates because they're traveling through residential areas. It's tough to operate in an environment with a lot of people watching you. That's why you don't see many of them [LAUGHS] in these places.

MH: Did you have a sense that things could have been done differently, in a way that would have stopped the decline? Was there a chance, if things had been done differently, [???]?

BK: Probably, if they'd have built a bigger pulp mill at the time they built that, instead of building this tiny, tiny thing that they built. And I got a sense that our . . . basically, the only pulp we could supply was to ourselves; nobody else wanted it because of the type we were producing. And we had no demand internally for that, because they'd never built any more paper machines or whatever. So. **You know, that . . . I don't think there was a long-term real focused outlook, I think, and that's what killed . . . really killed it. And, by the time somebody tried to, it was too late.**

MH: Tell me about when you found out you were going to be laid off.

BK: When I found out. I was already working [LAUGHS] and I got a page that said I had to go to a meeting at the H.R. And I'd heard from a guy who was a state senator that it was all over, the night before. And so I kind of had a feeling what was going to happen. I walked in late like I usually am in this room full of union reps and big H.R. guy from Boston, a couple of guys I'd never seen before, so I knew they were big, and our mill manager with his head down, reading off a piece of paper, to list everything that was

closing, shutting down. And then, at the end, how many . . . and I knew right then, I was all done at that point, because there'd already been two layoffs. They were getting close to the bottom.

MH: Had you anticipated that happening?

BK: Kind of. I thought it would be down the road probably a little farther—maybe six months or a year down the road. But when they decided to, they just said, “We’ve got to do it and get it done with, and be over with.” So. I just said, “Yup.” I went back to the shop. “What happened?” “Pack your bags. Put your tools . . . all the tools away”—because I knew everybody that was getting laid off. “We’re all done.” I didn’t . . . See, there were some people that were really just . . . I mean, you could see their jaws, physically just watch them, and turn white, on the spot. But I wasn’t . . . I don’t know . . . About most of the guys I knew, personally, or knew well, personally, “Yup.” Took it pretty well, at least, externally. And I didn’t have a hard time with it.

MH: How come?

BK: I don’t know. I was ready to . . . That wasn’t something that I wanted to do forever, you know? It was getting . . . It was getting a little old. You know, I’d been going to school at night, not for no reason but, you know, I probably subconsciously figured that I was not going to do that forever, although I never came out and said it. But, you knew someday; that place wasn’t going to last. And I couldn’t see myself doing it until I was sixty-five, either, so . . .

MH: Because of the physical part of it?

BK: Yes, and I imagine, after, you know . . . Twelve years was a long time, and I got to know almost everything about what I was doing. There was nothing new, it was getting old, some of the stuff you . . . you know, repetitive work that you’d continue to do. Even if it was once every two months, you’d be doing it six times a year, you know, you’d do it eighteen times in three years. It got to be old, after awhile.

MH: And briefly, you say you got qualified through TAA, TRA, to go back to school.

BK: Yes. I'd actually done some work on the first layoff that we had, applying for that. Which still left us in the window, that we didn't have to reapply as a whole. As a group, we were still considered eligible for that.

MH: So, was it fairly straightforward to take care of that?

BK: Yes. Yes, it was pretty straightforward. It was an individual thing, then. As a group, we'd been done. And I had to go do manual dexterity tests and the whole works, to see if I was eligible to be trained. Kind of like Arlo . . . It reminds me of an Arlo Guthrie song, but . . . He was ready to go to Vietnam, but . . . And I had two years, more than two years under my belt, so they would only train you for up to two years because, basically, it's for technical, for most people. And so that was it. I made up my mind, right away. I mean, I don't think it took me two seconds. When I heard I was getting laid off, I said, "I'm just going to go to school. That's what I'm doing."

MH: Do you miss your job, in any way?

BK: No. No. Probably miss the money. Or, I did. Now, it's good. But, other than that . . . No, I find all kinds of stuff to keep me busy, that challenge . . .

MH: Is that partly because you, like you were saying a minute ago, had run out of challenges?

BK: Yes. I think so. Yes. I think so. A lot of guys I'd known had left and got laid off, so I wasn't working with the guys that I liked to work with. It was getting to be kind of a drag at the end because, the last four or five months, nobody was going to do anything, anyways, because they were getting laid off.

MH: How long were you there after . . . ?

BK: I think, four months.

MH: What happened during that four months?

BK: Nothing. [LAUGHS] Not a thing. Not much. Nobody did much. The bare minimum. I'm surprised the place still ran at all. Yes. It was pretty . . . It was a pretty laid-back time. And nobody expected much, I don't think. I knew the mill manager fairly well. I talked to him. His biggest concern was nobody's going to get wrapped up in a paper machine, nobody's going to get killed because they're not paying attention, nobody's going to do, you know, whatever.

MH: There weren't high expectations of a worker, just don't hurt yourself before you leave?

BK: No, there weren't. Yes.

MH: Have you talked to people since then, because . . .

BK: That are still there, or . . . ?

MH: Yes.

BK: Yes.

MH: What do they say about what's going on there now?

BK: Same thing. You know. Working 60, 70, 80 hours a week. Everything's breaking down. Hiring outside contractors to fix stuff. Same stuff. Doesn't seem like it's changed [LAUGHS] hardly at all; there's just fewer people there.

MH: Because I'd heard that. It seems that they're making nearly as much paper as they were before, but a couple of machines haven't been shut down. And that people . . . Hadn't they ratcheted people down on their overtime?

BK: They had tried to do that. It was pretty much . . . It depended on who your direct supervisor was. That was . . . There were some guys who complained, and we used to tell them, "Well, you don't do anything all day, so they're not going to let you work at night." But I never . . . The last paper machines they cranked down on them because the guys would just be there for eighteen hours a day and do nothing. And they knew it. And they'd start reeling them in for awhile, and just to get them back in line. But I never had to deal with that.

MH: Did you sense that people working overtime, can you maintain your productivity over sixteen hours?

BK: No! Not usually. In a burst, you can, sure. If you . . . Yes. You could do it. In . . . When we worked probably a couple of months straight after the flood, I'll bet you we . . . you know, seven days a week, twelve hours a day, sometimes sixteen, depending if you wanted to stay. And I think we did then. There were some final purpose to that. But just . . .

MH: That was saving the mill so it didn't shut down, right?

BK: Right. Just every day, no, you can't be productive, doing that all the time. No way.

MH: But people still do it.

BK: Yes. Make a lot of money, though.

MH: Is there anything that I haven't asked you that you would want to tell me about your experiences?

BK: Oh, you got me to say a lot. No, I can't . . . I actually had good experiences there. I didn't have the . . . you know? It was good paying work, and I actually liked what I did. Compared to a lot of people didn't. A lot of people hated it. Couldn't stand it.

MH: And why'd they stay? They were stuck?

BK: Money. Yes.

MH: Couldn't get a job?

BK: No. Or they thought they couldn't. Some of them probably could—and a lot of them did after [LAUGHS], when they didn't have a choice, you know. But the money wasn't as good. Well, I liked it. I had a good time. I didn't care. When I was gone, I was gone.

MH: That's interesting. I've gotten different answers from people on that question.

BK: Yes. I don't feel slighted.

MH: Well. Thank you very much.

[END OF INTERVIEW AT 47 MINUTES OF SIDE B.]