

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, FULLERTON

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

Newport Beach Community History Project

Fishing in Newport Beach and San Pedro

O.H. 100

ART HILL

Interviewed

by

Charmaine Tichenor

on

December 17, 1968

CALIFORNIA STATE COLLEGE, FULLERTON

ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

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INTERVIEWEE: ART HILL

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SUBJECT: Fishing in Newport Beach

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T: This is an interview of Mr. Art Hill by Charmaine Tichenor for the California State College, Fullerton, Oral History Program on December 17, 1968 in Mr. Hill's business office. His business is the Hill-Cunningham Automatic Pilot. The location is 510 31st Street in Newport Beach, California.

Well, Mr. Hill, I felt very fortunate when I learned that you had been a fisherman here in Newport Beach for many years, but I think that I would be missing a great deal of information, and a great deal of your story of fishing, if I didn't start from the beginning.

H: Well, you mean when I was born?

T: Yes.

H: Well, I was born on May 6, 1903 in Ohio, which isn't on the coast but it is close enough to the coast that we used to go to Atlantic City, [New Jersey] every summer. Then in about 1912 we came to California, and of course, the first thing I wanted to do when we arrived in Los Angeles was go down and see the ocean.

T: Had you done any sailing?

H: No, not on the ocean, but as a boy I had fished in the lakes there in Youngstown, Ohio. And then, of course, I went out on the piers. There were a lot of piers at that time at Atlantic City. As I remember, except for one of the piers, we had to pay a nickel or something to go out on them. And they had the Million Dollar Pier. Of course, a million dollars was a lot of money in those

days. [H. J.] Heinz had a pier that was free, and we used to go out there. And, of course, being young and hungry, I used to go out there and get the samples of the Heinz products all the time. So that kind of introduced me to the sea, and I have always liked it.

T: Did Heinz have a fishery there in Atlantic City?

H: No. They were advertising their fifty-seven varieties of food. They had their pickles and all their different things. They would give you a cracker to go with it, so you could try their catsup, and all their different spices, flavorings, and piccalilli, as they called it, and other products.

T: Now, are you talking about Atlantic City?

H: Yes.

T: So you were about seven or eight years old, then?

H: I was about nine when I came to California. When we came to California they used to have specials on the cars and we could go down to old Redondo where they had three large piers. These piers took the place of what is now known as the San Pedro Harbor, because the boats used to come in there and land lumber.

T: I've heard that was a very, very busy harbor.

H: Yes. And these piers went out to pretty deep water and it was good fishing. I used to go down on the streetcar.

T: Where did you live?

H: I lived in Los Angeles?

T: What part of Los Angeles?

H: Well, I lived, at that time, out at Wilton and Sixteenth Street. On Thursdays we could go down there and back for a quarter. (laughter)

T: My goodness. Those were the days.

H: Yes. So I used to go down. Then, when I grew up, pretty soon, as I could afford it, I had to have my own boat. I used to love to go out fishing.

T: What school did you go to Mr. Hill?

- H: Well, I went to a number of different schools in Los Angeles. The high school I went to was Hollywood High School, but I didn't finish.
- T: Did the call of the ocean get to you?
- H: No, I ran away from home. I wanted to be a cowboy.
(laughter)
- T: Oh, now this isn't leading to fishing at all.
(laughter)
- H: No, it isn't, but there's quite a similarity because one is to get meat, the other is to get fish. And they're both a pretty rough life, I guess, by any measurement that you make.
- T: Where did you go to be a cowboy?
- H: I went up to the Estrella Cattle Ranch, up by Paso Robles. It was a forty-five thousand acre ranch, at that time. I got there about three years after the last grizzly bear was killed. You see a grizzly was an animal that if you were out with, say, a .30-.30 rifle or something, you didn't dare shoot at it, because it would kill you. You had to have a special high-powered rifle, or else you had to hunt them in groups. They were about the only animal in North America that could just go up to a cow, break her neck, and feast on her.
- T: Oh, I've heard some fantastic stories about that animal. How was this one finally killed?
- H: Well, I don't know, but I remember that it was killed three years before I arrived up there. That made it roughly before World War I.
- T: How long were you a cowboy, and what did you want to do after that?
- H: Well, I was a cowboy for probably less than a year. I got sick of that, and then for awhile I went all over the country as a bindlestiff. That's the same a migratory worker. Then I went back home. In the meantime, my dad had acquired a sawmill, so I went up and worked in the sawmill.
- T: Where was this located?

H: That was up where Big Pines is now, up by Wright's Ranch. Of course, that was a long time ago; that was about fifty years ago.

T: What did you do in the sawmill?

H: Well, I did everything because it was my dad's mill. I could do what I wanted, so I felled timber, ran the donkey engine, I fired the boilers, and just about everything that you can do.

T: This is all equipment that they're not using now, isn't it?

H: Oh, no. In the woods today, one man with a chain saw and everything could do about what ten of us could do at that period. But of course, they didn't have the chain saws then. We had to do it the hard way; we had to do it with axes and we had to do it with the saws. And of course, you'd have to stop and sharpen your saws and sharpen your ax. And then if you worked real fast, you got tired and had to stop and rest a minute.

T: How long a day did you put in, in those days?

H: Around a ten-hour day.

T: It was certainly hard labor, I would say. What was the name of your father's mill, do you remember?

H: Well, I guess it would have been called the Hill Mill, (laughter) but it really didn't have a name, except under his own name.

T: Did you have any brothers and sisters?

H: Yes, I had a brother, but he's nine years and nine months younger than I am.

T: Did he help too, at this time?

H: No, he was too little. He was only about seven years old.

T: From the sawmill, what do you recall that you did?

H: Well, then I went back and became a city fellow. (laughter)

T: In Los Angeles?

H: Yes. I got into business as an executive with the Southern Service people.

T: What did they do?

H: Well, they ran thirty-one laundries and dry-cleaning plants. They're still doing it here. They had plants in San Diego, plants in San Bernadino, plants in Los Angeles, and all around.

T: So you had a supervisory job?

H: Yes, I was sales manager of one of the plants. Then they wanted me to go down and take charge of the five plants in San Diego. They had dry-cleaning plants, and, I think, a couple of laundries, and they had a linen supply plant. There were five of them and I was to go down there and be superintendent of the five plants. My boss was a man named Lucas. He was an old ex-cavalry officer, and that's when the cavalry was really the cavalry.

T: Was this for World War I?

H: Yes. I didn't want to go down there because I had my father and mother here, and I was taking care of them. I wanted to get my brother into school, so finally Lucas said, "Well, you either go up in the organization, or you go out." That's when I decided I didn't ever want to work for any big company, because they tell you where to go. I decided that wasn't for me.

In the meantime, I had a boat, and I'd been fishing for pleasure. So I went and bought an old rum-runner. Prohibition had come by that time. I got this rum-runner real cheap and I converted it into a fishing boat.

T: Do you remember who you bought it from?

H: He was a fellow named Val Kettle, up there on Pico. And so I got the boat in 1936 and we went out fishing.

T: What would a rum-runner look like at that time?

H: Down here they had a special configuration, they were specially built. But this operated out of San Francisco, and up at Frisco, they had an entirely different operation. The fishing boats would go out and pick it up off the rum boats, and then the little fast boats would go out and get it from the fishing boats,

that hadn't yet arrived in port to be searched. Then they would put it on this fast boat, and they'd run in with it. They always met what they called the "runners." These men had to be able to run down through the sand, grab a case under each arm, and run back through the sand to the truck. That was the way they were run down here. So, this boat was never caught. She had two Liberties in her and she could do sixty.

T: Two Liberty engines?

H: Yes. She was a thirty-one foot sea sled; she could do sixty miles an hour. She had surface propellers that threw a wall of water behind her about fifteen feet high. The Coast Guard couldn't get them. Neither the machine gun fire nor the one-pounder could get through that water.

T: I think I'm beginning to see how she survived.
(laughter)

H: Yes. (laughter)

T: Were there many of these boats caught?

H: Oh, yes, they caught them all the time. Then when they caught the real fast ones, they converted those. Like the Diatome, they converted that into a Coast Guard boat, because the Coast Guard didn't have as fast a boat as the rum-runners.

T: So they would just put them right into their service?

H: Right into their service. (laughter)

T: This was the Diatome?

H: Yes, the old Diatome. And she had three Liberties on her.

T: What kind of engine is a Liberty?

H: That was a twelve-cylinder engine that was developed for World War I, but it never got into action. It was a wonderful engine, about four hundred horsepower. And that was real horsepower, though, because one of them would take about a forty-foot water taxi type of boat and drive it about forty knots when it was light.

T: That's pretty fast, I would say.

- H: Yes, and I thought when these four hundred horsepower automobiles came I'd see the same thing. But they didn't have the same kick as a big boat. (laughter) They were quite a sight, because when they were going wide open in the ocean in calm weather, it just looked like they had two great, enormous fire hydrants on both sides churning up the water. They were semi-rounded on the bottoms; they weren't the true planing type. They just went through the water on pure power and threw out the water on both sides. It was quite a sight to see.
- T: I can imagine. The boat you bought came from San Francisco?
- H: Right.
- T: Did you go up and pick it up?
- H: No, Val Kettle brought it down. He sold it to me. I couldn't use the Liberties fishing, so I put a Ford V-8 truck engine in it.
- T: Are they a little more practical and sturdier?
- H: Well, they are economical enough that I could use it. You couldn't use a Liberty, it burned fifty gallons an hour wide open.
- T: So that was the end of your fast boat?
- H: I didn't have a fast boat; I had other types of boats. Oh, yes, I had a fast boat for pleasure fishing. But this boat was pretty fast; with that Ford V-8 it would do fifteen knots when it was light.
- T: What did you do with the Liberty engine that you took out?
- H: They were taken out before I bought it. I just bought the bare hull.
- T: Did you have other converting to do?
- H: Yes, I had to put a deck on it so I could fish. I had to be able to wash the fish down, to carry the fish, and so on. I had to put in a cabin and some living quarters with a couple of bunks in it, so my dad and I could have a place to sleep.
- T: He was through with the sawmill by this time?

- H: Oh, yes, he'd been through for a long time, because his health broke shortly after that.
- T: So you started your fishing operations. Was that here in Newport Beach?
- H: No, in San Pedro. That was the biggest fishing port in the world, at that time. We had more tonnage come into San Pedro than any other port in the world. We were kind of proud of ourselves up there.
- T: Well, I'll bet. What kind of fishing did you do?
- H: Principally I did some barracuda, some mackerel, and some albacore fishing, although the albacore were not running very good at that time.
- T: Did you supply one cannery, or would you just sell your fish to the best bidder?
- H: I sold the mackerel to the Gorby Cannery up in San Pedro, and I sold my albacore to the Southern Cal Cannery.
- T: Would you have any sort of a contract or agreement?
- H: No, we just fished day to day. But the difference between the canneries and the markets is that the markets wouldn't tell us what they would pay when we came in. We could only get the price for that day.
- T: Now, what is a market? The fish market?
- H: The fish market for the fresh fish. The canneries would usually establish the price, and, as long as they didn't tell us not to fish, they would buy our fish at that price when we came in.
- T: So that price would hold for awhile?
- H: Right. That's the only place we had a stable price.
- T: Could you tell me a little bit about a typical day's fishing?
- H: Originally, we fished in the daytime for mackerel. We didn't fish at night. We would go out in the morning and we would chum the fish and catch them with strikers. We didn't know about the net scoop, at that time; we had a chicken wire scoop. When we'd brail mackerel with this, it would skin their noses up. The ones that we

didn't catch would hit this wire, and then pretty soon, after about twenty-five or thirty minutes, they would get leery of the scoop and then we'd go back and strike them for a while.

T: Now, brailing is picking them up in this . . .

H: In the scoop; it's just like a big butterfly net. We could lift about twenty pounds at a time. If you get too much in the scoop, then you can't get it in quickly, and get it back. Normally if we get about twenty pounds, we'd cut them off, because that's about all you want to lift on the end of a stick.

T: It's important to get that back in there quickly.

H: Yes. The minute that we dumped the scoop, then we threw our chum, handful of this ground fish, in the water, and then we'd get the scoop back in position, and when the mackerel rushed in there to feed on this, we'd dip it. We'd lift it about every twenty seconds.

T: So, you'd have a handful of chum for every scoop that you'd bring in.

H: Yes.

T: You kept chumming to attract the fish.

H: Sometimes we'd throw a little bit of lead chum, to get the fish started, and then we'd throw a heavy charge, and then brail it.

T: Lead chum just means a little bit more chum?

H: No, chumming a little bit ahead of time. That would get the small amount of fish to start in on this lead chum, and they'd kind of lead the rest in. Then we'd throw a big charge in and then brail. (laughter) It's quite a trick, but it's hard to explain. Sometimes we didn't have to do that.

T: So this is part of the skill of the fishing, I would say.

H: Yes, it is.

T: What would make one person a better fisherman than another?

H: Well, this was the reason why there were "high boats" and "low boats."

T: What's the difference?

H: Some of the fishermen just didn't get as many fish as the other fishermen. Certain fishermen consistently brought in the fish, and other fishermen didn't bring in any.

T: Where would you put the fish, just right on the deck?

H: We'd generally brail them on deck. Later on, some of the boys rigged their boats with ice holds for albacore. They began to brail them in the hold of the boat. But, in the beginning, all of the mackerel were brought in on deck.

T: So you were doing this fishing in San Pedro?

H: Yes, and at the same time, they had the same operation in Newport Beach.

T: You said 1936 was when you got this fishing boat, so this was about the time we're speaking of.

H: Yes. And it was along about this time, a fellow named Ralph Gilman had a good hot school of fish. We didn't have all the boats electrified, like we have now, so a lot of us had Coleman lanterns for light. The sun was going down, in order that he could see what he was doing, Ralph Gilman put the light out, and, by golly, he found that the fish all got up on top of the water, schooled up nice, and he could brail them much easier at night than he could in the daytime. So this turned the mackerel fishing into a night operation. And that's the way it was started by Ralph Gilman.

T: That's very interesting.

H: Later, somebody got the idea of making the brails with webbing, instead of with chicken wire, and then you could brail all night. You didn't need to strike anymore because the fish that came in from the other angles, and hit the net, but couldn't get in it, didn't get hurt, like they did on the chicken wire. Instead of brailing from ten to twenty minutes, we could brail maybe all night.

T: This would be more what you think of as a fish net--a cloth material.

H: Yes, just like a butterfly net, only it had about a half-inch mesh.

T: I didn't realize there was that difference in the net.

H: We used the net as big as we could, as long as it didn't gill the fish. If you got your net with too small a mesh, the fish would gill, and you would have to stop and take the fish out of the net, and that was no good.

T: Gillling would mean that the fish would be caught by the gills?

H: Yes. They stick their heads through the mesh and then they can't get back.

T: So, did you switch to night fishing?

H: Oh, yes, we all did. We had to, because then instead of going out and getting maybe a ton a day like we had before, we began to get five and sometimes eight and ten tons a night.

T: This was 1936, 1937, or along in there?

H: Yes, that was in the later part of the thirties.

T: So you had the same boat at this time, too?

H: Yes, I had a boat, but it didn't carry enough mackerel. I had it more for barracuda and for albacore, which was kind of slow fishing. We didn't get many, but we had a good market for them. There weren't many fish at that time. When barracuda season was over after the summer and the mackerel season started, I would get on a friend's boat, which was a bigger boat.

T: And you sort of shared the catch?

H: Then we shared the catch, yes. That was better than trying to use my boat, because I couldn't haul enough.

T: That's a good solution, I would say. Was the barracuda a much bigger fish than the mackerel?

H: Well, no. The barracuda was not a bigger fish, but we never caught those in large quantities. Five or six hundred pounds was a big catch, so there wasn't much of a problem of putting them on the boat. (laughter) We didn't have any problem there.

T: When did you come down to Newport?

H: When the war started they put the submarine nets in San Pedro, and there were only about twelve of us that were American fishermen; the rest were all Italian and Japanese, who, of course, had then become enemy aliens.

T: This was out of San Pedro?

H: Right. There were about twelve boats that were American boats, and the rest were mostly Japanese.

T: How many boats in all would you say operated?

H: Well, at that time there must have been several hundred of us in the small boats. We weren't the important part of the fishing. The most important part was the big purse seines and the tuna clippers.

T: Were they American boats?

H: Some of them were, and some weren't. They sort of arranged it so they got the fish, because they were important. But they just bump the small boats out of business. Of course, there were no Japanese allowed anywhere on the coast. We were told, "If you see a Japanese, go to the first telephone, because he's not supposed to be here." (laughter)

T: My goodness. Yes, they did send them to the internment camps.

H: Well, they had to, because they had that fake air-raid. I guess you've probably heard of that.

T: I think I remember that.

H: The Pinkertons and a lot of others were out here, and found out they just couldn't trust the Japs because they wouldn't obey the blackout. There were several cases where they were said to put up flares, although I don't know how true it was, because everything was censored during the war. But right after that, I think it was the next day, they were all up at the Santa Anita Race Track. They made a concentration camp up there. It probably wasn't all the Japs, but who could tell the difference? We were fighting for our lives. Of course, people have forgotten now; they're crying about what happened. But we had to do what we did. I remember that the Japs got pretty belligerent about 1938 or 1939.

T: You mean as far as fishing?

H: Yes.

T: How would that be?

H: Well, they'd do little things, I can't go into details. They wouldn't cooperate.

T: Well, isn't fishing a pretty competitive business, anyway, and pretty difficult at best, when you have a small boat?

H: Yes, it was hard to make a living, and an awful lot of fishermen started out and went broke; they didn't make it. Just a few really survived, there weren't too many of us. Like I say, there were only about twelve American boats there that were the small boats. So then it seemed kind of pointless for this small American fleet that was left to keep operating out of San Pedro. The small boats weren't getting too many fish, anyway, and weren't very important. They claimed it cost about five hundred dollars to open the nets for us, to let us in. It took about a hundred and fifty men on different boats to do it. Then they had to go out and kind of scout around to see that there weren't any subs around.

T: This was the navy?

H: Yes. They would open the nets and then you went out, but then, of course, they closed the nets at sundown. They didn't open for anybody until daylight the next morning.

T: So if you were caught outside...

H: You had to stay out all night.

T: That ever happen to you?

H: Well, yes. Most of the time, though, I stayed out purposely so I wouldn't have to go through the monkey business of going in and out. So, they just flatfootedly told us fellows we had better move to Newport. We all came down here, everybody but Barracuda Slim; he wouldn't leave, he stayed there.

T: Is Barracuda Slim still there?

H: Well, no, he passed away about two years ago. He was one of the kings of barracuda fishermen.

T: Do you know what his real name was?

H: Slim Farris. Of course, his first name wasn't Slim. I never knew his first name; we called him Slim. But his last name was Farris.

T: He was a pretty fair barracuda fisherman?

H: Oh, yes, he was a wonderful jigboat man. Yes, he was wonderful at that.

T: Could you tell me a little about the jig arrangement?

H: Do you mean for the albacore and barracuda?

T: Yes. Tell me how they catch those.

H: Well, of course they don't fish barracuda anymore. You see, the barracuda was a Depression fish; we could get quite a few of them and sell them pretty cheap. People wanted a good cheap protein food, and barracuda was pretty good. I've seen them land day after day, around thirty tons a day in San Pedro at the markets, when we were fishing them in the thirties. They usually would lay us off on Thursday, and then we couldn't fish again until Monday.

T: What would be the reason?

H: They would have as much or more fish than they wanted.

T: Oh, so they could get caught up on their canning process.

H: No, they didn't can these, they sold them fresh.

T: All fresh?

H: All for the fresh fish market.

T: I see. Well, what I was talking about was the barracuda jig that you mentioned.

H: Well, the barracuda jig normally was made out of whalebone and it was made by hand. It was cut out on the band-saw, out of whalebone, and they made the configuration against a sander. They had a rotating sander, under power, and then you just got up there and shaped it.

- T: I see. So we have spoken of several different methods of catching fish.
- H: Well, that was the way they caught the barracuda. And then, of course, the bigger boats would have a tank of live bait, and they would feed the fish. They would get them around the boat and they would use strikers on them.
- T: Now, what's a striker?
- H: It's a hook that has a lead weight on the front of it. And then on the back, around the hook part, they tie on feathers four or five inches long.
- T: To attract the fish?
- H: No, they aren't to attract the fish. The fish are up there fighting over this chum, trying to get ahead of each other to grab the chum, that's the live fish they hurled overboard. So when they see some thing moving, even though they're a long ways off, they make a rush for it. Just like if they were scrambling for hundred dollar bills and everybody was grabbing them, you could throw any little green piece of paper in the crowd and they'd grab that too.
- T: (laughter) I see.
- H: (laughter) But of course, they wouldn't look at that striker if it was just out in the water with nothing around it, and if the fish weren't feeding. The advantage of it was, that the minute that the fish grabbed it--it was not a true hook, it was more just a spike--you just tighten up the rod and threw them aboard. Then while they were in the air over the boat, you give it a slack line and then this lead weight and those barbed-like things, would throw out the fish automatically. You'd throw the striker right back in the water and get another one. So, you see, it worked real quick.
- T: You could have saved a lot of time by not having a barb.
- H: Well, you didn't have to bait the hook or anything. But then when the fishing was slow, as we used to call it, then we'd have to use a hook and bait on the bait boats. Now, the jig boats didn't have any bait, they just trolled these striking in back of the boat and they would circle around the live bait boats and take

advantage of their chum. And, of course, this caused all kinds of fights and arguments. (laughter)

T: What would happen if the bait boat would see them back there?

H: Well, they always did see them, and they'd holler. As long as you kept far enough away, they couldn't throw something at you. (laughter)

T: Well, all's fair in fishing and war.

H: Well, it wasn't fair; we had a lot of rules. We had a certain distance that we normally maintained. We didn't just go right up to the back of their boat, right where they were fishing, we held off a certain distance. There's a kind of etiquette to it. We always circled clockwise.

T: Is there a reason for that?

H: Yes, because at sea, if you're in any trouble, you always turn to starboard. And if you're going to be hit, you always try to make somebody hit you on the port side. Then he's in the wrong. So, naturally as you're circling, you're always going toward starboard. If somebody else was going in a port circle, they'd be going head on all the time. This way we all went about the same speed, so that we traveled around. It was a lot like the Indians riding around those fellows with the canvas wagons. (laughter) The jig boats going around the outside. (laughter)

T: That would be quite a picture.

H: Yes. This bone jig fishing is quite an art, but we didn't understand it. At that time nobody would tell us anything. The first year I was fishing, nobody would tell us anything. Nobody would help anybody.

T: This was just you and your father, on your own?

H: Yes. I thought I knew quite a bit about fishing, because I'd been a sport fisherman. But now, I was up against an entirely different problem. So I told Dad, "You know, pretty soon we're not going to be able to fish anymore, because we're going to go broke." We had to buy a whole lot of these bone jigs, because only about one out of ten would really fish. So even though they cost around a \$1.50 or a \$1.75, we'd buy \$20 worth,

and we'd have to throw away about \$18 worth, because they weren't any good. So it cost quite a bit of money.

T: You'd just have to try them out and see whether they worked?

H: Right. If they didn't fish, you'd just throw them aside until you got what we called a "hot" one.

T: My goodness.

H: So I told him, "We haven't got the money to buy enough jigs to get any 'hot' jigs. If we don't get a new way of fishing, why, we're going to have to quit." So I invented the jerk line.

T: What is the jerk line?

H: It is used the same as the striker, only it has a hook on it, but no barb. It has a full hook instead of just a sort of spike like a striker. It has feathers and everything. You go along real slow, and you jerk the line.

T: You're doing this by hand from the boat?

H: When I got the jerk line, then we were the top boat. It was the funniest thing. I never could understand it, but nobody could figure out what we were doing. Pappy got the biggest kick you've ever seen, because he enjoyed being the top boat.

T: Surely.

H: And if I hadn't invented that, I would have been out of business. When the season was over, everybody wanted to know what we were catching fish with, so I told Pappy, "Well, we might as well tell the other boys." So I told them, and then they taught me how to fish mackerel and all the different fish.

T: They began to let you in on the inner circle.

H: Yeah, that's right. (laughter) So we had a lot of fun in 1936, doing that. We had a barrel of fun.

T: Was this something you patented, Mr. Hill?

H: No, it wasn't a patentable invention. Most inventions are not patentable.

- T: So after you showed them what it was, did they in turn use the jerk line?
- H: Yes, that was the standard way to fish in the early part of the season. The bone jigs were the best when the water was cold. But when the water got to about sixty-five degrees, then the jerk line was the best.
- T: It was kind of something you had to find out by trial and error.
- H: Yes, that's right.
- T: So, when you came down to Newport . . .
- H: That made me kind of famous in the fishing fleet.
- T: Do they still use it?
- H: No, because they don't fish barracuda for the market anymore. People now don't want to eat barracuda; they want to eat turkey, chicken, steak, oysters, lobsters, and things like that. They don't want to eat a low-priced food anymore. You might sell a few barracuda, but not very many. They're not the best of what you might call a table fish.
- T: When did they begin to decline in consumption?
- H: They declined as soon as the war started and everybody got to work and had enough money to buy better food. They sold pretty good during the war, but when the war was over people didn't want to eat barracuda anymore. The same thing happened to the mackerel. They had a big market down south for the mackerel. The people used to buy mackerel in two-pound cans for a quarter. We were selling the mackerel for twenty-one dollars a ton. And that's just a little over a cent a pound. Why, you couldn't even get anything hauled for a cent a pound today. Even if it's just dirt, or water, or anything else, nobody would haul it for a cent a pound.
- T: So mackerel fishing is what you did most of when you came to Newport?
- H: No, I fished albacore most. I only fished mackerel when I had a bad albacore season. Then I just fished a little bit of mackerel, just to kind of get enough to pull me through the winter. I didn't like mackerel fishing.

T: You didn't care for it?

H: No, but I could catch them, and I've had some nice catches. And then I've worked in other boats where we've had some nice catches.

T: Did you bring the same boat you started out with in 1936?

H: Yes. Then the albacore came back in 1942 when they quit the chlorination of the water.

T: You said they quit chlorinating the water?

H: Yes, they quit chlorinating the water when the war started. They wanted to save the chlorine to use against Hitler, in case he used the poison gas. Then they had all the beaches quarantined, because they were putting raw sewage right into the ocean. The fish came right on in to the beach, then. The albacore came back, and they'd been gone since 1925. When the war was over, of course, the people wanted their beaches open. They wouldn't let you swim in the ocean, because they were putting raw sewage in it. They had to start chlorinating the water again, and then the fish left.

T: So the chlorine was something that just didn't agree with the albacore?

H: Well, stop and think about it a minute. Suppose you lived like a fish and you didn't have any home, or connections, or business, or anything. If you were swimming through the air, and you went up over that smog in Los Angeles, and it hit your eyes, are you going to live up there in Los Angeles?

T: It's bad enough down on the ground. (laughter)

H: You see, the fish don't have to come in. Now people have to endure that smog in Los Angeles to make a living, but they wouldn't live in that smog if they didn't have to be there to make a living. I don't think anybody enjoys it. When your eyes started stinging and everything, you'd say, "Well, this is no place for me," and you'd go somewhere you had clean air. And that's what these big-eyed fish I told you about did.

T: Yes. The big-eyed fish included what?

H: As I showed you in the Fisherman's Handbook, that just included all the fish that had big eyes--the sardines,

the mackerel, the albacore, the tuna, the skip-jack, the yellowfin, and the bluefin.

T: These are all fish that have disappeared from our areas?

H: Well, yes, but you can go down to Thousand Fathom Curve about eighty or ninety miles to the south of us where true open ocean water circulates, and they're out there, in season, right now. But they don't come in around the islands anymore, because the water in the islands does not make clean circulation. It just kind of circles the islands and goes back and forth which gives the chemicals a chance to concentrate.

T: Are you talking about the Catalina Islands?

H: Well, I'm talking about the Channel Islands--there are eight of them altogether. There's Santa Barbara, Santa Rosa, San Miguel, Anacapa, Santa Cruz, Catalina, [San Nicolas], and San Clemente.

T: Now is this where you did a lot of your fishing?

H: Yes, at one time. It's fantastic to think of it now, but at one time, this was on the sailing charts as one of the most important fishing banks on earth. If you look on the chart, it's a fantastic place, because we not only have islands, but we have deep water around all the islands. We have numerous banks and basins and it's just designed by nature for fish. It wasn't by any coincidence that San Pedro started the canning of tuna. They had a big sardine cannery at one time, and the Tuna Club started here. Zane Grey and all the big fishermen used to come here. In fact, Zane Grey built his home over there at Catalina Island. It was just a fisherman's paradise. Of course, it's polluted now.

T: Why would the banks be important for fish?

H: Well, a bank has a special function in the sea in the fact that it comes up out of the sea, and then there's deep water all around. There's a tendency for the small fish and the bottom fish to find a home on the bottom, because usually these banks are generally always rocks. They're able to maintain their formation because they're rock. If they were mud or sand, they would have long since been washed down to sea level. In these rocks, there are all kinds of small life that have a chance to grow from the egg stage on up. It's kind of a breeding ground for the smaller fish, and then, of course, the

big fish come in and they eat the little fish. Then they come there to probably lay their eggs themselves.

T: So you find these banks near the Channel Islands that you've mentioned?

H: No, they're not near the Channel Islands. Now the famous Fourteen Mile Bank is just about halfway between here and Catalina. It isn't on the Catalina course, it's just about halfway to Catalina.

T: I've heard that mentioned.

H: Want to see it on the chart?

T: All right, fine.

(At this point, Mr. Hill was reminded of an appointment that he had to keep, and the interviewer was unable to resume interviewing.)

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