1 BJ: Steelworker?
2 JN: Uh, yeah, I'm a steelworker. Uh, you know, I'm proud I made it through 43 years as—a steel mill is—I had a lot of brushes with very serious situations in a steel mill but [I survived]
3 BJ: [Dangerous place, yeah.]
4 JN: and came out with fingers and toes. And um, I had some serious incidents and I had some real life-threatening, I was in some life-threatening situations.
5 BJ: Tell me [about].
6 JN: [Several times.]
7 BJ: Do you have a good story about a life-threatening?
8 JN: Yeah, I can, I can name one that was very, very life-threatening. We um, we were repairing a pair of steps in the um, in a um, rolling mill area and um ((3 second pause)) they had materials that they brought in to repair what they call a stool on an ingot mold. Now the ingot mold is raised and the stool is another part of, of. But the ingot mold sits down on the stool. Now when they hit steel out of a ladle, releasing, they're releasing 250 ton of steel and it's coming out in a six string, six-inch string.
9 BJ: Hmm.
10 JN: So when it hits, when it hits the bottom of the stool. Well, yeah, it breaks down the, the, the material in, in that stool.
11 BJ: Mmm-hmm.
12 JN: Which gives it a, uh, a pocket [then], you know.
13 BJ: [Mmm-hmm.]
14 JN: So eventually that pocket enlarges to the point where . . . it won't set right whenever they put it in the, in the reheating oven, you know, because now it's got, it's got a bubble in the bottom, you know.
15 BJ: Yeah.
16 JN: Okay. So what they tried to do was, they, uh—they brought in some materials and it was, it was very hazardous. And I don't think that they really explained that, how hazardous it was. Maybe the people that worked with it did, do. But the surrounding people, the people that had to be in and around that area weren't, weren't aware of it that much. But . . . what they would do, is they would put this material in there ((clears throat)) and they, somehow or other they would ignite it. And this caused this material to . . . The ingredients that were in it caused it to melt and solidify and adhere to those particular pockets.
17 BJ: Mmm-hmm.
18 JN: Which then gave it a ((stutters)) a solid and took, took that cavity away. For time being.
19 BJ: Mmm-hmm.
20 JN: Okay.
21 BJ: So these would have to be made out of metal [that wouldn't melt].
22 JN: [Er, er.]

23 BJ: Would melt at a higher temperature than steel, right?
24 JN: Yeah, yeah cast iron.
25 BJ: Cast iron. Uh-huh.
26 JN: Yeah, yeah. The receptors for the, for the steel were cast iron.
27 BJ: Mmm-hmm.
28 JN: There's something about that it would, it was easy to break away steel from cast iron.
29 BJ: Okay, [uh-huh.]
30 JN: [There's a flux], a built-in flux there. Even though, they, they added flux also.
31 BJ: Mmm-hmm.
32 JN: Prior to pouring that steel in there so that the ingots could be removed from them.
33 BJ: Mmm-hmm.
34 JN: But anyway ((clears throat)) this material. It was loosely . . . or maybe through mishandling. But it got into and around, around a soaking pit area. They use coke dust and they would, they would uh, coat the bottom of a soaking pit with this coke dust so when they, when they put the igniters in there to heat the seal this coke dust . . . also would burn so that you had ((stutters)). It would increase
35 BJ: Mmm-hmm.
36 JN: the temperatures so that you could get the steel hot faster.
37 BJ: Mmm-hmm.
38 JN: And uh, this coke dust was just fine coke dust. Black, you know.
39 BJ: Mmm-hmm.
40 JN: This material that they were using for what I described in the bottom of these molds ((2-second pause)) was also like a dark material [and]
41 BJ: [Oh.]
42 JN: it got mixed in with all this coke dust.
43 BJ: [[Jeez.]]
44 JN: [[So now]] we're working on a flight of steps that went to the crane runway . . . and we're in there with a burning outfit and welders and so on and so forth. And um, we had to remove, there was damage. Steps rust, you know, deterioration, tra la la la la la. So we had, we had replacement steps with us and we would remove the, the metal steps.
45 BJ: Mmm-hmm.
46 JN: We would remove the metal steps. We'd use a burning torch and just sever them out [and]
47 BJ: [Uh-huh.]
48 JN: we'd put a replacement step in there and we'd weld it into position.
49 BJ: Mmm-hmm.
50 JN: ((clears throat)) Well, as we were burning these steps, the sparks were coming down like crazy, going down into this coke, this other material=
51 BJ: =This other material.

52 JN: I can't think of the material, the name of the material. ((2 second pause)) But the hazard with that material is, is . . . once that material ignites, you can't put it out with water.
53 BJ: ((softly)) Oh my God.
54 JN: You have to put it out with sand. You have to suffocate it.
55 BJ: Uh-huh.
56 JN: And even though fire departments were called in from surrounding . . . because they did away with cost-cutting, they did away with the fire department in the steel mill itself. They used to have a fire truck, [fire] department, eh y'know.
57 BJ: [Mmm-hmm].
58 JN: But they figured, 'Well, we have a fire, we'll call the fire department. Eh, Braddock, North Braddock, we'll get them all in here.'
59 BJ: ((gasps as if to speak))
60 JN: So now we're working on this thing, and all of a sudden I'm looking and I'm saying—we have a ground crew down there and me and another fella . . . we're up there, uh, removing these steps and uh . . . naturally they, like I say, the sparks are all falling down there. Drips, bolting drips of steel because when you burn the steel these big blobs of steel is all going down. You use a, you get it with, with propane and oxygen. You get it, uh, red hot and then you hit it with an oxygen supply and then it just blows out all the steel.
61 BJ: [Uh-huh.]
62 JN: [You] familiar with that, kinda? Am I describing it good enough for ya? [[( ) Okay.]]
63 BJ: [[Yeah, yeah. I can]] imagine it, I can picture it.
64 JN: Yeah. It goes down there and now all of a sudden . . . this stuff's on fire!
65 BJ: ((gasps))
66 JN: So I'm saying to the gr-ground crew, I said, 'Get that damn stuff out' ((laughs)). Steel mill language.
67 BJ: ((laughing)) Uh-huh.
68 JN: 'Get that damn stuff out, you know it's getting hot up here'. And they're trying. And they're kicking dust on it and they got a shovel and they're throwing stuff on it. Well, the stuff they're throwing on it is full of this stuff that's burning.
69 BJ: ((sighs))
70 JN: ((2-second pause)) This is the truth. It got so hot ((4-second pause)) oh, we almost got burned up. [Me] and another fella.
71 BJ: [Mmm.]
72 JN: And we couldn't go down . . . 'cause the fire was down.
73 BJ: Mmm-hmm.
74 JN: And we were . . . we were probably 25 foot up on a landing or another step. It [was, you] know
75 BJ: [Mmm-hmm.]
76 JN: there was like a flight of steps and then a landing and then another flight of steps before you got to the main, uh, landing on the top.
77 BJ: Mmm-hmm.

78 JN: And, uh ((sigh)) it just got so . . . there was such a raging fire there that . . . we looked at each other and we both ran up the steps, holding our breath because I think if we would have inhaled we'd uh probably inhaled, uh, searing heat. Probably damaged our lungs.

79 BJ: Jeez.

80 JN: And we held our breath and we—and I, I didn't tell him to hold his and he didn't tell me to hold mine. We just knew enough to do that.

81 BJ: Mmm-hmm.

82 JN: And we were scurrying. We made it all the way to the top and we got to the crane runway and then we ran down the cran-crane runway and ran away from the, the heat in that (( )) area, that.

83 BJ: Uh-huh.

84 JN: So that was

85 BJ: Whew.

86 JN: That was, that was a close call.

87 BJ: That [was a close call.]

88 JN: [That was one] that I can vividly remember. And uh, [[and some other ones, there was other ones that were bad.]]

89 BJ: [[Mmm-hmm. Yeah, yeah. Mmm-hmm.]] Well, um, let me just.