

## AMERICA WORKS PODCAST

### OCCUPATIONAL FOLKLIFE PROJECT, AMERICAN FOLKLIFE CENTER

SEASON 04: EPISODE 1: Jude Bejarano. Cement Plant Worker, Evansville, Pennsylvania.

Length: 5:14

ANNOUNCER: From the Library of Congress in Washington, DC.

THEME MUSIC: "Pay Day" played on guitar by Mississippi John Hurt.

**Nancy Groce (Host):** Welcome to America Works, interviews with contemporary workers throughout the United States collected by the Library's American Folklife Center as part of its Occupational Folklife Project.

This is AFC staff folklorist Nancy Groce and this America Works episode features excerpts from a longer interview with cement plant worker Jude Bejarano, who was interviewed by historian Vyta Pivo as part of a project documenting the occupational culture of Cement Workers in Pennsylvania's Lehigh Valley. The Lehigh Valley is considered "the birthplace of the American cement industry." Its enormous cement plants, like the one in Evansville where Mr. Bejarano works, are filled with huge, noisy machines. He told us how he started with "basic shoveling"--because as he said, "you always start at the bottom in a cement plant," and how he worked his way up to a job in management.

### INTERVIEW

**Jude Bejarano:** Another guy told me, "Hey, we're not doctors, we're not lawyers, we're just dealing with dust." He goes, "It's just dirt. And we mix it up and we bond it together and it's concrete; it's cement, right?" He goes, "And if you can get that in your mind every time you come to work that it's just a dust plant—that's all it is, it's a dust plant—and you're just grinding it up and what is cement? The powder, it's just the dust." He goes, "We're a dust plant." So, I use that from all the industries that I'm at, I'm always like—or plants that I work at—I'm like, I tell these guys, 'Hey, don't worry, man, we're not doing open-heart surgery, we're just working with dust.'

When you first get out there, you could just feel it on your neck and in your ears, on your face, in your eyes, in your hair—you don't even know you have it in your hair, you know? So you could be walking around, and then, like, if you go eat, it'll be falling into your food if you don't

blow off, you know, because it's dust. So, it can be overwhelming sometimes. But after a while, it's like, it is what it is. You're going to have it on you.

So, if you're a worker and you're clean, they think you're not doing anything... they think you're not doing it. They think you're hiding on the job, you're running around and you're just messing around or you're talking to somebody else. You better... if you're a worker, you better be getting dirty because that's your reputation, too.

But it is loud out there. You have to take care of your ears.

A lot of these guys are like, yeah, they're a little bit deaf, right? And I'm like... because he's been around us so long. And I tell them, like, "You guys, you got to use earplugs," and they'll be, like, "Yeah, we do." I put my earplugs in all the time. And they're like, Yeah, same with the PP, the hard hat, and everything like that. It kind of all goes together, you know.

Some people are like tired or it's getting hot or they're going through a divorce out there in the plant. I listen to them a little bit. You know, I talk to them, and I ask them how they're doing. And it's kind of like dealing with different personalities, you know... You know who's really, really quiet, so you don't push them and get them to talk all the time. You know, you just ask them how they're doing and go on--or you've got the guy who wants to talk all the time.

In this industry you have to show that you care, because you could be in the office like me, and, you know, you could see me kind of clean. But, when it's time to get dirty with time, when it's really, really hot and even though I've been in the AC, they know I've been in the AC. But, if I show up on a job and I stay with them, they value that like, or "It's really important because you're here with us," you know? So...uh, that's what I see like in my... like, with cement workers, and in miner-- in mining in general--but, cement workers...if they--if you show that you care, they'll do whatever for you. You know, they'll break their backs for you.

If somebody listens to this, they, they see, you know, that there's different people at different aspects of people and it's a diverse group, you know, within the cement industry. Like, like I told you, like they told me, why wouldn't you want to work in cement? It's everywhere!"

## **END OF INTERVIEW**

**Nancy Groce (Host):** You've been listening to Jude Bejarano in Evansville, Pennsylvania. To hear the complete interview with Mr. Bejarano and interviews with other cement plant workers as well as hundreds of other contemporary American workers, please visit the Library's Occupational Folklife Project at [www.loc.gov/folklife](http://www.loc.gov/folklife)--or just search online for the Occupation Folklife Project.

This is AFC staff folklorist Nancy Groce. On behalf of the American Folklife Center, and with a special thanks to AFC intern Elisa Alfonso for her help with this episode, thank you for listening to America Works.

**ANNOUNCER:** This has been a presentation of the Library of Congress. Visit us at [LOC.GOV](http://LOC.GOV).