

KENYHERCZ, John

Historical Collections, Bridgeport Public Library
Oral History Project, “Bridgeport Working: Voices From the Twentieth Century”
John Kennyhercz (**JK**) interviewed by John Soltis (**I**).

Transcript

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I John, could you tell us when and where you were born?

JK I was born in Bridgeport, Connecticut on March 18, 1953 at Saint Vincent's Hospital. As a matter a fact, where I work today.

I Okay, so you were born right here in Bridgeport, what neighborhood did you live in?

JK I lived on --at 458 Hollister Avenue. That's where my folks lived when I was born. And it's right between Connecticut and Stratford Avenue. And the funny part about it is that my parents were the second owners, they bought the house in 1941, they were the second owners. The house was built in 1865, they bought the house in 1941, they moved in 1955, and the third owner, the family that bought the house from us is still living there. And I think that's intriguing, after all those years the house has had three owners.

I Well over a hundred years.

JK Yes, that's surprising.

I That is. Where were your family originally from? Where did your folks come from?

JK My, you know, the funny part about that is my parents met, both met in Bridgeport. They both came to Bridgeport in 1938. My mother was from a small town in Pennsylvania called Perryopolis, Pennsylvania. It's like 30 miles southwest of Pittsburgh. My father was born in a small town in the same county called Orient, Pennsylvania. They never knew each other, they never knew each other there. They met when they came to Bridgeport. My father actually, his parents moved back to, both his parents were from Hungary, they moved back to Hungary when he was fairly young. So he was born there, he was about a year old and he moved back to Hungary and stayed there until he was eighteen years old. He was, what happened was he was an American citizen and it was the Second World War was breaking out so his mother wanted, since he was born in the United States she wanted to make sure that he served in the United States Army. So she sent him back with his other brother who was also an American citizen. So the funny thing is, when he came to Bridgeport, because he had an uncle here, he's an American citizen and couldn't speak English.

I That's something. (laughter) And how about your mom? What brought her to Bridgeport?

JK There was, lemme see, it was, I think, I'm just trying to think how old she was at the time, I think she was like 22 years old. There was no work out in Pennsylvania at all, it was during the Depression the mines had closed. And she came, she actually came from a family of eighteen brothers and sisters, so she had some relatives who were living here. There was a lot of work here, so her father said that, suggested that she should come out here to visit her relatives because it was a booming place. Actually, I jumped ahead of myself, that wasn't, it was after the Depression, it was like 1938. So she had moved to Pittsburgh from that little town where she was born and then from there she moved to Long Island and then

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she had family out here so she decided to move to Bridgeport and she came here in 1938.

I Okay, and what was your mother's ethnic background?

JK She was Hungarian as well.

I Okay, so Hungarian on both sides?

JK Right. Her mother were Protestants, but her mother was actually Jewish and when she got married she converted, so she's actually from a Hungarian/Jewish background, my grandmother.

I Okay, and so they met here and in 1953 you came along. Tell us a little about your family life growing up on the East End of the '50s and I guess early '60s.

JK I actually moved out of there in '55, so I was like two and a half years old. But the funny thing is, is that they still kept up a relationship up with the old neighbors. There were families that lived together on the same street and they built a relationship when my father owned the house and there was, one of them was the tenants and there was the two sisters lived next to each other. So we still maintained a relationship after my parents had moved out of the neighborhood so it wasn't unusual to go back there and visit the people there.

I And where did you move to when you left the East End?

JK Yeah, when we left Hollister Avenue, moved to Ridgevale Place, it's the Upper East Side between Treeland and Hawley Lane Mall. So it's on the Bridgeport/Stratford/Trumbull town line. You know, the funny thing is for me to go to work or leave my house, my street, which is in Bridgeport and go over to the next street, half of that street's in Bridgeport, half is in Trumbull. Or the street in front of my house, the next street over from in front of my house, half of it's in Stratford, half of it's in Bridgeport.

I And what was the name of that street again?

JK It's Ridgevale Place.

I Ridgevale Place. And, so that's where you grew up?

JK Pretty much, yeah.

I And what type of neighborhood was that?

JK I wouldn't say it was as close as it was on the East Side, but it's a middle class neighborhood. Most of the people around there were either policemen, firemen, or they worked at Sikorsky's or Remington Arms or G.E [General Electric]. So it was a pretty middle class neighborhood.

I And where did you go to school?

JK I went to Thomas Hooker School and then I went to Harding High School for two years, then I went to the University School in Bridgeport for two years, that's where I graduated. I went to Norwalk State Technical College, I also attended, which was in Norwalk of course, I also attended the Connecticut School of Electronics in New Haven, graduated from there, and I also took some courses at Housatonic.

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I You've been around. Tell us a little bit about some of the social activities, maybe during your high school years, that type of thing. The kind of typical Friday or Saturday night, where'd you go for fun?

JK Well to tell you the truth I went, I was basically a bookworm. So, I'll tell you, my idea, I would enjoy going to the library. The funny thing is, even though we're going to be getting to that, I worked in a movie theater, I wasn't really much of a movie goer. So aside from a couple of record hops or socials in high school, that's just basically it.

I Okay, well you mentioned work, so I guess let's move into that area, which is sort of the focus of what we're doing here. Tell us about your first full time job.

JK Actually, while I was going to college I worked for the City of Bridgeport, for the Youth Employment. It was called Project YES, it was youth employment for summer. And I worked, the first year I worked, I actually worked in the Police Department.

I Excuse me, about when was this?

JK That would have been....

I Late 60's?

JK No, it was actually, 1972, '73 and '74. So I worked pretty much as a laborer and then I was supervisor coordinator. That pretty much was a full-time job --it was only for the summer, and then after school, full-time career job, if you want to call it, was at Columbia Broadcasting System Labs in Stamford. What my focus was when I went to the Connecticut School of Electronics was for broadcast engineering, I got my FCC license. And then there weren't too many jobs, broadcast engineering jobs. So I would work part time to fill in with the chief engineers with both WICC and WNAB in Bridgeport so that when I got out of school, when I graduated from school, there weren't practically any jobs full time and it didn't look that promising long term, as far as a career went. So what I did was I went to work for CBS in Stamford. I was a quality control technician and inspector in the broadcast equipment division. So some of the equipment that would see in a radio station, line amplifiers, limiters, modulation monitors, I worked on that at Columbia Broadcasting in Stamford.

I And how long were you there?

JK I was there for just about a year and it's funny because I started working there for four dollars an hour, it was a hundred and sixty dollars a week driving all the way out to Stamford. And what happened was I had a friend that worked at Fermont Division, make engine generator sets in Bridgeport on North Avenue. And when I found out that they had an opening there in the quality control department, I applied for a job there and I got a whopping five ninety two an hour. (laughter) So I worked there for two and half years.

I What type of job was that, you say Quality Control?

JK Yeah, quality control, in other words when the control units for the engine generator sets came off the line, what I would do is I would inspect and calibrate the control units. Now what these, it was both for the Department of Defense to contract and regular, what they called commercial line. In other words if there was a power failure, they were diesel driven generators and it was automatic, let's

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say, for instance, the power dropped out, well the engine would start and the generator would start and you would get emergency lighting, emergency power from the engine generator sets. So it was both, like I said, for the Department of Defense, so in other words out in the field somewhere, where the soldiers if they didn't have electricity, they need the electricity for the camp they set up or for communications or what not so, we made these engine generator sets.

I For the Army?

JK For the Army.

I How a big a shop was this, how many people worked there, approximately?

JK Approximately, I would say maybe about a hundred and fifty people. It was very small, a small operation.

I Did you have union there?

JK There was a union there, but I was a salaried employee. The salaried employees didn't belong to unions.

I I assume you had vacation time, sick days, that sort of thing?

JK Yeah.

I Do you recall any strikes or lockouts while you were there?

JK No, not really, because it was basically majority of their work was government work. Where the government was involved, when they had a government contract they tried to do everything in their utmost to keep people from striking. Funny thing is, both of my parents worked at Remington Arms, it was the same way at Remington, even though they had a union they never went on strike. The government was right there to try to make them come to some sort of agreement so production would continue.

I I see.

JK So it was never, even with the union employees, never any problems as far as that went.

I So generally you'd say it was a good place to work?

JK Yeah. You know the pay wasn't really that great for the hourly employees there. They had a lot of immigrants and lot of minorities, lot of immigrants so the pay was, it was just a little above the minimum wage at the time. So whatever the management said is what they did, they went along with, the unions.

I I see.

JK They really didn't have the backbone, it was important to get whatever they could and settle.

I Sure. Where did you go after that?

JK I had a friend who worked in a hospital taking care of the heart monitors. Basically it's a piece of electronics, whether it be a radio or heart monitor, it was pretty much the same.

I All the same?

JK It may be, it may perform a different function but it's pretty much the same.

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Works the same way, a transistor does what a transistor does, whether it's in a radio or an amplifier, whatever. I got to know him quite well and the work seem to be pretty intriguing, so it took me a good two years to really get into that and as a situation of applying for a job at Bridgeport, applying and it took a good two years 'til the position opened up, then I went to work over at Bridgeport Hospital.

I How long were you there?

JK I was over at Bridgeport for about eight months. I went to work there, went on call, but I had a disagreement with my boss. Now if you go over there and if you look at the record and the funny thing is that I had gone over there, they had asked me to go back there. I basically was fired from the position, but they called me after two years after I working for St. Vincent's Hospital they call me up and they says there's an opening we'd like to have you go back. Come back and talk to us. To be honest with you John the only reason why I went there was to break 'em off on them. I had no intentions of going to work there, but I went there and demanded whatever the hell I could from them. Sat down with the guys, I mean I was really obnoxious. Sat down with them, this is what I want, that's what I want, that's what I want, okay we'll offer it to you, you want the job? I said go to hell and I walked the place. It was terrible. (laughter) I felt good when I went back to work. The funny thing is I went and sat down with them over at the personnel office, they said why'd you leave and they had a file this thick on me and I says "c'mon". I says "you that file in front of you and you're asking me why I left?" I says "it's gotta be right there in front of you," so she opened up the file and looked. There was an interview with my, who would've been the Vice President and my immediate manager and they had an exit interview with them and they says, no, he comes highly recommended and we would hired him back in an instant. I was just completely floored when I saw that, but I never went back there.

I So you wound up at St. Vincent's?

JK Right, actually the day I left there and I went home, I took a shower, I got dressed, I went to St. Vincent's Hospital and I was hired like that (snapping of fingers).

I And you've been there since?

JK Ever since. It'll be, twenty years this past August.

I Tell us a little bit about your work there, how its evolved over, you know twenty years is a long time, what you did when you first started there. What you're doing now?

JK Basically, I'm pretty much doing the same type of work. Except with a computer technology, it's evolved to the point where a monitor back twenty years ago was nothing more than a narrow band width amplifier, with a monitor. To where everything is basically computer based now. So when you see the monitor in the intensive care unit where I work, you're looking at the monitor but it's basically a computer. It's a PC that takes information, physiological parameters, whether it be blood pressure, invasive blood pressure, respiration, pulse oximetry in other words it's checking the oxygen percentage in your blood and it takes an analog signal and converts to digital form, stores it and then displays it on the monitor. So it's all computer based now. When I first went to work there it was like, when I went to work their monitors had vacuum tubes in them. That's how, it has really, really come a long way.

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I What exactly is your title there?

JK Clinical Engineer.

I Clinical Engineer.

JK And my responsibility is, my areas are the Intensive Care Unit, which includes medical intensive care, surgical intensive care, coronary care unit. The Emergency room and all the equipment related to the emergency room and also some therapeutic equipment that you would use. Like say for instance somebody had surgery, I'm sure you've heard the expression that they shouldn't really staying bed, because the longer they stay in bed the blood clots could form in your leg and so on and so forth. Well, there's a therapeutic piece of equipment that actually massages the leg while somebody's bedridden so the blood clots don't form.

I And your responsible for making sure all this equipment is in the proper working order?

JK Right, right, so in other words it's calibrated so that when someone's looking at a blood pressure there's a certain degree of accuracy in the blood pressure because you figure that they will, not that they will medicate according to that blood pressure, they will verify the blood pressure but they have to make sure that the readings at the parameters that they are monitoring are in fact accurate. So....

I A lot of responsibility.

JK Yeah. And I've worked everywhere in that hospital, so you know the same thing goes on in the emergency room, I'm sorry the operating room, cardiac cath lab, so that's pretty much...

I And do you work with a team or people or pretty much on your own?

JK No, we work with a team, we have our own areas in other words we have our own designated areas like as I said, mine's the emergency room and the intensive care areas. There's another fellow that his area is respiratory therapy so he pretty much concentrates on the ventilators. There's another ventilator or respirators, that's probably a more common term that you would understand. Because now they call them respirators but now they're ventilators; they ventilate they don't respirate. And then someone takes care of the laboratory equipment and then someone concentrates on the operating room equipment.

I And are they salary positions?

JK No, they're actually hourly positions yeah.

I And is there a Union or anything?

JK No, you know the funny thing was the Clinical Engineering Department was managed by the hospital. And it's going on six years now, they decided to get a management company into the hospital; as a cost saving measure for Clinical Engineering Department. It's like the budgeting in the department is over a St. Vincent's is over a million dollars a year so what the hospital decided was it would be more cost effective if they could get a management company in to manage our department. So what happened was, other departments within the hospital saw that this management group was coming in and they got kind of fidgety so they went and they called the Teamsters and as a bargaining unit they come into the hospital and to see if they would represent

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the other employees because they were afraid that they're departments would be taken over by other companies and then push the employees out of the hospital. That basically was unfounded because it, to tell you the truth, the management company that came into St. Vincent's, their whole business was managing departments like ours so they knew what different suppliers to go to for parts.

I: Oh, okay, sure.

JK: For calibration on the equipment. They were actually there, they had helped the hospital save money by instead of going back to the original manufacturer for components for their systems, they went to a third party that sold to, not just one hospital but many hospitals. And then they were able to recognize the substantial savings to the department. And with insurances and what not today you really have to get the most out of your dollar as possible. And I can really understand why they did that, but the other departments in the hospital didn't. It was almost like the focus from the administration was on us because we got this management company in there. They figured that we were the ones that wanted the Teamsters in to represent us and that wasn't true at all. It turned out that the management from this management company was better than the hospital management, as far as we were concerned.

I: But, you still worked for St. Vincent's?

JK: We still worked for St. Vincent's but were managed actually by GE [General Electric Company]. GE Medical Systems and it's called GE National MD.

I: They do this around the country?

JK: They do it around the country --whichever hospital contracts with them. They go and they manage the department at a substantial savings.

I: Has there been any, how has it affected you on the job?

JK: Actually it's made my job a lot easier, because I was reporting to a, --basically an engineering department person and his job is to make sure that the light bulbs are changed and make sure that the sink is unplugged and they need wiring down the hall make sure that the run the circuits and put the outlets in. So he couldn't deal with, it's hard for them to deal with us in our department because it's, in a lot of ways it's direct patient contact. They don't understand that when you go on a call, like say to the intensive care unit, and there's a patient that's in critical condition and there's a problem with a monitor and you have to go in there and you have to find out what's wrong with the monitor and in some instances tell them whether it's actually the patient that has the problem or the monitoring equipment. They don't understand that, because when you go into the bathroom with the clogged sink there's no patient involved, you don't have critical involved. So GE National MD understood where we were coming from because the managers did the same work that I'm doing now at the hospital.

I: Oh, okay.

JK: So they understood, so they actually facilitated our job. They made our job easier.

I: Great. I guess, a little more of this. I'm not going to ask you how much you make but can you give me like the salary ranges in your field?

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JK: It's, you want to know something, it sounds like a crazy thing to say, I'm so content of what I'm doing in my job that I have no idea.

I: Okay.

JK: All I can tell you, is this going to be public or? Like the starting the range is approximately \$24, 000 to \$35,000 entry level.

I: And then it goes obviously up?

JK: And then it goes up with your responsibility, the number of years, whether you're on call.

I: After a while you could be making a pretty decent salary there?

JK: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, definitely. The funny thing is, maybe about five or six years ago they had an opening in the department and they were looking for another person, because the work load is increasing all the time and they got an applicant from Rhode Island. That's the only one that applied in the hospital. (chuckle). So there are not too many people that do it.

I: How about, how are your benefits? I mean do you have good insurance, that type of thing?

JK: Oh, yeah, yeah. The insurance is good and like every other person that gets insurance benefit we contribute. For the longest time we didn't but there is, we contribute to what they got a liberal retirement plan and a mutual fund, matching mutual fund. To a certain percentage they match our contributions. It's a good place to work.

I: Well, you've only been there twenty years, I guess so.

JK: Yeah, well you know, like anything else there are some days when you're pulling your hair out. Like I just pretty much coordinated the installation of a three hundred thousand monitoring system and every month you have, I don't know if you ever heard of the Joint Commission, Accreditation of Hospitals?

I: Yes, as a matter of fact.

JK: They basically evaluate the hospital from every aspect, how the patient is taken care of, how they track their medical records, medications, the types of test that are ordered and they also take a look at how the equipment is inspected in the hospital. They want to see how often it's calibrated, they want to see records on what went wrong with it. How many times the unit broke down, how frequent are your inspections, if they meet the safety requirements. This is done on a monthly basis. There's like, in our department at the hospital there's over three thousand pieces of equipment that have to be inspected at least annually, some of them twice a year. So what they do is they break it up and every month you get so many to do and regardless of what happens, whether I'm installing a monitoring system, that's going to take me a month and a half or I'm tying up loose ends, every month you have to, you have certain inspections done. You have to have a certain quota, you know, I inspected. To maintain the critical information.

I: Is there anything more on your current job that you'd like to add?

JK: Just it's very fulfilling. Very fulfilling work, I enjoy it very much.

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I: Great, I can't think of a good way to segue into this, so I'm just gonna. People are telling me about, Mary [Mary Witkowski, BHC Head/Librarian], who briefed me on this projectionist angle. I don't even know how to segue into that so just tell me about it. (chuckle).

JK: I'll tell you how it came about. It was shortly after I started working at the hospital. The pay was good, there was no doubt about that, but I was in a position where I could've taken a little part time work to supplement my income. I always had an interest in motion pictures. Always had an interest in it. It's very interesting how this happened. A friend of mine was a projectionist and I says I would like to go into movie theater projection booth to see how everything runs, to see how it operates. I had not exposure to it, just in books that I had read. So like two months went by and I don't understand why, I figured it would be very simple for me just to, for my friend just to call me and say you're going to meet with so and so. His shift starts at this time, go in there and meet him, he'll give you a tour of the booth. So after two and half, almost three months I get a call and he said George is going, we'll meet you at the Beverly Theater in Bridgeport.

I: Over in Black Rock.

JK: Over in Black Rock. He says go down there and meet him and tell him that I sent you there. So I walk up into the booth and he starts showing me around and apparently my friend told him that I had some experience with electronics and fixing sound equipment. So he says "oh, you'd be a big benefit to the theater". So we go in there looking at the sound equipment, he come out looking at the projection. He says okay you have to report Thursday to the County Cinema in Fairfield and I says "for what?" He says we're gonna break you in as a projectionist (chuckle). I couldn't believe this. This guy was so gruff, like I didn't want to say no to him. So I went home, I called my friend Mike, I says Mike what the heck is this. I says "now I'm going to be apprenticing". He says "that's the only way I could get you into the booth". So for a year and half I studied, I went there under the direction of this fella I learned how to run movies in a projection booth. A year and half later I went for my test and got a license and I would fill in when the guys had wanted a night off or they were on vacation. So that's how I actually started being a projectionist.

I: What are some of the theaters you've worked in around here?

JK: I worked at the Beverly, the Beverly Theater on Saturday. I use to cover on Saturdays for the fella. I worked in the Klein Memorial when they use to, a couple of times these different groups would rent the theater for a day and they would show films and I was a projectionist there. I worked at the Merritt Theater as a relief operator. And also, did I mention the Hi-way Theater and also the Stratford Theater.

I: Okay, so you had local theaters. I remember some of them very well. Is this something you still do?

JK: No, actually in order to work as a projectionist in the Bridgeport Local you had to be a union member. They were sanctioned by (Tape Ends)....(Tape Begins)...Alliance of Theatrical and Stage Employees, Local 277 in Bridgeport, Connecticut.

I: So are you a member of that?

JK: Yeah, yeah, I was a member.

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I: Is that union still around?

JK: No, they actually dissolved, I would say maybe four years ago. The Bridgeport area pretty much covered Fairfield, Stratford, Trumbull, Bridgeport, and at a one time it was Newtown, so the end of Town Hall in Newtown at one time was a Bridgeport theater. The Bridgeport Local theater. What happened was there were many theaters that closed. If you would remember like the Studio Cinema in Bridgeport or the Hi-Way or the Beverly they were very small, very small circuits and the Merritt Theater. So what happened when the theaters started closing a lot of the theaters that were left went non-union so they really didn't really need licensed operators anymore. And then the theaters that were in there were like the Hoyt Theaters in Stratford, where the Stratford Square, were going non-union, they were owned by big theater companies. Like the '70's and 80's the trend was anti-union so they more less started to shy away from the unions, so there was really no need for it. The strange part about it, it's very interesting is when you had a, it was the responsibility of the union if they had a contract with the theater, it was their responsibility to provide an operator and they would guarantee that they would take care of the equipment that the film would be run undamaged. They were responsible for the booth, they were responsible for the operation. They made sure that the equipment was maintained and as I mentioned if the operator was out sick, the union was responsible for getting someone to cover for him. So it was more of really a security. I mean they got their money's work out of the unionized projectionist. The funny thing is, you remember the Hoyt Theaters in Stratford that I mentioned in Stratford Square?

I: Yes.

JK: Well they were non-union, it was very interesting what happened was after the theater opened up they were getting a lot of inexperienced projectionist. Now I understand, when I studied to become a projectionist you had a minimum of six months apprenticeship that you had to serve. Now I understand it's so bad, you can go up there, get somebody to go up there with you to take a test and they'll give you a license now. I don't know how true it is. What happened at the Stratford Square Theater is was that there was a lot of film that was being ruined, because the projectionist over there didn't know how to set the projector head up properly, didn't know how to make the adjustments, didn't know how to check for worn sprockets. If there were any worn sprockets it would tear the crap out of the film. Paramount showed a couple of movies over there and they were, --there was what they call a first run house. In other words if there was a new movie that came out they would run it right there. It would be anywhere from a month, two months to six months, whatever that first run was. And Paramount was fining the theater left and right because the film was being ruined. They were paying some stiff fines over there. What happened was the Hoyt Theaters over there contacted the Union and asked them if they could put up a Union operator in there. So what the Union says is well we'll put a Union operator in there but after so many months we have to sit down and talk turkey about getting a contracting deal. They didn't want to have anything to do with this so it never went Union over there. So the small houses like the studio, that closed up downtown, the Beverly, the highway theater they were owned by the same family and the owner was getting old he wanted to sell off his theaters and close the door and that was it.

I: And, so today, like with the theaters we have now, this multi screens, these are primarily non-Union?

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JK: They're all non-Union, but like say for instance the Black Rock, the Showcase in Black Rock, there was a former Union member who is the manager operator there now, so even though he doesn't belong to the Union anymore was still a life-long projectionist since his father was in the Union. So even, like he's not paying Union dues or anything but he was at one time a Union operator.

I: So he has the knowledge?

JK: Yeah, yeah.

I: What is the, well I don't know, what does a projectionist make? How do you get paid?

JK: By the hour. By the hour. Usually it's, some operators get as high as twenty dollars an hour. But you figure that the show runs for like five hours a night. And plus with the, what they call the make up and the break down of the show. See, a lot of the theaters in Bridgeport they were carbon arc lamps that lit up the screen. So in other words you need a high intensity light to go through the shutter of the projector to project the image on the screen. And they were carbon arc, they were the old fashioned carbon arc type lamp houses. And people don't realize this, but a two hour film consists of six twenty minute reels.

I: I didn't know that.

JK: So in other words, you'd have to change projectors, you have to switch from one projector to another, six times during the show because there are six twenty minute reels and you have to switch back and forth. So people don't realize it when you're sitting in the, like the Highway or the Beverly or the, even the Klein Memorial that there were two projectors that were running all the time. So in other words when you shut one machine off you switch the other machine unbeknownst to the patrons in the theater. Now-a-days they use what they call Xenon lamps, it's a high intensity light, a very high intensity light. And Xenon is inert gas and what, it's in a big envelope, you know, the electrodes are in this big glass envelope and it's usually filled under pressure with Xenon gas, which when you strike a mark on the two electrodes it ionizes the gas and you get this bright light. Well, you don't have to change or shut this off every twenty minutes now. So it runs, so one show runs continuously, so when I say make up the show, what they actually have to do is they splice the tail of one reel of film onto the head of the other until you get this twelve thousand feet of film on one platter and it runs continuously.

I: Oh, so basically then you just push the button?

JK: You push the button, so that's one of the things that killed the Union, because you have to, when you actually, when you were in a booth you didn't actually sit there and watch the movie the whole time. You were running back and forth to each machine, so in other words when one reel would run out you would start the other projector, the one that you threaded up, and you'd go back to the one the film was just finished and take it out, trim the carbons, you'd take another, like say if you started out with reel number one, you have reel number two loaded and then when this machine shut off you'd load it with reel three. You'd have to thread up, you'd have to make sure it was in sync, you'd have to trim the carbons, test it to make sure that it would light, rewind the film, and then by the time you were finished with that it was time to switch over again. So you pretty much worked all the time that you were there.

I: So just, a technical term there, "trim the carbons?"

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JK: So in other words you have to make sure because it's gonna take twenty minutes for that carbon to burn. Twenty minutes for that carbon to burn down, so what you have to do is in the contacts, you have to make sure that you had enough carbon to last that whole reel of film so the light wouldn't go out in the middle of a reel.

I: I see, that had to keep being changed.

JK: Right, oh yeah. We had to change it all the time.

I: During your time as a projectionist, I imagine you met some interesting people, some of the old timers.

JK: Oh that definitely.

I: Got a few stories you want to share?

JK: You know, this is very interesting because it just so happens that the person that I apprenticed with was my friend. And he had only been in the Union for about five years when he was breaking me in on the job. And the fellow that was the head operator at this theater, just so happens that I broke in at the County Cinema in Fairfield with this story, was that the fellow that was the head operator there was a fireman of the city of Bridgeport, retired fireman. And Mike was showing me how to thread up, how to trim the carbons, the whole thing. How to start the show, in other words you were supposed to dim the house lights so that the attention is focused at the screen, and then when you start the projectors you dim the stage so that the people could, there's still a little bit of light in terms so that they could find their way to the seats and you open up the curtains so that the film is on the screen when the curtains open the whole thing. So this fireman's name was Tom Duling, so he was coming back after one year leave of absence, so I had to meet him in the theater. So he calls me up the night the that I was supposed to go there to work with him, and he calls me up and he says, "when you come in tonight," because he knew I had the keys, he says, "when you come in, I don't want you to go up into the booth, I want you to meet me in the lobby." And he says, "I know you know how to thread up, I know you know how to run the film, I bet you can do it better than I can, but I want you to wait in the lobby for me." So I get there about six thirty and the manager was already there, so I'm pacing back and forth in the lobby, so this fellow walks in. He introduces himself as Tom Duling. So he says, "We're going to go sit in the auditorium." I said what's up with this guy. I've been here before, I know what this is all about. We sit down in the seat, and he says, "Take your coat off." We sit down in the seat and he points to the stage. He says, "This is where our work becomes the most important to the patron sitting in this auditorium. I don't care what they showed you, but I'm gonna teach you the way I think a projection should be taught." And that's when he told me about, you have stage lights to light the curtain up, we got the house lights. He says, "When you start the show you dim the house lights and you leave the stage lit so everybody's attention is focused at that stage. He says, "You never put the light through the projection lens without film, in other words, you don't see a bright, you don't wanna see the numbers counting down at the screen or you don't wanna see a white screen, you make sure that there's always film on that camera, and then he went upstairs and showed me what to do in case there was a break in the film, how to fade it in so that you don't make the screen go bright. You do a fade in; because what blocks off the light in a projector is a dowser. And if there's a mistake made, in other words, if you miss a change-over cue, because remember at that time it was carbon arc lamps,

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and you know what's very interesting, is that, like when I saw the projectors I said, "How do you know when it's time to change over?" Well when the reel gets to the end, two minutes to the end there's what they call a two minute warning bell and you hear this ding ding ding. And he says, that's when you know when the film is about to end. So what you do is you go up and you strike up the arc. And then he says you strike up the arc and then you go to the porthole in the projection booth and in the upper right hand corner there's a series of dots. And there is two sets of dots. You see a dot and then a couple of seconds later you see another set of dots. The first set of dots are to start the projector, the projector with the four reel, and then when you see the second set of dots you push a change over shutter which blocks the light off one and releases the light in the other and then you open up the dowsers so that when the reel changes the continuity is there. So in other words, you're not even aware that they're changing projectors but it's happening six times during the length of a movie. So he says, "well if you talking and you miss a change-over you have to know how to make that change over without getting that white screen." And he taught me how to do that. He says, you never want anybody to see a white screen. And you know I really appreciated it because here is somebody that took so much enjoyment out of his work that he wanted to make sure that he always put on a good show for those people. And I'll never forget this guy as long as I live because here was a true showman. You figure, here he goes, up there with these greasy machines and turns them on and lets the film run. With him it wasn't like that. He was so concerned about putting on a good show for those people.

I: He was a craftsman, an artist.

JK: Yeah ya know, he was so good at what he did that Paul Newman was looking for a projectionist for the theater in his house and he had approached Tom several times to be his projectionist. I don't know whatever became of that, but he was in his 60s at that time. He was retired and he didn't know if he wanted to get into the grind of having to go and put on a show at Paul Newman's house, the biggest critic of all.

I: That's something. You were mentioning earlier before we started the tape about a gentleman that was the projectionist at the Palace, the Majestic.....

JK: Palace, yeah, he was one of the founding members of the Local. His name was Ernie Gilbert and at one time he was even the business agent of the local and his, I was good friends with his son Ray Gilbert and I had met him a couple times because he was, he would come up from, he lived in Florida in the winter and he would come up and stay with his son in the summer and he was still a union member. Funny thing is he was the operator at the Palace from when it first opened to when it closed.

I: When did it open, the 30's or something?

JK: It opened in the 20's.

I: Oh that far back.

JK: Yeah, yeah, and then it closed, you know the funny thing is when I worked for the City of Bridgeport, I worked for the city of Bridgeport, like I said '72, '73 and '74. Now, I remember in '73 the office I worked for was right across the street from the theater and it was still running even back that far. But, I'll tell you, Ernie was also another one that was very concerned about his craft and he wanted his son to pretty much follow the same rules that he followed. I'll tell you

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he was quite a guy. I met him just after he had his 100th birthday party and to tell you, John, what good health this guy was in, he would, when I met him he had all his teeth, he had all his hair. He walked, like somebody that was sixty years old. You would never know that the guy was a hundred years old and then he would fly back to Florida up until the last year of his life, by himself in the winter time. He couldn't stand the cold, so he would fly back to Florida and stay with his daughter when the cold weather came. My friend was very protective of him, his son was very protective of him. The funny thing is, he was telling me one time when his father flew back for the summer, he says he was watching him, well I could see that he was like over a hundred years old, he was watching him all the time to see if there were any changes. See if he didn't look as well as he did when he saw him the last time. His father was an avid sports fan. He loved baseball so he would sit there and he'd read his sports papers, over and over again. So Ray was telling that he was looking at his father and he says there was something different about him. He says, you know, he says, I don't know what it was but he just didn't look the same so he was telling he says "Dad are you all right?" He says "Yeah, I'm fine." Well, he says "You know there's something wrong with you. Are you sure you're feeling all right?" He says "Yeah, Ray" he says "I'm fine". So finally he asked him again, he says "You're not talking much" he says "last year when you were up here you used to talk more." So finally he puts the paper down, he says "Ray, I'm a hundred and one years old." He says "What could I possibly say to you now that I haven't said before?" (laughter). He says, when he said that he, he says he threw his head back and laughed and said he wasn't going to worry about it anymore.

I: That's good and you say he lived to be about a hundred and three?

JK: He lived to be a hundred and three, yeah. Tell you what happened, he was up for the summer and then toward the end of his visit, I think they said he'd fly back after Thanksgiving. But toward the end of his visit, his son noticed that he was, he would get very short of breath. Like the least little exertion he would just get very winded and then here's a fella that would brush his teeth, walk upstairs by himself brush his teeth. The guy was remarkable. So what Ray, his son did, he took him to the doctor for a checkup and he ran some tests and did an X-ray and found out that he was in congestive heart failure. So the doctor said to his son, "look, I'm not going to put him in the hospital." He said "I'm not going to run him through some tests, put him through the rigors of medical tests." He said "I'm going to prescribe this fluid elimination pill, to take the excess fluid away from his lungs." So he prescribed the medication and he was as good as gold. He was able to walk, go outside and get the paper, go to the mall or go to the shopping center. So he flew down, I think it was in November. He got on the plane like he always did and he flew down to Florida. So this one particular night, the thing about a life for a projectionist is usually they stay up all night and sleep all day. You know because, the union meetings use to be after the movies closed at midnight, so they would have the union meetings at one, two o'clock in the morning. There was a fella, a projectionist that worked at the Studio Cinema, that lived across the street from the hospital and if I got called into the hospital, Lenny's light was on, you could see him reading the paper in the parlor. So this Ernie, my friend's father, he wouldn't go to bed before midnight. He was staying with his daughter in Florida and this one particular night he said to his daughter "you know, I'm really, I'm tired. I think I'm going to go to bed." So she thought that was unusual, because here he was somebody that liked to stay up until, they could see the movies at late night and what not. So she put him into bed and always liked to sleep with the covers up to his chin but with his hands on top of the covers. So his laughter put him to bed and she gave him a kiss goodnight, the next morning when she went in to

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check on him he was in the same position that he was in that she put in the bed the night before. He died in his sleep. So....

I: At a hundred and three years old.

JK: Yes, a hundred and three years old and the thing is, that my friend called me up to let me know that he passed away. He says, "you know, there's always something that you wished you could of done." I says, Ray, the way you took care of your father, I says if it was God had him in his hands, that's how good you took care of him. I said you have no regrets, he lived a full life and spent very little time in the hospital. The ironic thing is he died at a hundred and three, his father lived to be ninety eight years old and his great, great grandfather was eighty two and he got hit by a train in Danbury. You wanna know the ironic part about it, my friend Ray who was Ernie's son died at sixty seven years old of liver cancer. So that's.....

I: Failure?

JK: Yes, because he thought, you know it came from a long line, so you never know.

I: Okay, John thank you for that good story and now, we get to the end here, is there anything that we haven't touched on that you'd like to add?

JK: I think basically that was it, you were talking about when my parents came here. It's interesting, because I thought we were going to have a chance to touch on this before I did some research in the library. To find out when my family --when the first Kenyhercz moved to Bridgeport. It's very interesting it was in 1896, it was my father's great uncle. So I had asked him, I says, "Well how did you happen to wind up here?" and again it was from the family. He says, "Oh, I had relatives that moved here." And he says he wasn't sure how far back it was and when I checked the records the first one was 1896.

I: Bridgeporter way back.

JK: Yeah, so we've been here for long time. What I didn't tell is my father was also a policeman for the city of Bridgeport. And he always, Bridgeport was always a special place to him, so he was basically here in good times and bad. The funny thing is that he knew this Ernie Gilbert, because one of the places my father use to work at was the Palace Theater where Ernie worked. So his areas where he would patrol, for security a lot was the Mosque Skating Rink on State Street.

I: Oh, yeah.

JK: Pleasure Beach, and also at the Palace Theater.

I: Yeah, those are three old Bridgeport landmarks.

JK: Yeah, yeah, yeah.

I: Okay, John, thank you very much.

JK: Enjoyable, thank you.