

Historical Collections, Bridgeport Public Library
Oral History Project, "Bridgeport Working: Voices from the Twentieth Century"
Edward Kuba (**EK**) interviewed by John Soltis (**I**)

Transcript

Part 1: Early life and family; East Side neighborhood; First jobs during Depression

Part 2: Service in the U.S. Navy before, during, and after WWII

Part 3: Post WWII era work as bridgeman and the Ironworkers' Local 424; Safety measures and benefits for workers; Reforming union practices

Part 4: 1960's prosperity; Mianus River Bridgeport project and collapse

Part 5: Integration in union; Globalization

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I Okay, we're doing the oral history and today we're interviewing Edward Kuba. Mr. Kuba, when and where were you born?

EK Bridgeport, Connecticut on Booth Street. In May the 12th, 1914.

I Okay, so a Bridgeport native.

EK Bridgeport native yes.

I Can you tell us a little bit of what it was like on Booth Street, the neighborhood you lived in?

EK The neighborhood?

I Yeah.

EK Mostly Italian and Polish. Or predominately Italian and the Mom n' Pops store around the corner. Halpin's Feed Store for horses 'cause horses were very prevalent them days.

I Oh okay, sure.

EK Peddlers and all, you know, all had horses, the coal man, the ice man, the, that was all on horses.

I Oh that's right, you had horse and wagon.

EK And cars were just coming in to the--, but that was for the more affluent (laughter).

I And, this was on the East Side of Bridgeport?

EK East Side, yes.

I And, oh I'm sorry go on.

EK And on the next block over, Saint Mary's Church. That's the corner on Pembroke Street and Steuben Street. I remember when the church burnt. Saint Mary's Church burnt, yeah. That was from spontaneous combustion and the fire started about 5 o'clock in the morning. And it damaged the roof very bad.

I Do you know about when that was? Back in the 20's maybe?

EK Let me tell you. Let me get my dates..... oh that was 72, about 72 years ago.

I Oh okay, we can do the math later.

EK Yeah.

I Your family, how large a family did you have?

EK My mother, my father, four children. Three boys and one girl. And my grandmother lived with us.

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I A large family.

EK Huh?

I A fairly large family.?

EK Oh yeah. And we lived in a cold water flat, there was no central heating system. And the toilet was down in the basement in the cellar. And we spent all winter heating the pipes, trying to watch that the water wouldn't freeze. Or when the pipe burst we had to go down there, my father used to have to go down and beat the lid to close the holes. (laughter) And that was living. And I remember distinctly and very vividly that we, the kids, ya know, the boys, we slept up in the attic. And we used to put, we used to, in them days they had irons, for ironing clothes that they put on the coal stove.

I Oh to heat the iron?

EK To heat the iron, then you had a handle that you put on and locked it in, and we used to take the irons and heat them on the coal stove and my grandmother would wrapped them in flannels and we ran upstairs into the attic, the bed and put the irons on our feet. (laughter) To keep warm to fall asleep, of course as a kid, you're tired of running around you know why once you went to sleep why nothing woke you up.

I So the neighborhood was primarily Italian and Polish.

EK Polish, Yeah.

I Is that your what's your background?

EK I'm Slovak. That is my parents were Slovak

I Me too.

EK Huh?

I Me too. Okay and where did you go to school?

EK Saint Cyril's.

I Oh, sure.

EK Yeah, Saint Cyril's School, because we were Catholic. And them days you had to have a Catholic education. And we were just discussing this at my son-in-law's the other day, we paid, let's see, four dollars a year, forty cents a month, ten cents a week, for school. Of course it was subsidized by the, what the....

I Diocese?

EK The parish.

JS Yeah.

EK We had, what? Eight grades, and the teaching nuns were from the order of Saint Cyril and Methodius. Well, then from there after I graduated I went to Harding.

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I Oh, me too.

EK Harding was new then, just a couple of years old.

I Oh okay.

EK So it was fairly new when I was there, because before that you had to go to Bridgeport High School on Congress Street.

I Oh okay, that's City Hall today, right?

EK Huh?

I Is that the City Hall?

EK No, no, they demolished that. It's not City Hall, what you're talking about now that is City Hall is the old Central High.

I Oh okay.

EK Right? But, wait a minute, now let me get, yeah. And Bridgeport High School was an old sandstone building on Congress Street, [unclear] and that's where you went to school. Of course them days, you weren't encouraged to go to school like today, they stress education. But they didn't them days because hey you get out of school and go to work to help the family. Ya know?

I Sure. What type of work did your father or your mother do?

EK All right my father worked, well, when he come from Europe he was only fifteen years old and come alone. And he got a job, 'course you see his father in Europe, in Slovakia was the overseer of a baronial Estate. Them days it was the fiefdoms, ya know, a piece a land and then, ya know. And he come here at fifteen and while on the Estate he worked in the greenhouse, of course he'd done a lot of things, as a profession or trade he was a horticulturist. So he come over here and he got a job in, on Sylvan Avenue. I remember that, for a long time it was there before they revamped all the Sylvan Avenue and all. There was an old greenhouse there and an old German by the name of Mr. Schleichen owned it. My father got his first job there and then he went from there, he went to work for Frank Miller Lumber Company. That was on the corner of Washington Avenue and Housatonic Avenue.

I Okay.

EK And he worked for a fella by the name of Pat Flanagan. Who later became a lieutenant, chief, in fact superintendent of police in Bridgeport. This house next door was his, he bought this when he--.

I Where, on Ridgefield?

EK Right here, next door. And from there, he went to work for Bullards and he worked there for a long time as a grinder. Previous to that though he worked in, what they call, the American Tube and Stamping and that's what CarTech was.

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I Where was that again?

EK Huh?

I Whereabouts was that?

EK On Seaview Avenue...

I Oh, okay, the old Carpenter Steel.

EK Carpenter Steel, CarTech, yeah. In fact just before I retired, I'll be retired twenty five years, this June. I went and I installed a new gasser in there, the new oven that they were experimenting with. The old ovens use to take four hours for heat and this new one seventy minutes, see. And that was run with hydrogen and oxygen.

I So you installed that just before your retired?

EK Yeah, I worked on that, nine months, putting it in. Well, anyway then my father went to work in GE and he stayed in GE and lasted there until he retired.

I So pretty much working class Bridgeport...

EK That's it and in a factory, and then you gotta know, them days as a kid the factories had an hour lunch and the twelve o'clock whistle would blow and you could hear it all over, what's that, Bridgeport. Locomobile, Singers, all of them they'd blow their whistles.

I Oh, that meant everybody was on lunch?

EK That was lunch, yeah. And then they come back at one, so at quarter of one they had another low decibels, rather it was low frequencies from the Singer Sewing Machine, which is the parking lot you see on Barnum Avenue. You know, that was all big plants and I as an iron worker was assigned to a job there when they were demolishing it to put up what was Housatonic College [Housatonic Community College]. And them buildings that we demolished, I was sent just to salvage the cast iron columns.

I Oh, really?

EK They were put in there before the Civil War.

I That long?

EK And the trusses. And you know it was a shame, they should have saved some of them for what, the way they make trusses them days. They had no riveting guns. Put in the rivet there and they'd beat it with sledge hammers and that.

I What was your first job here in Bridgeport, that you recall?

EK Yes, I do. I went to work as an errand boy for Howland Dry Good Company. That was on Canon Street and Main Street.

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I How old were you?

EK I'm fourteen. I was there about a year and I got a job, The Frank H. Fargo Company and that's where, on Broad Street between John and State. Where what's that building is now? Macy's is it? Across the street from the Library.

I Oh, okay, it's the Chase Manhattan now, it used to be Gimbels?

EK That's right, Chase Manhattan now. Well they used to have the Masonic building there, and downstairs in the stores was Hadley Hardware, Hadley Furniture which was one of the biggest furniture stores. Frank H. Lee Furniture, Hadley Furniture, Nothnagles they were all about that, see. I went to work there as a delivery boy downtown. Delivering all that, what's that, stationary and stuff.

I Do you recall about what the pay was back then?

EK Yeah! I was getting eight dollars a week at Howland's and I got ten dollars a week at Fargo's. But it was a better job in this respect. It was smaller, closer, the relationship between the employees.....

I as this a full time job or had you finished school by then?

EK I started at Harding and I had to quit, because the Depression came and my father worked at GE, but they didn't, if you had any tenure at all they didn't lay you off. What they did was give you one day a week five dollars a day. Now go on out and support a family of four. So I went out and I got a job.

I To help support the family?

EK Oh, yes! And as I say, them days they didn't stress education. Especially the, the only ones, the exceptional cases were the parent in spite of the ones on financial difficulties that they were going through insisted that the kids get their education.

I Where did you go from there, or how long did?

EK I stayed in Fargos 'til I was seventeen years old and then I went in the Navy. I stayed in the Navy, minority crews and that means from seventeen, you're automatically, your time is up when the day before you're twenty one. Then I extended for two years. I had to do that 'cause I requested submarine duty and I had to extend my enlistment for two years to go in. They weren't going to train me and then keep you there a couple years, just like they do pilots and all now. Six years in the reserve, you gotta stay, serve the six years. So you had to stay and I did time, about five years on submarines. Then from there, see this is where it didn't pay off to read a lot (chuckle).

I Oh, how's that?

EK Well, because you became aware of what was going on around you. It's like the [unclear] dope, "yassa massa" you know and I wasn't of that nature. When I seen injustice or anything, I couldn't keep it to myself. As a result I certainly didn't enhance myself with the hierarchy. (laughter, and a cough). And then when I got out, I went on merchant ships and I sailed to the

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orient, from the west coast. And so I became a member of the Sailor's Union in the Pacific and all our shipping was from the west coast out to the orient, throughout the orient. (Clears his throat) I stayed with the merchant ships until 19.., wait a minute, 1941 was it that the war broke out?

I Yeah.

EK I was in Hamburg when war broke out.

I In Germany?

EK Germany and England. That was September 1941. No, September 1940! War between Germany and what the heck was it?

I I think it was '39 when they invaded Poland?

EK '39, '39 sorry, that's right you're right '39. And in spite of us not being in the war, the German government says we'll give you twenty four hours to leave the port, when we were in Hamburg. So we had to leave and I come home and then Roosevelt signed, what's that?

I Lend Lease?

EK Huh?

I Lend Lease?

EK No, not Lend Lease, before then. What the hell is it, that you're not involved?

I Neutrality?

EK Neutrality, that's right. Signed the Neutrality Act and as a result shipping dried up in a lot of (cough, cough). So I come home and just in the course of a conversation with a guy "oh wait a minute, you want to go to work I'll get you a job," you know.

I This was back in Bridgeport?

EK Yeah, yeah, because my people lived here. So I went to work at the Bridgeport Brass and I stayed there, about a year. And then one day I'm saying to myself "what the hell am I doing here?" 'Cause now we became involved in the war. I was in, with a group of friends we went to the Yankee Stadium to watch the Washington Redskins and the Giants playing football. It was during that time that Pearl Harbor was attacked that afternoon. So then at work I says "what the heck am I doing here?" I was always an outgoing guy, you know, and I had a good job. I was made foreman of the tool room and I never served a day apprenticeship in my life, apparently I had something on the ball that they

Of course then another thing, you know, the war and they started getting contracts, war contracts and one day, going on down to New York and see how shipping is. So I come down to the Union hall, they said geez just the guy we're looking for got a good job for you. I didn't even come home for my clothes. I grabbed the ship, the John McLaughlin and that made that 750 ship convoy that went to North Africa. Remember?

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I Okay.

EK Well, then I stayed all during the war. In fact, when the war ended in 1945 in August, I felt kind of guilty. I said I went through all of this, you know, and they were torpedoing at us like hell.

I Sure.

EK They were knocking us off left and right. Then I says, oh, after the war they were still sending ships over with wheat to feed the country. And I says "Jesus, this is an awful life, with the hell that you went through, now with the which was peaceful at that time, people are hungry so I says I'm going to stay on the ships. Make a couple of trips to bring some wheat over and I done that, and I got home, let's see '46. I spent, not quite a year, bringing the wheat and stuff over, food stuff. So then I went and I was hanging around and through another course of conversation with a guy, oh come on I got a good job for you, he says. Oh yeah! He says you've got great briggging ability and he says we got some big presses, we're gonna,.... Where did I go back, Bridgeport Brass, taking a hundred and twenty five compressors out of there that belonged to the government.

I Oh, after the war?

EK Yeah, after the war, see. A big outfit from New York, Dowdy Brothers come in and I went to work for them and stayed with them for about a year 'til we completed the job. Of course, I was an iron worker then, I went up and I took my test and kept my Bridgeman's Card and I was working around here...

I What was that card called?

EK Bridgeman's. To be a Bridgeman. So I went to work for American Bridge in Saybrook, Old Lyme. That's the Baldwin Bridge. I put it up and it's torn down already. Outwore its usefulness. (laughter) There's a new bridge there now. Of course that thing was only two lanes each way. It was nowhere near adequate, you know, to handle the traffic. So now they got the big, what's that, three lanes with a shoulder. So, then I worked around different jobs, you know.

I How would that work? You would contract out for a job?

EK No, you'd go to the union hall.

I Oh, the union places, yeah.

EK You were dispatched. Well they need so many men out here and they need so many men out here, you know. But I went there for the experience, too. Sick and tired of putting up, what's that, shopping centers with columns and girders. These were big, 150 tons.

I And this was in the late 40's, early 50's?

EK The job there started in 1948 on the bridge. And I set the shoes on the Old Saybrook side and set the shoes on the Old Lyme side. The shoes are the things that the girders sit on. Of course, they got to be right, the elevation, right on the money, you know.

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I So that was part of your job?

EK. Huh?

I That was part of your job?

EK That's what I did. When the shoes were set. There was no place on the bridge site with railroad tracks that could handle the girders. So the girders were loaded in Essex. They had an abandoned coal yard there that had tracks. And the girders used to come in there and we'd unload them and put them on the what's that, the trailer, you know, lowboy.

I The flatbed?

EK Yeah, flatbed. It had 16 wheels in the back and we put one end on the mat and another one on what we used to call a dolly and that had 2, 4, 6, 8 wheels and between the...of course, they were a hundred and some feet long, so you had to have a cable strung taut for the dolly in the back. And we'd take them from Essex and bring them to the job site and from there they'd lift them. The traveler would lift them up and set them.

I That's quite a thing. Where did you go after the bridge?

EK After the bridge, a number of little jobs. Oh incidentally, I got**((Tape is turned off , then turned on again.))**

I Okay, so you worked a number of smaller jobs after the bridge?

EK After that, yeah.

I Now the union hall, was it here in Bridgeport?

EK It's in New Haven. See there's two locals in the state of Connecticut, Local 15 in Hartford, and Local 424 here in New Haven. The local in New Haven took from the state line up in Byram and went as far as, oh, what the heck do they call it, the Old Saybrook Bridge, where the bridge is. That was our territory.

I Like your territory? And then Hartford?

EK And then Hartford took over towards Rhode Island and then all the way up to the Massachusetts state line.

I I see, so you were living here in Bridgeport...

EK Oh yeah, I had to travel. At the early part of the trade, before we got any conditions, 'cause all it was a dues collecting agency, named union, but you had no, hardly any, what's that, benefits.

I Oh really?

EK Yeah.

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I So what was the pay like? Did it vary from job to job?

EK When I first started, when I come in and we did right after the war, the Bridgeport Brass job, we were getting \$1.37 an hour. And when I left, 25 years ago, it was up to \$14, now with benefits. You got travel time, you got show-up time. Before if you showed up on a job in the morning and it was raining or snowing, they'd send you home

I Oh, and you didn't get any pay for that?

EK You didn't get nothing. Not even show-up time. Now, then they finally won in the contract, you get two hours. You had to be there at 8 o'clock and you stayed till ten and then at ten why...

I But you would get paid for that?

EK You'd get paid for the two hours and that would help you, your travel expenses, the gas and all.

I These were all things that had to be negotiated.

EK This was all negotiated. But it was only in recent years that they were negotiating somewhere where you got some semblance of.... It was never a real strong, in spite of its struggles, they never did attain a powerful arm as a union. In fact, when you read the history of the ironworkers' union from its inception in 1903, it was murder. Members being killed left and right, falling off the iron. There was no safety measures of any kind. There was no belts, no safety belts, no hard hats, and you know. As I say, it was only in recent years before I retired, well I would say 35 years ago because I'm retired 25, that you enjoyed some semblance of.... Of course, their pension plan isn't that bad. Not for me, cause it was, when I retired it was just the start of the pensions plan, you know. And I'll never forget when I come to the hall one day and I says to John Sullivan who was the business manager. Incidentally, the guy had his master's in English. And he was doing the job up in uh...oh, him and I worked on the Veteran's Coliseum in New Haven.

I Oh really?

EK In the course of conversation I said to him, John, what the hell are you doing here? I says, a goddamn ironworker, you know. Well, he says, what's wrong with it? It's an honest living. I says yeah, but I says, your educational background, don't you feel that it's sort of a waste? No, he says, the old papal encyclical says there's dignity to all labor. ((Laughter)) And I says, well, I'm not going to sit back and see this talent go to waste. I says, how about running for BA?

I That's business agent?

EK Business agent, yeah. And he says, I don't know, do you think I stand a chance? And he says, what does it cost to try? And I was pushing for that because we had corrupt guys. Unfortunately, one of the guys was a good friend of mine. A friend, I don't care if it was my mother, you know, it's a matter of principle. So, anyway, John ran and he won. And he did a good job. He started reforms. Then he found out that the two business agents, the business agent and the assistant business agent, had a secret pension plan that the local was paying them,

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over and above the plan that we had by contract. He stopped payment on that and confiscated the money. But John did an excellent job. He started reforms. In fact, the International called him a number of times. What the hell are you doing down there, you're rocking the boat. Oh, he says, you ain't seen nothing, he says. Before I get through it's gonna look like we're going through a typhoon.

I How large a local was it, at least here out of the New Haven office?

EK The what?

I How large a local was that, how many ironworkers?

EK Oh, men? When I started I think there was about 250. That was in 1946. And when I left there was 500. Because we did have a spell there that was pretty prosperous in building there at that time.

I When was that, in the 60's?

EK No about 20, yeah! Yeah 60's. And we had prosperous times. Let's see, my chain of thought broke....

I Okay, so things were booming like in the 60's....

EK Yeah, they were doing pretty good. And then when I retired. Of course, this is where reading pays off. Not that I consider myself a Ph.D. in political science, but I used to follow it as a hobby, you know. That's why I don't belong to any party. No, I had taken and I bolted I was a Democrat. But I bolted that when the hierarchy of the Democratic Party had shafted what's his name, McGovern, when he ran. When he got all the young, the guys from the 60's in there, the young students and all. They seized control of the Democratic Party and as a result, the hierarchy of the Democratic Party shifted over and voted all for Nixon. Now, to verify that, my little grandson was having a birthday party. So we had it at the Stratford Inn. And at that time, McGovern owned it. Right? We had a nice little party, a nice place, and who comes in? McGovern. So he come in, introduced himself, and we got to talking, him and I. And I told him how I had taken and bolted the Democratic party because of what the hierarchy did to him. And he threw down the crap, tried to smooth it over. And I says, no, I says, Senator, I don't operate that way. But he was nice, a very good guy. And incidentally, he's a professor of political science at Montana State, I think it was.

I Yeah, I'm not sure where, but I remember hearing that.

EK Pretty savvy guy.

I I voted for him in my first presidential election.

EK Well, my last one, and I'm not going to condemn him in entirety, Clinton, but I voted for Ralph Nader when Ralph ran for election.

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I Well, maybe we should save our opinions on national politics. Well, I'll get going. I'm a political science major too.

EK Were you?

I What were some of the other jobs you worked on as an ironworker?

EK Bigger jobs?

I Yeah. You mentioned what the New Haven Coliseum?

EK New Haven Coliseum. Close your ears. Mianus River Bridge. I was the rigging foreman.

I Really?

EK Yeah, but that's not our fault. Hey, our job is like the old military adage, you know. Yours is not to reason why, yours is to do or die. They hand you the plans and say put this up. We do.

I Yeah, you build according to specifications, right?

EK I was so incensed about the report from the DOT and the different investigating agencies that investigated the cause of the collapse. Nobody, but nobody, nothing in the report about what did the iron 'rockwell' do?. Now to explain that to you. You take a piece of steel. And they have a machine that's got diamond points on it. You press down on it to see what the density and hardness of the steel is. They measure that, density and hardness. They didn't say that the goddamn steel comes from, what's that, Korea, you know. And it's like putty or lead. Plus the fact that that center span that comes down was attached by hanging straps, you know. And the state highway department is supposed to send guys up there to inspect that, the bridge. How the pin is, is it wearing, is it rusty, is it, what's that...you know?

I Oh, over the course of time, they're supposed to...

EK Yeah, they're supposed to go up there periodically and check it. And they used binoculars. Nobody'd climbed up. As a result, the pins were...the straps...I'm trying to think...I think it was an inch and a half thick, they were about a foot wide, and you had a seven inch pin on top and a seven inch pin on the bottom. Incidentally, that was set at two o'clock in the morning. Coldest damn day I ever...It was jacked up on jacks. We built the span on two Pennsylvania railroad barges welded this way.

I Side to side?

EK Like this, to take the whole span. We erected it on the barges and once it was erected and ready to set, we just moved the barge in and then jacked it up.

I Okay, so you built the span on the barges...

EK Got them in position

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I And raised it.

EK And jacked it up. Jacked it up higher. And we waited for the tide to come down and that's when we fitted our pins.

I Oh the pins which would support, hold it, on either side.

EK See it had two straps, here.

I Okay, so as the tide would come down, then it would line up.

EK Then you take the pin and line up and what's that, drive your pin in and then when the tide goes out, then you could see the barge going down and there was no contact, which was holding itself up now.

I But as you said they used what you believed to be inferior steel.

EK Inferior, what's that, plus grossly neglected, what's that, inspections. And they didn't put that in, of course. This is the government here. You know, everything, cover it up so...

I Okay.

EK And then another. Tappan Zee Bridge, I went to work there.

I Oh, really?

EK Yeah, I went there and that was six days a week. See, what they did to induce guys to come work on the bridge.... See, in them days it was double time for anything before 8 o'clock in the morning or after 4:30 at night, that was double time. In fact, if I started on the job, brand-new tomorrow morning at 7 o'clock, I'd get double time from 7 to 8 o'clock. See 8 to 4:30 was a regular working day.

I And the rest like premium time?

EK That was all. And what they'd do, they'd give you, they used to call it six tens. You work instead of eight hours a day during the week, you'd work ten. You'd come in at 7 and leave at 5:30, you know. And you did the same thing, they'd give you an extra day. They gave you Saturday. As a result, that damn near compounds itself and you'd come home with a pretty decent week's pay. And so it paid. So I worked on that. And then in New York on the Secony building, that was 42 stories.

I So you were up there doing whatever...fitting the steel, the girders...?

EK Oh yeah, erecting the steel, fitting it. And they did away with rivets. They used to have riveting gangs rivet the points, but now they have high tensile bolts and all you do is put the bolt in and you have an impact wrench, let say 750 torque. And you put it on and you set the gun. When it reaches its limit on the torque, the gun shuts itself off and it won't spin no more. This is all new stuff now coming in. Now what else?

I Okay, well, maybe here we can just shift a little bit to talk about what was the makeup of the union, or of the ironworkers? Was there a particular ethnic group?

EK Oh, hohoho. I'm glad you asked that. When I first went it was exclusively Irish. Exclusively Irish. And I remember when I first come in with the local there was a guy he was a good friend of mine 'til this day. He's 95 years old. He's one of the finest men you ever met. Pete Labello. Pete was running for BA And on the job, you're talking. Who you gonna vote? I'm gonna vote for Pete. You're not Irish. You see what I mean? Well, eventually what happened, the so-called ethnic groups started encroaching, getting a foothold in the local. So, it's not all mixed, it's, you get a pretty good cross-section. And then, I was always pretty popular. I run for the executive board. I was vice president of the local. Pretty popular. I got to thinking and I, oh. In them days, they used to sneak them in the back door. It was all nepotism, favoritism. You know. And we would say, bring 'em in the back door. Sneak 'em in the back door. That's just what they were doing.

I By that do you mean friends or relatives you'd get them union card?

EK That's right, that's right. Give em a card. So then, what Leo Dunn, who was the Deputy Labor Commissioner, who was a good friend of mine, I started to draw up a plan, whereby not only the ironworkers... I wanted to go through all the building trades. And we drew up a program that potential candidates had to go to Hartford and take an exam. Something like a civil service exam. This was only to measure their intellectual level because we had so goddamn many dolts, you know. Living on their father's reputation, you know.

I Okay, sure.

EK So you take an exam, and as I say this was mainly to measure the intellectual level of the prospective what's that...

I Candidate?

EK Candidate, yeah. Well, they finally got it through as a program, but it was diluted in a lot of respects. I didn't like it, but, hey, half a loaf is better than none. **((Tape is turned over))** I was the CO-chairman in the Southern Connecticut district of that program. Well, that meant that we were taking minorities and it was lily white.

I Up until that?

EK Yeah. And this was one of my aims. I don't care how other people feel. When is there going to be time for the blacks after three hundred years? When? Never mind this story about well, we're not ready for them yet. Baloney. So anyway, we were starting to bring blacks. Holy smokes. My credit rating went down to about zero minus. So what do you brand them? Nigger lovers? And who does it come from? Mostly ignorant, what's that they've got all they can do to sign their name. And we did. We were bringing in blacks. Then, this incident happened on the Coliseum. So they sent a black on the job. So it later come back to me. And he says well, Eddie's, what's that, the nigger lover. let's send him to Eddie and let him... The most beautiful specimen of a man you ever seen. Black. So I talked to the guy. Hey, a fellow human being. I says, this is what I expect. And now we were putting up sheets at a 45 degree angle under the

Coliseum. And I says, Bos, look, there's a clean can of gas, there's clean rags, and I says all I want you to do is wipe the film off of these, but don't scratch them cause it's going to show. Okay, that's good, yeah, I'll do that. Geez, I'm up above there with the gang we're putting... and he's prepping the rags on the what's that, loaded with sand, scratching. Oh my God! I come down I told him, you know I tried to put him straight. Then about 20 minutes of twelve one time I says to one of the guys, I says Jimmy, I says get another sheet up. He says who's going to hook on to it? I says what do you mean? I says where the hell is Bos? He says look down the street. And he was there twenty minutes of twelve and talking to the meter maid. A black meter maid. So he's got about three strikes against him there. And I'm trying to exercise a little patience. Well, he come back and I says, hey, Bos, we gotta knock this off. I says, we go to lunch at 12 o'clock. About five of you sneak off. But I says we can't tolerate this twenty minutes of, I says. There's all of us up on the scaffold there waiting for a sheet and I says, you're down the street there playing grab ass with a meter maid. I know, I know. So then I had the job here at the courthouse at the corner of Main and Fairfield. The Superior Court building. So that was another..... We'll send him over to the nigger lover. So they send him down there. Of course, as big as the guy was, as beautiful a build he had, he was useless. You know they say "shiftless," and he was a... Now you're trying to talk to the guy, you're trying to teach him something. Now another thing. The gas and acetylene, the acetylene and the oxygen. I had to go to New Haven, to the Coliseum to get it, you know, cause that's where it was all delivered, you know. So when I got it here, when I needed it, I used to sparingly use it so I didn't have to run to New Haven for it. So it was a Friday night and I says to Bos, unhook the torch and I says take the welding leads, I says pull them all in for the weekend. You know, cause they go through the building on the weekend in spite of a guard. They'll steal only your welding leads, that's copper. So I says, disconnect the burning outfit, make sure it's shut off good. All right. So we come in Monday morning and one of the guys was hooking up the burning outfit, turns it on, and no gas and no air. He could have blown the place up with the acetylene leaking and in an enclosed room.

I Not good.

EK Acetylene blows. So anyway, he wasn't there that day. He took a day off. The weekend. I guess his social life was interfering with his... well, anyway. When there was no gas and no air, well, I went out of my mind. Now I had to go to New Haven to get started. There you had three or four guys hanging around. So I called Chuck, he was the general foreman, and I said I'm sending Holden down and what's his name. Give him a bottle of gas and air and I says that. That guy says you give me his money and I'll go to his house and fire him. Now I got it up to here. Well, to make a long story short, he come in Tuesday morning and Chuck says, "hey! don't start, Eddie fired you yesterday. Here's your money." So he went and they had a monitor, the blacks did, which was good. And the guy was fair, very fair minded guy, in the event that you thought you had an injustice perpetrated against you, they would iron it out. Well, he went there to see him. And he says he got fired. Why'd you get fired? I don't know. Chuck called me he says, hey, take an afternoon off and go down to that office. I went down and I talked to the guy. I had a meeting with him and I told the guy I wanted him to be there to defend himself. When I got through talking, you want to hear what he said to that guy? One of his own blacks. Useless!

I This monitor, who did he work for? Was that through the union? Was this a government person?

EK Huh?

I The monitor was this a government person, union?

EK State, state, state. That was state. They used to iron out the beefs. Then what they did, his job was, and he was a good guy, he was rough though. Whoo! Another big one, as big as what the, but no-nonsense, and as straight as a die. You know there's no gray areas, it was either black or white. And he was a nice guy.

I Over the years, did the local become more integrated?

EK Oh, now, yeah. Very. A lot of them. In fact, I'm surprised that even some of the southern locals have the blacks in them.

I So some of that resistance at least...?

EK It's still not what I think it should be. All right, we got 20 percent of the population that is supposed to be minorities and in spite of what people think of this affirmative action and all, give them the jobs proportionately, what's that, 20 percent or whatever it's supposed to be. But it hasn't reached that. Although I will say that they have made great strides. 'Cause I worked on that Grasso College in Waterbury and we had some guys come in there and I felt so sorry. A colored woman, an old grandma come in appealing, at least hire one or two boys, the blacks. And I says to her, I says, they'll be here in the morning. I called John Sullivan. John was a very fair minded guy, educated. I says, John, I guess I'll have to put a couple of blacks down here. Oh sure, he says, I'll send you a couple of them. They come down, nice guys, the guys were good. They weren't the, what's that, champions, because they haven't had the experience. But they do what you told them and no rhubarbs, nice guys. And then she come down a couple of days later to thank me for it.

I Let's see, I guess we're pretty well wrapped up. The only other thing, as I was saying earlier, this tape is going to be in the library archives.

EK Right, right.

I So if there is anything you'd like to say to posterity, or to your grandchildren? Or whatever, there you go.

EK Oh I got what, four grandchildren. They're doing good. Of course, we lost a son, 43 years old.

I I'm sorry to hear that.

EK Yeah, an exceptional brain, smart kid. Very bad back problems. And my daughter, she works in Stamford for Admiralty Associates. I don't know how to explain, their job is like, say a shipping line gets in trouble with a government somewhere, they go out and try to, sort of a diplomatic corps, public relations.

Ed Kuba

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I Okay, is there now any message you'd like to leave, anything you'd like to say, any message?

EK Yeah, I would like to say one thing. I don't have no faith at all in what's going on now, this globalization, where we lose our ethnic and cultural identity. And that's well in the works now, I don't know whether you're aware of it or not. You can tell by things that are going on now. I'm talking about the globalization of the economy and everything. How do they achieve that? They achieve it only through one way. Through a monopoly, right? You got your megamergers, you got your megatake-overs. Everything's going into monopoly which is part of the program for this globalization. That I can't buy.

I Okay. Anything else?

(Background voice) He said enough.