



MASSACHUSETTS CULTURAL COUNCIL
FOLK ARTS & HERITAGE PROGRAM

AUDIO TAPE LOG

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Fieldworker(s): Maggie Holtzberg

Interviewee(s): John F. "Jack" Sullivan and Paul Butt

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Brief summary of tape contents: Union history, family background, ethnic make-up of Local 56, weather affecting the job, Sandhogs on the Callahan, informal "apprenticeships" in the old days compared to today, improvements in safety, monkeying a machine, hearing protection, John's story about a mishap monkeying sheets, pranks, learning on the job, oldtimers' reluctance to share knowledge, the importance of knowing your knots, Red Adams, percentage of black men in tunnel work, racial discrimination, Nova Scotians in tunnel work, safety equipment, loss of hearing, jobs on the Big Dig, South Station, Mike Tanney slipping in stream of water, Edison No. 2 manhole, work flow, working nights, excellent truck driver, slurry walls and iron workers, long hours, the amazement of what happened under Atlantic Avenue with the Central Artery just "propped up," new technologies and less need for welders, the rag man and second hand clothing, the time before hard hats, John's story of the swinging pelican hook, Paul's constant worry of endangering co-workers on the job, John's mishap with the floating canoe, accidental death on the Deer Island outfall job, John being the first to the body, watching the Tall Ships from a helicopter, what both men miss about working "the men", riding the T, Dudley Square, commuting to job sites, annuities and pensions.

Counter/ABS	Contents
	MH: It's May 6, 2004 and I'm back at the Pile Driver's Local Union 56 with two gentlemen. Just start by telling me your name and what union or unions you've worked for.
	PB: Paul Butt and I've only worked for the Local 56. How many years? Thirty five or six, something like that. I'm retired at 53.
	MH: That's young.
	PB: Tough life.
	JS: John Sullivan, Local 56 since '67. Before that, Local 88. Retired, '60. 65 years of age.
	MH: Are you both from Boston?
	PB: Well I live in Everett, brought up in Saugus.

JS: Originally from Dorchester, now live in South Braintree for the last thirty-some odd years.

MH: And family going back from Ireland?

JS: My parents are from Ireland, my wife is from Ireland.

MH: From where?

JS: Kerry, Kenmare. County Kerry.

MH: It's beautiful country. (laughs) Oh, because it's your wife's country?

JS: No I'm only kidding. Yeah it's beautiful. So I don't know what it'll be like when I get back there.

MH: And what about in your family?

PB: Ah, my father was born here, my mother Newfoundland.

MH: I heard there were a lot of Newfoundlanders.

PB: There used to be a lot of Newfoundlanders in 56, yeah, lots of them. I don't think there's any anymore.

JS: It was predominantly a Newfoundland Local when I came on.

PB: Yeah, there always was. No more.

MH: Yeah, what would be the makeup.

PB: Today you mean? Quite a mixture.

I don't know, in my time, 88 it was about 50% black, 50% white. Mostly, a lot of Nova Scotians, a few Newfoundlanders, cause they worked in the mines in Nova Scotia and New Brunswick. When I came in, pile drivers still predominantly Newfoundlanders.

It was all Newfoundlanders I think just about. Not all, but I mean, predominantly. It was all water work. They were brought up on the water, so. A lot of the Newfoundlanders that worked in the Local in the winters they used to be fishermen. Because winter work really slowed down at that time, not today.

MH: For construction workers.

JS: Construction workers, yeah. Tunnel workers, no. Weather makes no difference. Now why would it make more difference in pile driving?

Well you're outside whereas the tunnels are underground.

MH: Ok, because the pile drivers are getting to the part to be underground. You go in there first, right?

PB: Well, it depends, you might as well be out in the weather if you're underground anyway. Years ago, the weather made a big difference. I think it made more of a difference in the equipment. You couldn't keep the equipment going in the winter. Where now you can basically.

JS: No frost. The equipment's so big it just pounds through it.

PB: Yeah. Starting machines up you couldn't keep things going.

JS: Funny Paul mentioned that, I actually worked for very little with Frankie, but I spent one day setting fires underneath that rig (?) and at 1 o'clock they gave it up because the oil wouldn't flow well enough to keep the machine going. It was a different way then. The conditions, the weather conditions were altogether different.

MH: In general was it tougher back then, just in general.

PB: I don't think you had the clothes back then that you have now. Now you've got the nice suits, you know they're warm.

MH: I mean for instance, this winter that was so brutal. I couldn't believe that people were out working in it, and they don't even look like they're wearing enough.

JS: Well you've got that thermal stuff and nylon. The clothes are a lot better. The clothes are a lot better.

MH: For either of you, were your fathers in the trades? Talk a little bit about how you got into the trade.

JS: Well, Sandhogs basically was working non-union labor and then they needed so many guys on the Callahan because of the money that was in the Callahan, so it took a few weeks to finally, they were going through men pretty fast. A lot of guys would start, work two hours, three hours, and that was the end of it, walk off.

MH: How come?

JS: It was pretty hard work. Pretty hard work underground at the at time. It was mostly spader work. I actually remember guys who couldn't get into their cars after the first day of work because their hands would be so, couldn't get your hands from the pounding of that hammer. Couldn't open the locks. I actually remember that. So that's how I got in. And then when I was digging for the pile drivers and they asked me would I go pile driving, so I did.

MH: Did you have to an apprenticeship?

JS: Not in my time. No. Not at that time. Which is a great thing they have today.

PB: Yeah, that's right, when we did it, they used to take you out in the hall and tell you to tie a bunch of knots and ask you a few questions. They did, they used to make a little committee, and they'd go out and ask you to tie a bowline on something, put a six-penny in a ten-penny nail (?)

They probably did yeah.

JS: Just because I had worked the years with them, around them, digging for them, I probably did more lagging then some of them did, at the time. But they didn't have apprenticeships. The knowledge the kids have today, they're very foolish, they don't keep it up.

PB: They come in now and they know everything, a little bit about everything anyway. They know the basics about everything. Years ago you just started from scratch.

MH: And you're really learning on the job.

PB: Right yeah, now when you get a journeyman who came through the apprentice program, they know what they're doing.

JS: Yeah, they do.

PB: Some real good ones.

JS: They're so specialized today. Some guys never do anything but finish our countertops or welding or whatever it happens to be.

MH: Yeah, is that partially because the technology has gotten more advanced?

PB: The companies are so specialized. Very few general contractors do a job today. Call general contractors, they sub almost everything.

MH: I see, more specialized. It's like medecine.

JS: Yeah, same idea.

MH: So you're father wasn't a pile driver?

PB: No, a lot of my relatives were, but my father wasn't. My father was a guard in the Callahan Tunnel, in the summertime. They weren't too crazy about that because some super said they took them down to show them what was going on he says that's like galley slaves in Rome, he says. It's that kind of work, at the time, you know.

MH: It's pretty rough.

PB: Yeah it was pretty rough. But a good bunch of fellows.

MH: Good camaraderie?

PB: I thought so. In today's environment it's altogether different.

MH: How?

PB: Well, I'm kind of out of the loop now too. I still go to the union meetings, and there's not many I know there any more.

JS: Oh in fact I should get to one fairly soon

PB: I'm one of the old ones that shows up. It's amazing. It's just a different group. And you know that's the way it should be I guess.

JS: Today they're a lot stricter too.

MH: Safety?

JS: Safety is a big improvement, big improvement. When I think of some of the things we used to do.

PB: Oh yeah, the things we used to do you absolutely you'd be in jail if you did them now. You would.

MH: Give me an example.

PB: Well I mean just priming the monkey, monkeying a machine, climbing up to the top of a machine. You'd never have any safety line back then, you'd just go up and do your thing and you'd come back down. There was no such thing as hooking up anything or a safety line back then, wearing safety glasses, nothing like that.

JS: I regret, the hearing protection was a big thing.

PB: Yeah, yeah.

JS: Today there's really no excuse. I hate to see guys out there not wearing it. I even wear it a good part of the time just tilling, keep the noise down for the damage it does.

PB: Everything, they've got something for everything now. Monkeying sheets. Is there any such thing anymore? I don't think so.

MH: Those are the things - Somebody would be sitting on top of that.

PB: You'd just sit on top of that. It's only that wide. [holds thumb and finger up to show a few inches.]

JS: Funny things happen with that though. I was, Dave Frye for some reason wasn't monkeying. Hank told me to monkey, where the ramp used to come down near Haymarket Square, on the night shift so I went up and monkeyed a single sheet so I'm up 45 ft. something like that. I'm sitting there waiting for the next sheet. Now I'm facing the ramp coming down from 93. Two to three in the morning. The poor guy slams on, hear an awful screech on the brakes. I looked because, I can see what happened now. They guy's coming down, and to him, here's a guy sitting in mid-air, cause you can't see the sheet that I'm sitting on, there's only one sheet. He slams on the breaks (laughs). That wouldn't happen today.

PB: No, or like, was it Jackie I think it was Jackie Dunlevy, down the Fort River, he was sticking sheets out in the middle of a river and it was a windy night. And he's sitting out there, he's out by himself just sitting in the top of the sheet and the operator swings the sheet over for him to stick and just as it gets to him the lights went out. (laughs) So he figures he was going to get killed by the sheet so he jumped overboard and the lights don't come back for another five or ten minutes, they look up and he's gone. And they caught him out floating out somewhere, they caught up with him. You know, it could never happen now.

MH: I asked Dan and Dave about this and they said no, but I know that in other trades when there's a greenhorn, someone new on the job, typically there's some prank, there are traditional pranks that are played.

JS: Oh yeah.

MH: And I was just curious what they would be in pile-driving. Especially in the old days.

JS: Oh I don't know, I remember them sending people out, didn't happen to me, for a bucket of steam on on Carter's old rigs.

PB: Yeah, I can remember, yeah, looking for, telling them to go get a left-handed monkey wrench.

JS: There were some common ones. I've experienced so much with the others, I'd already been a laborer, already But same thing happens to you. I remember the tunnel,

Callahan, the first day, they kind of tell you to shovel out the lower level as it's coming down. And you know, you can't hear it. I mean there's about 15 guys on spaders. But it's very very loud. Earl White the foreman, his face, he's on the next level, like at that beam [he points to an overhead beam about 8 feet overhead. and he's hollering for a spade. I don't know what the hell a spader is. And hollering and hollering. Finally I said, I'm going to walk back to Johnny MacNeil, Nova Scotian guy, and he's says, "It's right on the motor. There it is." So I learned. If I don't know what the hell he's yelling about, I'm going to ask MacNeil. A couple of days later he wants a buster, which is a bigger, 90 pound hammer. So I just did the same thing.

There's nobody to teach you the early things. Like when you come down levels in the tunnel, all they had was 12 x 12s. They had hydraulic jack on the shield And that would hold the earth back til they got to that level. So your job in the lower level, was to get ahold of that 12 x 12 when they released the jack. Well the first time I did it, I was young, you don't know. You put your arm around the 12 x 12, cause it's going to be heavy. You brace yourself. But nobody ever tells you that the arc[?] goes out a couple of inches before it came back. By that time my fingers were going into the mud. I couldn't get them out. But it was mud, thank God. I think about it; I said, if it had been a rock in there or something, I might be missing a finger.

MH: And nowadays, they'll teach that stuff in the apprenticeship?

PB: Well, they make you a lot more aware of the safety. And I think the insurance companies have made the companies a lot more aware of safety, than in our day.

JS: That's the biggest difference now I think is the safety thing.

PB: You could not do what we used to do. Not that I'd like to see it back where it was. It was no good. But it was just the way it was. You also had people that didn't want to show you anything.

JS: Oh yeah. Some of the oldtimers.

PB: A lot of the oldtimers didn't want to show you anything.

JS: Because their job was-

PB: Afraid of their job. No, they didn't want to show you anything.

JS: That I think is true. They were much more aware of when you became older, the company would hire a younger man. They were right in that respect.

MH: And there wasn't protection through the union?

JS: Not that you have today, no.

PB: A lot of the oldtimers didn't, they were afraid of their job. They didn't want to show you anything. Not all of them. There was always somebody that you could get some information from. But you had to kind of pick through it and see who you could get the right information from.

JS: I was fortunate when I started. I had a few guys that didn't have a problem telling me anything. Red Adams and people like that. Some of the old philanders[?] they came from hard times.

PB: Red Adams, he knew his knots.

MH: Now wait, what's up with the knots? Why are they so important?

PB: Well it used to be, everything was on the waterfront back then. You needed to know how to tie something up.

JS: Besides, it was dangerous if it slipped overhead --a knot slipped overhead carrying a load would be dangerous.

PB: A lot of those times, you used ropes back then that you couldn't use now either for tying something up.

JS: You couldn't tie up a barrel with a rope nowadays, you'd have to a lift. You used to have to tie something up.

PB: Most of those guys were good - fishermen were good at that, the Newfoundland guys. They knew that stuff.

JS: And they knew the wood work. The timber work.

PB: There was a lot of timber work back then.

JS: He was an interesting guy, Red Adams.

PB: He was.

JS: I ran into him at Quincy one time. They had clog dancers up from Tennessee up in Quincy Square about 12 years ago. Cause he came from Loretta Lynn's area. He knew all that stuff.

PB: Used to play the jew's harp. He was a good guy.

JS: I think that was the best job I ever had. Oh I tended Red Adams one time, diver for two days. It didn't amount to anything. We were working for J.F. White chinking up the bridge on 93, up in the Merrimac River. So you're sit in the boat. Red would come up about once every 45 minutes. He'd go back down again. He'd be roaming around in the swift current down there, trying to get something done.

MH: Did both of you do diving?

JS and PB: No I didn't.

JS: There weren't many divers at that time; it was all hard hat.

MH: Is the competition between the tunnelworkers and the pile drivers? Cause some of the jurisdictions are the same.

JS: Oh yeah.

PB: We all think it's our work and they think it's all their work.

JS: I know cause I've been in both of them.

PB: It's been that way forever too.

MH: Well the way Dan described it, the pile drivers seem to be much more diverse in what you have to do. Is that true?

PB: Well I think that's probably true.

JS: Yeah. I haven't been in the tunnels in years but they operate a lot of equipment now that when I was in the tunnels, Local 4 was the only operator of equipment. But now I think most of that machinery underground -

PB: I started in '63. In those years, sandhogs - there wasn't much work for them. There was no tunnels going on. The only ones that used to work were the, remember they used to go down and bell out the bells for the New England piles. New England foundation.

JS: Work was slow, after the Callahan Tunnel.

PB: They went down to very few members, if I remember. ANd at that time they were almost all black.

JS: They were more than 50 percent black.

PB: I think it was more than that.

MH: Were they from the South or were they from here?

PB: I think they were local.

JS :Well nobody, I suppose it's racial discrimination thing too. Most white men, especially in southern areas, would never do that kind of work.

PB: I remember the first time I saw it I couldn't believe what I was seeing. They'd lower them down and they bring a little shovel about a foot long. And they'd send

buckets down by hand. And they'd fill the buckets and the other guy would pull it up. They'd make a big bell on the bottom of the thing. Nobody else would do it, I would think.

JS: It's hard work.

PB: And they were all nice guys. They all used to have funny nicknames.

JS: They were real gentlemen. Bobby Gilchrist. Nice guys.

MH: But now it's not done by hand.

PB: No, no. And now it's mostly white, I believe.

JS: Well it varies across the country. You get further south, Baltimore and that area, they've held onto their work.

MH: Were there a lot of Italians?

JS: If you're talking about tunnel workers, say at the Callahan Tunnel, a few. It would be predominantly Nova Scotian, PEI, blacks. There were a good many Irish. The ones that got killed were Irish guys. When the crane collapsed, '61 I think it was. I was in the army that year.

MH: And the safety record on the Big Dig seems to be incredibly clean.

JS: Very good.

PB: Very good. By that time, the safety equipment you'd have to wear was altogether different. You were issued glasses and safety belts.

MH: Is there any talk about being wimpy? I'm just curious about when you lived through that -

PB: I never thought it was wimpy.

JS: I will laugh. He knows Big Dave, I was working for Big Dave over at the Broadway Bridge. They had a big coffer dam there. And he wanted me to put the safety railings on. So we talked about it. We had to run a cable all the way around. So I'm going to weld. I said, "Well we'll get some nuts." We didn't have anything special. So I got some big nuts. I'm going to put them on every other sheet at the right height. But now of course there's no safety line for me.

PB: No, of course not.

JS: So I'm dragging the leads, which is a couple of hundred feet by the time. I put connections every 50 feet, so I could keep adding on it from the outside. I go inside, I've got to have on the vest. Got to have protection. Got to have a shield. Got to carry the leads on my shoulder. What else did we have? Had to have glasses. I'd have the hearing thing on. It got to the point where there's about 70 pounds - so I says, "What am I going to hang on to, you know." Cause there's water there. Geez, what a job getting that thing on. Dave was laughing. But the safety aspect of it is much better.

PB: Oh yeah. I got all my fingers. Fortunately. You got everything?

JS: Hearings not too good. Everything else seems to work alright. Which is a big thing. When you think of guys like Jackie Butts with fingers missing. Missing fingers were a common thing.

PB: Sure, oh yeah. There was a guy who had all of them gone. He lost the whole four of them. He had a half a stub I think on this one. He says, "Just enough to pick his nose."

MH: Now did people tease you about your last name?

PB: No

MH: Cause it's a name for pile drivers too?

JS: YOu don't hear that often, "pile butt."

PB: West Coast you do. You never used to hear it here.

JS: Curly [?] is the only one that uses it, that I know of.

PB: I thought it was "buck." Pile buck.

JS: Yeah, he says it both ways.

MH: Can we talk about the Big Dig a little bit, and it meant to you to be involved in that project?

PB: It meant getting the last few years in through retirement. I know that. It was a nice job for me. I started, my last four years before I retired. I was over with Perini on South Station. I retired from there.

MH: Which part of the South Station?

PB: I was on the street. I started on the street, more of the T Station stuff over in South Station, than anything. Removing the stations around.

MH: Before they froze the ground?

PB: No, that was the other end. This was just getting access; moving stairways. Remember the elevator that took forever? It's still there. I thought that was temporary. That's still there. It was terrible.

JS: It was a big deal. I think they thought we might bore through to the Federal Reserve.

PB: That was on the other side of the street. They used to have the guards come every night and close the gates. There was a lot of work right there in South Station, just in preparation for the dig to go under there. Move a stairway, make a new stairway.

JS: Awful lot of tedious work.

PB: This is right up against the Federal Reserve. That was where Mike Tanney - you talk about the safety - he went on night. He had to go the tunnel and he had to weld something. He has fifty feet of welding leads on one shoulder, another fifty on the other. Course boots and everything, because it was all mud. He had his shield on, up. And he's going down. He says, "I see a little stream across." He says, I was just going to bound across it.

JS: [laughs] He's a big guy.

PB: A big guy - he weighs 250 pounds. As he bounds across it he sinks in the mud. He can't get out. The shield went down. So it's pitch black - [chuckles] and he was just stuck there. Until somebody went down and pulled him out. I forget who it was.

JS: They'd have a hard job pulling Mike out.

PB: That was the start of that. It was really trying to get things - they weren't really up on what was going on there yet.

JS: Well I think it was such a big job, a lot of those younger engineers hadn't s[?] out some of things through.

PB: That was where the Edison No. 2 manhole was. Where the power lines come into the manhole. It was right on the corner of the Federal Reserve Bank. I'm surprised it wasn't dug up when they built the Federal Reserve, because it was real close. So that had been there a long time.

You'd have something to do and you'd always run into something that wasn't chartered. An electric line. Every day you'd seem to find something new that wasn't supposed to be there.

MH: I'm just curious how the work flow is. Do you all meet in the morning and they tell you what to do?

PB: Everybody had their little sections where they gear up. Everybody would come from the office to the supers and they'd have things for you to do. They'd talk about it the night before. One guy, Bobby Bowlin, he was a carpenter super and

he ran that corner. That corner was his. We'd have to come in early sometimes, if we had to take some steel out of the hole because you couldn't close the road down. So we'd have to be off the street by six in the morning. So we'd come in early to load the steel down, enough for the day. You might go a week before you have to come in early again to do something else.

JS: That was probably the busiest section.

MH: What did you work on during the course of the Big Dig?

JS: On the Big Dig? I forgot how many sections I've been on it. I was on nights. I had a gang making up the first pipe struts they were doing in the yard. We did nights following Paul's days. Different things happened. I give credit to one guy there that no one's ever mentioned, the truck driver. They had a truck driver, I remember his face but I can't remember his name. They had a mix-up one night right on that corner. When they were putting in the slurry wall beam, 120 footer -- picker on the back end and a big crane on the front end. Stand it up, put it in the hole. It was one of the first ones we put in. Then they had to reposition the second one. Because they came in the wrong way, so the truck's facing Chinatown. He's O.B. Hill's driver.

PB: Dave Price? Dave worked for Perini but I think he originally came from O.B. Hill.

JS: I know the guy. The tall guy - he was good because when he came into the yard, the crane wasn't big enough. Bobby couldn't boom out at all before flipping that thing. So we had him drive, get it up in the air, and have him drive underneath it. But this time, they had the beam on the truck and he's facing the wrong way and they got to go back to the yard with this 120 foot beam. So they asked him how is going to get back there. So he says, "I'm going to reverse." So he put it in reverse from South Station, main entrance, along that curve in the road. And he said, "You've got to put a state cop up in the expressway, so the back end of the beam is going to go in the expressway. Then I'm going to take a right on Congress. A left on Congress." That's what he did. Snaked that thing, with his mirrors. Put the back end up on the expressway all the way back. That's three blocks. He's a good driver.

PB: That was a tough job. Dave Price was good too. He turned one of those beams around in the middle of the street.

MH: Now union would that be?

JS: 25 I guess, Teamsters.

PB: Good drivers. They saved you a lot of time. And those were the first beams going in down there too.

MH: Describe what these beams are doing.

PB: They're slurry wall beams.

JS: They were big beams. They held the retaining walls on each side of the tunnel apart.

MH: And so you would excavate first?

JS: These actually went in first.

PB: They went in before. You'd dig down a little bit, you'd put that in, then you'd dig down underneath it. That was after the slurry walls were in. That was later. Cause we were there when they put the first panel in. First slurry panel went in up by the Mass Highway building. Me and Marty and a group of ironworkers. I think it was 100 foot panel and it had to be spliced. It was the first one that was going in so nobody was sure of what you were going to do. The ironworkers do their thing, asked to splice everything else that was in it. The night it was supposed to go, it was supposed to go five o'clock in the afternoon. We were there until four o'clock

the next morning. Coldest day of the year. It must have been ten below zero out there. Started to snow. And you were stuck. You had the thing up in the air. You had to finish no matter what.

JS: I remember working 28 straight hours one time. Got the panel in and then the rolled in on it. Couldn't get the depth. Take it back out again. Start all over.

PB: It's amazing that it got done as well as it did.

JS: When you were talking about the meetings of the big ones, the top supers, it wasn't the Central Artery, some of them, the oldtimers had a sense of humor. They had one, you probably knew him. Freddy Grove, he was a master mechanic for Perini. Sharp guy but, you know, rough. They had a problem with a chemical they were using over at Harvard Square for their panels, the carpenters. I know because I was doing the welding for Freddy and I heard about it. They had a big meeting, all the supers. Brought in some chemists - something about their qualities under water and stresses on laminated plywood. Chris McDermott thought a lot of [?] when we asked him. Well what do you think about it? "If it was me I'd get pigeon shit," he says. "It sticks to everything." [laughter] Some of the oldtimers were good. But the Big Dig, the size of that project - the specialized equipment they had was amazing.

PB: If people could just see what was happening below, like under Atlantic Ave. Things were slowed and people were having to deal with some stuff up top, I mean people walking by. But if they ever realized what was happening underneath, they couldn't even imagine it.

JS: I don't think that most of them knew that the Central Artery is just really propped up overhead. That was a lot of work - the beams that carry that. Carry that weight, transfer it over.

PB: When I first heard it was going to start, I couldn't imagine doing it. You know, propping everything up and going under it. And it went pretty good. Traffic still flowed. There was always something that was screwed up a little bit. All in all, it's amazing that it worked as well as it did.

MH: Were there any moments that you just suddenly were amazed at what was taking place?

JS: Yeah, when you see some of the size of the panels and the new technologies they have, compared to years ago. If they did that the way it used to be done with the beams and steel, they'd need an army of welders.

PB: Just the layout alone - years ago, fitting beams. You had to fit them in. Now it's all, they jack and wedge it. It basically all comes from a factory. We used to do it all by - you'd have to measure up. We'd have strings and lines trying to fit a beam in. It was great work too. I used to love that work.

JS: The Big Dig, like this morning, I don't know what was going on with traffic this morning. But it's a horror show.

PB: I came over on the Ted Williams Tunnel; I came in here like nothing.

JS: Yeah, it's working great for certain things. Other people, I'm sure they were sitting on the Expressway say, "What did we spend all this money for?" Cause it doesn't seem to be moving any different than it did. [talk about traffic]

MH: Your picture is in Dan McNichol's book.

JS: Well I had a lot of fun with that picture. There is only one full-page photo in the book. Eddie Robertson. Welder. They were razing me.

PB: They should have names in that book.

MH: So where were you working?

JS: At that point? I was hooking up a vibrator. That would be the old telephone building on Atlantic Avenue. That would be the corner of -

PB: That was early on. I wasn't even on the project yet. I think I was still on the outfall. I was in the yard making up the diffusers and sending them out there.

JS: I'm trying to think of what the name of the street is. If you go down Atlantic Avenue, it used to be telephone building. Modern converted it. It's the sheeting they were afraid, it's over the Blue Line. So it was very fussy on the depth of the sheets, so they wouldn't hit the Blue Line.

The clothes we bought off the rag man, the name on the overalls happened to be Jack for the first time. It's usually Sam or Louis. You laugh about that - at one time I went to cash my check at the bank and the clerk was a new clerk. I know most of them. I could tell - the used shirt, I used to buy them cause you burn them up. They'd have all kinds of names on them. The name did not tally with what I was signing the check for.

PB: He used to be on the job every week.

JS: I don't know if the rag man still come to a job.

MH: A rag man?

JS: We call him a rag man. The father started it.

PB: He died in a car accident. He had a nice business. It was all used clothes. He'd get new stuff too. If he didn't have what you wanted, he'd have it the next time. Come round the job with used clothes.

JS: He had a store in Malden, Medford. He was good. Nick. There's a guy still coming around but it's not Nick.

MH: What about - what people put on their hard hats.

JS: The stickers. I never used to do that.

PB: It seems hard to look back now on our time, I'm sure Bobby remembers when we didn't have hard hats. Hard hats were just about coming in. We used to have them and wear them most of the time. And they were tin, can't have them now because I guess you can get shocks. And Frankie, they were pretty safety conscious way back then even.

MH: Was there, thinking back, in the whole realm of danger and caution, can you tell me a story or an experience in which you really felt that you were in danger, on any specific job?

PB: I thought I was in danger on a lot of them.

JS: I can remember some of them. I remember one time, Hank was the boss. Dave Frye was there. I was welding but they had put out a long sheet, 60 footer, as a walkway. So they wanted to take it out of there. So, are you allowed to use pelican hooks anymore? I don't know.

PB: I think you can probably use them but I don't think you can pick anything up with them. They call them sorting hooks now.

JS: Well I went up and I stuck the hook in. Whatever happened, the hook was in there. But it tore the lock out as I was walking back. And that thing came flying back. I grabbed it and it took me from wherever I was, 45 feet, right back into crane. I always remember Hank saying, "Scared the hell out me." I says, "How do

the hell do you think I felt?" If I had missed that, it probably would have taken my head off.

PB: I remember those. We used to use those all the time.

JS: You had to be very careful. You'd always be watching the other guy. Cause usually there's two of you. If one of them put it on the wrong way, the beam would flip.

PB: If yours flipped out, it wasn't going to get you probably, but it was going to get the other guy. There was a lot of safety stuff. I think one of the main reasons I retired was I didn't want to get anybody else killed. That was always my main concern. That bothered me a lot. I was just as glad when I retired just for that reason.

JS: I think the worst mess I got myself into, thank God the coast guard didn't catch me. I was working for Soupy. Soupy Reagel[?] called me up. They had floats over onh Deer Island. They had those collars on them. I didn't put them in. They rolled up and down on the collars. Pipe pile. That's where the computer boat left the workers off. Tuckerman had the job. They had an aluminum canoe for the welding. What we had to do, the water was right here. There was about, depending on the tide, 15 inches. You had to do overhead welding underneath too. So there was no room. I took everything out of it, because you'd have to lie underneath. I said to Soupy, "You've got to stand there, because if a wave comes while my head is underneath there, goodbye."

In order to go from this cluster of piles to the next one, we would throw a rope around and he would pull me over to the next one, and I would get underneath. After a couple of days of this, it was getting to be a nuisance. It was cold, winter, March. I decided that I could reach most of them myself. So I would push off with the canoe. I only had to go about seven feet. So I would give myself a good push, get a hold of the next pile, pull myself in, tie off, go underneath and weld.

So we're doing this for about two weeks. One day, it was the outside one. And I pushed off. And I got my fingers on it. Whatever it was, the wave or the wind, I couldn't hold. I had to let go of it. Soupy missed the line. And I'm drifting out into the harbor in March in a canoe. No oars, no paddle, no nothing [chuckles]. And he's hollering. I just sat as low as I could go, cause it was cold. I was about, I don't know - I was out a few hundred yards off Deer Island. The comuter boat saw me. And so did the tug. I'm looking and they're both coming. And I'm thinking, "I'm staying low in the water." I didn't have a paddly or anything. Didn't even have a life preserver. I'm thinking if the coast guard ever comes, this is going to be a classic. Geez, I hope the tug gets here before the computer boat - the tug's low, I can step onto the tug. I don't know how the hell I'm going to get on to the comuter boat and I don't want him to wash me, you know? Then I realize the tug is pulling a couple mud scows behind him. The comuter boat veered off, let the tug come get me. So we made it without the coast guard coming after us.

PB: A lot of things can happen. In no time.

JS: Never figure that would happen. It's the same as poor Richie [either Richard White or Charles "Ricky" Spears?] that got killed in the outfalls there. It was an awful shame too. The drill guy there - when they were putting out the last diffuser. You're thinking about Billy and his partner [William Juse].

MH: What happened?

JS: Well on the first one, they were on their last diffuser offshore. We were going off shift because I was on the platform, waiting for the helicopter. I think I was the first one to get to Richie.

PB: Is that when the door flew open?

JS: Yeah.

PB: I heard about it. Actually I was in bound, doing the -

JS: It happened so fast. I saw him going up in the air and I ran down.

MH: Wait, what door? What do you mean?

JS: Well they had this big, it was 100 tons at least, they had this apparatus that you would put into the water and they would drill through it. It had a drill platform on top of it. But when they first put it in, it sinks. Then they decide when it stops sinking. Whether there is a boat under there or whatever. When the men stepped to release it, Richie - it dropped. And that pushed the pipe up and threw the doors open and threw him. And it's hard, because . . . [he sighs quietly] I don't know. I think today, I never took a CPR course. Today they do this, which is good. Cause I've been three times to the body first and it's hard. Because he's down in the well. - you ever saw it Paul? It's about twelve foot deep. And the caisson's right there. So there's only room for one man. His body is upside down. He wasn't Mike Tanney's size, but they called him the Gnome, kidding him. Cause he was a short, powerful guy. And I had Scotty throw me a rope, to tie around my waist, in case it would drop further while I'm trying to get him.

Now I know you cannot disturb the back of a man's spine. I'm been fighting about this even after that. Fought with Cashman about it. They put baskets on the job. You know, man baskets. But you should have a board with every basket. We didn't have a board to slide under a man's head. So I held his head, best I could, til we could get him into the basket. And the EMT is saying no, but I said, "Well, I'm the only one here. Unless you find a way to get down here, what can you do? You can't get a basket here. We got to get him up." But you know, you're very - forgetting the legal issues, you're trying to get the guy on the helicopter to a hospital where he can get some attention. But it's hard. Very hard.

MH: Was it the impact that -

JS: Well those are very big steel gates. When he landed, he landed inside ?pipe.

PB: When the pipe comes in, there's a working platform that comes down this way. It closes around it. Now you can work around there. Now when this thing flew open, he was gone. I remember hearing about it. Like I say, I was inland.

JS: Only found out later that that man Richie had done two tours of duty. He's decorated from Vietnam. Because Mike Davies said he's pretty sure they taught that in marine corps boot camp, whatever he had done in Vietnam. And to get killed on the last diffuser tunnel on a freak accident like that --

MH: How awful. And you were the first to find him.

JS: Yeah. Some things happen. You can sit around and talk about the correct way to do it after. Hindsight is always perfect. We all did things in hindsight, if we learned the hard way the first time. Never going to do that again.

It's a shame. It did cost lives, different parts of that project. Although, it was very safe.

MH: Was is it more than one pile driver?

PB: Was he a dredge man?

JS: Dredge man, out of New York. Dredgemen had part of the work and we had part of the work. I'm not sure - he was buried in Hull, but I'm not sure if later on, the wife had him interned elsewhere. I know it was Richie, but I don't know Richie's last name.

PB: I didn't even know him. He was kind of big guy.

JS: Yes, nice guy too. Powerful guy.

PB: The dredgemen were there a long time, after everybody else was gone. I guess they had a different kind of a contract. Cause they were sitting in the yard until they shipped all that stuff back to Amsterdam.

JS: Well the drill [?] went to South China Sea.

PB: Who was the captain: Hime? They had containers that were going back, going on deck. And I know he had a new Ford. At the time it was a new Ford. And there was one of them in the container and there was also a new Harley Hog in there. I guess it was probably three times as much money back where he was going than it was here.

MH: Well the money was good on this job.

JS: Oh yeah.

PB: There was a lot of money to be made on all those jobs.

JS: A funny aside to that offshore job was we flew out of Long Island. So when the Tall Ships came in I had a beautiful spot set up to watch the Tall Ships. Mary, you know my wife Mary - can't get her onto a boat unless it's the Queen Mary. I tried to talk her into getting a helicopter ride to see the Tall Ships. Cause the guy would fly, the helicopter pilot, if he's on a refueling stop would take a couple of people for a ride. If he wanted the weight. I tried to talk Mary into it and got her out there but she wouldn't get in the helicopter.

There was a guy in that drilling outfit - he was Danish. He grabbed Mary and pulled her over to the helicopter. She didn't want to object. She sat strapped into it. Deathly afraid for a couple of seconds. Then we flew over the Tall Ships. Then she says over the Expressway, "You ought to get one of these things." I says, "Oh yeah, this is just the way to commute."

PB: I never was out there. I was always loading the stuff on the barges.

MH: That's the Deer Island project?

PB: Right.

JS: It seems to be working. I don't see anything about pollution of Cape Cod Bay that they were talking about?

MH: Is there anything you miss about working?

JS: I miss some of the guys.

PB: That's the only thing I miss.

JS: - Not all of them.

PB: I do the same. I really miss, sometimes in the morning, talking with them. Actually some of the rain and weather delays, sitting in there talking with different people. I've missed that stuff, but I don't miss the work one bit.

JS: I think that sums it up. I still do my own stuff, but it's mostly the comraderie and most of the good guys.

PB: There were a lot of good guys.

JS: And you miss them. I think things have changed. Paul, being from Everett, probably had similar experience. But being from Dorchester, you grow up with the T. I did. Never bothered me at all. I still like the T. I still go into Roxbury and Dorchester any time of the day or night. I miss that part because in those days, you would meet everybody but today everybody's spread out.

PB: Yeah. I remember we used to work in different jobs -- the Hancock, different places and you'd take the T. Half the T seemed to filled with guys from the job when you left.

JS: That's right.

PB: It was the easy way to commute.

MH: It was a tighter neighborhood.

JS: Yeah, a much tighter neighborhood.

MH: Were you around - you know when the Dudley Square - there was this heyday of Irish music.

JS: Yeah, the Hibernian and the Colonial. Yeah, I worked there. Well, if you get into the ethnic thing, it's funny. I can remember some Newfoundlanders, I always thought they were Irish.

PB: Oh yeah, well. A lot of them probably were.

JS: John there from New Hampshire. The ruddy faced fellow - I always thought he was from Ireland. The T was a good way, you'd meet a lot of people. And you'd walk a lot more. Because if the bus wasn't there you would think nothing of walking five or six blocks. But today it's different.

PB: But they must still do that because there is no place to park in town.

[more about getting to construction sites and how it was easier to park within neighborhoods.]

MH: Tell me again when you retired.

PB: I retired - well I'm a member of the golf club for 6 years. So it was 6 years ago.

JS: I was just ahead of that. I think I retired just ahead of that.

PB: The times have changed. The men have changed too. It worked out good for me. Not many guys retire at my age. I had 30 years in.

MH: Did either of your wives work?

PB: I wasn't married. That's why I could retire.

JS: I didn't have the 30. I had 30 in but not 30 good ones. 28 and a half, or 29. Had I stayed sandhogging, I had 45, 46. You lost it when you changed from one. Didn't lose much because the pensions weren't that big. You started out at what? 25 cents an hour. They were just starting that.

PB: Back in '63, I think they just started the pension that year.

JS: Didn't have an annuity. I remember when they voted on the annuity.

PB: I remember there were big arguments. All the new philanderers[?] saying, "I can save my own money. I don't need this." But they're all glad they have it after.

JS: Life is hard today for some of the people that are drawing those minimum pensions. That is not an easy thing.

END OF TAPE 1