

PORT OF LOS ANGELES  
AN INTERVIEW WITH MIKE ALBANO  
FOR THE  
PORT OF LOS ANGELES CENTENNIAL ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED  
BY  
UNKNOWN

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TRANSCRIPT BY  
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Interviewer: We have the tough question first.

Michael Albano: Okay.

Interviewer: Please say your name and spell it.

MA: Okay, my name is Michael Albano. M-I-C-H-A-E-L A-L-B-A-N-O.

Interviewer: Terrific, and look at me when you are talking.

MA: Oh, Okay.

Interviewer: And Michael, what year were you born and where were you born?

MA: Okay, I was born November 24<sup>th</sup> in 47. Born in Long Beach, California hospital called Saint Mary's.

Interviewer: Good. What were your earliest memories of San Pedro as a kid? What do you remember about--any stories you have?

MA: Well, my grandfather were fishermen and my father is a fishermen, was a fishermen. They all came over on a boat. Who married and came over, you know, married.

Interviewer: Tell me about your father. Where did they come from?

MA: My father came from Ischia, Italy. They immigrated here [he was] probably 39, 41, when he got here. [His] brother came first. He was a fisherman and then my dad came here. He lived with his brother. Then he had a third brother and came here. He lived with them. Watched the parents and stuff they always jumped on fishing boats here. It was a tremendous fleet in the forties. Forth-seven, I was born but they had tremendous fiestas here.

Interviewer: We are going to talk about all that stuff. First, talk about what was the reason why your parents came here.

MA: Father came, well, they fell comfortable.

Interviewer: Say, my father, my family.

MA: My father, the family, and they talked. They wrote back and forth the Italians that were here. Oh just reminds me of where you're at and you got to see this. Everything was more plentiful. They felt comfortable coming to a little town and fishing off Catalina Island and brought him closer to the roots. They all lived within certain blocks of everybody. They walked in the house on Sunday. They had pasta and stuff and [would] visit. They didn't have any automobiles, I mean they didn't have any license to drive an automobile. Eventually, they learned. My parents never drove. Some parents, you know, got right back and went to night school. San Pedro High School was—stories they used to tell me was San Pedro High School was light daytime in the evening. Everybody would work all day or do things and you would just run at six or seven o'clock to San Pedro High School for night classes, Adult School. To get on to English, you run down to DMV and pass the driving test and other things you know. Getting along...

Interviewer: When you were growing up, and you were a young kid. What do you remember? Any stories about when you were really young? What this place was like and what a young kid like you would do?

MA: Oh yeah. We would—I remember before Ports of Call was built, they had pilings, different plywood, and planks. We would go down there as kids at ten or nine years old. We would put a couple of plywood on a couple of boards and we would just float around Ports of Call. That's right around the main channel. Some guys--we would go swimming there. The big thing was, the people, I mean the kids that were down there would see the Catalina Steamer. It would arrive. It would go over in the morning to Catalina and stay there, the white steamer. By a quarter to six, it would be coming down the channel to be docked at six. We didn't have no watch or time or anything; but we knew when that steamer was going down the main channel we better clean-up, somewhat, and start packing up to go home for dinner at six or six-thirty. That was like your time clock. The steamer coming down the main channel.

Interviewer: So when you were making these little boats and stuff out of plywood, where were you going? What were you seeing?

MA: Just ah, just floating around and then—we thought we were like Tom Sawyer explorers. Going around the main channel. They were building at that time the whole Ports of Call. Guys would get string from the wharf. Then you would go buy you a whole fishing line. You would tie all these little pieces of knots. You would find a hook and you try your luck at fishing. Just learning how to conduct—tell your parents, “Hey I can do this too mom or dad.” We would go by San Pedro Boat Works that was a real popular spot in the earl years for crab. You would see little crabs crawling on the rocks. Nobody would come over there and bother you or any Port Police or anything like that would happen. You would have a sake and get some crabs or take them home. Maybe not even eat them, just playing with them and learning everyday life, you know. That's what it was like, you know, at the harbor.

Interviewer: Who were your friends that were going out with you? Tell me about them.

MA: There were fellas, ah, like John DiMaglio, his parents and uncles worked at a fish market. A lot of us went fishing, not fishing, worked in a fish market.

Interviewer: Start again. Say a lot of us.

MA: Yeah, we went to...

Interviewer: Start again, say, “A lot of us.”

MA: Oh, a lot of us, yes. Would go work at...

Interviewer: Start again from the beginning and say, “A lot of us.”

MA: A lot of us would go down there. Some would get a little job. Guys like John DiMaglio and another fellow named Sandy Bellsor, which is my cousin. They would go down to the Fish Market after school, make boxes, and clean up. You know, it is like, you are right at the teenage years about thirteen. You take a little responsibility and they give you a pair of boots to wear. I went the other way. My uncle had a marine field dock at Burse 78. He started that right during the war.

Interviewer: So what is a marine field dock?

MA: Okay, a marine field dock is a where San Pedro Fish Market is located at Burse 78 on the main channel. There were two marine field docks there. There was a Standard Oil and Union Oil at that time. They were on the same dock, believe it or not. We shared the same dock. It was three hundred feet of dock and we had one hundred fifty feet and he had and a hundred and fifty feet. We were Italian decent and this fellow was John Thomas, which his brother was Vincent Thomas. They knew a lot of Sylvania people and other people. Everybody had their own relatives. John Thomas was the marine distributor for Standard Oil. We were at Union Oil. My uncle's name was Les Esposito. He started down there. He worked on some boats. He fished for a little while and he got a marine business because he understood Italian and he spoke it well. At that time, there was three hundred fishing boats or more in the fishermen's slip at that time. Yes, it was incredible. There was like fifteen canneries. It was for people that came and didn't speak any English, [they] didn't know the area. They would make sure they knew someone who could speak Italian to get a job on a fishing boat, which were an eleven-man crew. Now today's fishermen is a five man crew or six man crew.

Interviewer: Let's go back, as a kid when you began to work on the field doc. What did you do?

MA: Um hm.

Interviewer: What did you do there? What was your job?

MA: My job was to tie boats, learn how to make invoices, credit carding, and know how to handle people. I understood Italian--so they came in, they would tell you stories. I knew your grandfather. My grandfather fished here in thirty-nine. They got capped in a storm and they got lost. They were never found. It was kind of a crazy story but...

Interviewer: Tell me that story.

MA: Fidelity was the name of the boat. It was back in 1939. My mom was like thirteen. Someone had an article. In those days, you rent boats from the cannery because there were boats to make money. If you are a pretty knowledgeable seaman, skipper/navigator, and you had a crew they would issue/assign you a boat. You work on consignment. Apparently, they were fishing off of Anacapa [Island, CA]. They didn't have proper Coast Guard radio communications. What happened, a big storm came up and they had a load of fish. The other boats were there, so when you come into port you are coming in to Terminal Island to unload the catch. You tie everything down. You tie your skiff to the nat and you tie everything down. Everything is secure. Well apparently, we were coming in and the boat kind-of opened up. It was an eleven-man crew, brothers were on the vessel also. They thought they could, you know,—someone says they are in a bad blow, but we'll find them. There was no trace ever found. In those days, you just hire somebody they didn't have a full on search. It takes three days to get somebody in that area to see—we'll find somebody on the beach or we'll find a plank or we will find something. Then my mom said, they collected money to send more, you know, guys really experienced in finding traces of them but it was never found. It is kind of a tragedy. There were a few like that at that time in those days. The boats probably needed to go on dry dock and it wasn't really properly maintained. You just want to go out and make that first thousand bucks or ten thousand dollars for the year and get yourself settled. That was that story. My uncle fished for a while then he got into the marine fuel business.

Interviewer: Talk about—let me change the tape, this is great, this is great.

MA: Thank you.

Undistinguishable talking. Conversation cut off abruptly.

MA: Under the good fellow—that knows a lot of that and has a lot of historic pictures is—Go ahead I'll tell you later.

Interviewer: Okay ready? Why don't you tell me that story from the beginning, the loss of the boat and the people never found. Tell me that story again as if we were sitting across from each other having a drink some place.

MA: Okay. The name of the boat was Fidelity. It was about a forty-five footer. There were two brothers and there was a Slovenian crew member that kind of like—there was like eleven member crew. They were going to a tough area it is like inner islands there, Anacapa. It gets rough really fast. If you are stuck in there, it's kind of tragic. The boats weren't real fast and you had a load of fish. The power of running was probably, you know, six to seven knots or less. Then in the storm it was probably three. The boat was taking a beating. They have heavy gear on. They have wool shirts, heavy thermals, and boots on. When it probably opened up there, you know, trying to swim in those days you had heavy boots up there thing. A lot of them probably went down so quickly. They just thought they could find traces of this or one survivor or life. They never found anything of it. It was kind of a mystery. As I was growing up, as a teenager working or mentioning your name, the older fellows would say, "Yeah, I knew your grandfather" or "I was out there, I was out there and got in earlier or the day before." "I never made it out there." That kind of thing. I kept the roots of that with the town. Working in the Water Front was — you know they tell you stories and you get to know people that you didn't know before. My uncle, he was at the marine filed dock — he was the owner operator there. He was starting out and that was his father. A lot of guys, you know, hey let's go there field there. It was kind of a small town thing and the guy was starting a business and he didn't have any father and a mother. They are all like self-support, there was—in those days there was nobody helping him trying to survive or make a living doing things. So when he opened a business he got real successful with the local fleet, on the Italian side. And Seventy-six was like a straight name, so when they needed products—I need this kind of hydraulics oil, what do I use? I don't know. As time went on, in the fifties they go more modern with the power blocks and stuff. [They got] more advanced. They didn't know how to order things. It was a small town, real honest neighborhood store, neighborhood field dock, neighborhood gas station. That is what this town was like in a lot of things like that. You go into a store and they would know you, the neighborhood you lived on. We lived on Granite. Started when I was a boy, we lived on Granite. A lot of the fishermen would get up and would walk. Some guys would walk down H Street. They take their little walk that was like their exercise. They go on the boat to go fishing. They get a ride eventually, a crewmember be like hoping on a ride. One of the crewmembers would get a car, he will stop by your house, and you hop in. There would be like six guys going down to the boat in a little rambler. They would park it down the wharf. I remember times a lot of guys needed things removed off of their boats. They didn't have a pickup truck. Then sixties and fifty-seven, those times, "Oh you got a truck? Can I—I'm a customer of yours. I'm going to go pick up some gear, little corks, and nets. They would borrow your truck. Take it to the boat. That was big deal because they didn't have a truck. Today's fisherman has everything there. Also, when they put nets together, my dad would make bumper nets. They would rope and put it on a skiff. You seal it, a hanging thing. It looks like a web. It is made out of rope. They use to make these in the

backyard. You go in the backyard, and you think you are playing around your dad would say, "Hold this." Pull a pick and you are splicing the rope into a—you know like you are making a blanket out of rope. You would hang that on your—they didn't have rubber bumpers, so they rope bumpers. I remember going in an alley, my dad's friend, John Skagamello, he owned a fishing boat and the crew would go over to his house. He lived behind an alley on like Seventh Street, where there are a lot of alleys back there. They would just string out this whole net. They would have a whole box of corks, brand new. They would be sewing on these corks on the top of the net to have it float. They took the whole alley. They would go there at eight o'clock in the morning, and that was like their workshop. It was an alley in San Pedro. They would tie all these corks onto the net and the other fishermen would drive by see what he is doing. "Oh that is going to be a nice deal." Then you would load that onto trucks. Then you would have to take it down the wharf. For us teenagers, that was like playtime. We were pulling the net on the truck, and then jumping on top of it. They were driving down Pacific and Gaffey. Can you imagine that today? Oh my God that guy is eight feet high. He is just on top—they are going really slow, but just the idea doing things like that. Those were the early days.

Interviewer: What kind of men, you hung out with these—not only your dad, but what kind of men were these fishermen? What kind of guys were they?

MA: They were, they were just...

Interviewer: These fishermen were...

MA: These fishermen were just genuine family men. They're workers. Today, I have a brother-in-law that does a lot of paddling and they do this carb, you need carbs. Well these fishermen eat a lot of spaghetti. Those were all your carbs. These guys are genuine. On the boat—I'll tell you how genuine they were. They would come in to fuel the boat. Let's say like now, twelve to twelve-fifteen. They use to have a cook on the boat. That table would be set. There would be a big pot of spaghetti or fish supine. You could be at the radio maintenance man to come down to fix something, or like me. I'm fueling the boat. They would just say, "Come on down, we're having lunch." We are talking lunch, a big plate of spaghetti and hot French bread. They are just sitting there having their wine. They gotta have their wine with their—but anyone that was in the vicinity, other fish boat, when they are working maintenance you just come on down for lunch. They had a plate. There was no room on the galley, you would go on the hatch and have your plate. It was the best lunch. You would want to be there all the time. You just got to find where they are going to be. That was more exciting times. They were real genuine. They wouldn't go on vacation. They weren't that type. My parents would say, "OK we are going to Yosemite or we are going to Hollywood Boat to watch a concert or something like that. It was just hard, honest working and that's all they knew. Then the holidays were a big deal. That was but we never...

Interviewer: What kind of holidays did you celebrate? Tell me about those. What were they? What happened on those holidays?

MA: Oh, God yeah. You would—always around Christmas time. That was the big one. Christmas was a—see our parents in those days, in fifty, you just don't go to the store and buy a five pound of shrimp. Say I'm having people over. You had shrimp, it was Christmas Eve, the day before Christmas. It was a day of fast, you would—everything you have is fish. All the fish

markets, at that time, would—you would bring home a box of shrimp or if you work for the Fish Market, it was like a gift. That was your Christmas gift. You would get a box of shrimp, some crab, and clams was big, muscles. I remember that was a big feast. You could go to anybody's house on Christmas Eve and have a drink. The doors were open. Because we all lived below Ninth Street. We all lived on Grand and Leland. Nobody really lived up on Western. That was more like tomatoes and guys hunt rabbits up there. It was nothing. It was just a simple neighborhood and they all had the same thing on the table. Everybody had their different flavoring of stuff. That was your one o'clock on Christmas Eve. You would sit there with fifty people in the house, and just have a feast and half with all seafood. I remember going down to Point Fermin with a fellow of mine. I was young. He wanted me—we use to go out. My uncles use to go to certain beaches. We would actually get the muscles off the rocks. Before Christmas Eve there would be—always around December there were minus tides, so you know when to go. You don't go in the summer time because that is when they were poisons or whatever. It was just a cold winter. Minus tide, we use have guys with tide tables for all the old timers. They would come around November and October. Hey, I need a tide table because next month I'm going to get these octopus. The octopus were on the rock. They wanted real low tides. They would look at the little tide book with their sack, a little stick with a hook. They would go down and get these octopuses. That was for their Christmas Eve feast right out of here in San Pedro. Point Fermin was one of them, at that time, going back to sixty, fifty-nine. They would have, there was no Fish and Game bothering you. You would carry a sack of muscles. You would tie these black muscles on this big wreath. It would be low tide and you go out there and fill up a sack. Now you got to get the sack up a hill, so one would be carrying the front of it and another would be carrying the back of it taking the weight off. [They would say] Oh you are almost there just get it into my truck. That is kind of like your—then you remember sitting there eating with your family saying I got those things right down there. I busted my butt, it was like you try to be macho in front of them. They were real simple people.

Interviewer: Were the fishermen, were they still speaking primarily Italian with each other? What was the language? What were you hearing?

MA: Yes, mostly Italian.

Interviewer: Oh the fishermen.

MA: The fishermen did.

Interviewer: Say it again, the fishermen...

MA: The fishermen would speak mostly Italian and then would throw a couple of words in English. Like, "You know what I mean." A lot of them were really smart. They picked up real well. They made sure their kids went to school. We all—Mary Star was our main church at that time. It was on Eighth Street. Eighth and Pallister, a small little church there. Then they built up there on Seventh, Seventh and Meyler there. They built a big—they all chipped in. Whatever the church needed they all participated, the canneries and everything. They were real church going people on both sides. The Sylvanias were, the Italians were. Everybody was—made sure. They all wanted their kids to go to a private school. They couldn't help you with your homework, my mom did. A lot of the on both sides. These kids-we all-because our dads were—mostly they

fished at night and they were home in the daytime. We are in school in the daytime, so your parents—your father would sleep in the day and go leave at five. Go out to the boat and go fishing. Come home in the morning, sometimes they were out for two or three days. You would be there after school and you have to be real quiet because at three o'clock your dad was still sleeping. He has to get up at four-thirty or five o'clock and go to work. We would come home with buddies and you would start playing around the yard. Throwing stuff. We'd hit the screen window with a ball. He [dad] gets up kind of get upset and talk Italian to you. That's the way it was with everybody. It was more or less hard working men, as just as honest as you can be. Real trustworthy and they want to make sure—all they wanted was their kids and their daughters to be educated and to move on.

Interviewer: What, what—let's go back to the fishing fleet.

MA: Um, hm.

Interviewer: It is called the Pride of San Pedro, right?

MA: Yes.

Interviewer: Tell me about that. Tell me the Pride of San Pedro, why was it the Pride of San Pedro. Describe it, what was this fishing fleet?

MA: Well it was, it was.

Interviewer: The fishing fleet was.

MA: The fishing fleet was the main source of just about everything from the store selling the groceries. If you could only imagine having three hundred boats in a fishing slip calling. We had an A-1 Groceries and another store called, Vagers. Sunshine Market was a tremendous store. It is still there, so is A-1. They are just small—when they would order the cook—you had an eleven-man crew, the cook would order for the week. I need this much salami, I need loafs of bread, or cold cuts, and fifteen chickens. They would come down in their trucks with the white apron on, unloading that truck. Eighteen gallons of milk and be sure you don't forget the wine. You can image the business. He had everyday business just buying cold cut sandwiches, but his main thing was supplying the boat. That was a big deal. I would be working at the field dock, as a teenager, they would call you and say, "Hey we are leaving at five o'clock. I'm going to come by and get some fuel, but grocery guy is going to come down your dock too." We would open up and we were all done fueling, but a lot of times, here is this poor grocery guy parked in the back. He just got done unloading somebody else, and he has to go back to load that guy's groceries. He would get dollies and be pushing down the fuel dock. Here is your fifteen loafs of bread and cold cuts. That cook was responsible for keeping everything—not to get it all spoiled or banged up. That was his big job. Each boat had their own cook. Then in the summer, when the tuna showed up it was—you tuna was big money, a hundred dollars a ton. They would call you at all hours. It always happened right after June when kids were out of school. We would be out of school like Fourth of July weekend. You know when the weather gets real warm. The water warms up and these tuna would be jumping. I remember my dad, they just call you up [he would say] "Jeez we are going to have—be ready for a 4<sup>th</sup> of July party or something." We want to have a little party, Fourth of July barbeque or something. Then we would get a call. They would say, "Hey they



spotted blue fin tuna.” These phones would be ringing; I mean all these boats were headed out. You think, Oh God here’s Fourth of July weekend and we are going to shoot some fireworks. Sometimes your dad is on his way out fishing. That was big deal. Then he would call the grocer, “Hey I forgot to order.” The cook would say, “How many days are you going to be out?” That’s when you have to be honest. You are going to be out for three or four day, make sure you are going to groceries for that long. Tuna was a big money thing at that time in the fifties.

Interviewer: What about the canneries? What do you know about those and tell me about that?

MA: Well there are many of them.

Interviewer: Many canneries...

MA: Many canneries.

Interviewer: Start again there are many canneries.

MA: Yes, there were many canneries. You have to remember, there were no big time refrigeration, just ice. Your idea was to get the fish off the boat as soon as you can. You know, they come in. If you only had three or four canneries and you had all these boats, you know it would take all day. They couldn’t keep the fish. They didn’t have no refrigeration. By having so many places to unload the fish, was a big asset for the bringing more. Jeez I got more room, I can take your fish. That is by the fleet whistle large. It was so plentiful. The hay days of fishing, you could go—everybody had their assigned cannery.

Interviewer: What were the big canneries? The big popular ones.

MA: Oh well, like we had French Sardine, Star Kiss, Van de Kamp was really big. They were all on Terminal Island. If you ever drive by there, people wonder what all these buildings are. What do they do here? Well, they are big cookers. The smell would carry all the way to here. I remember you would smell the cooking of the fish. You know they had to get it prepared to get it cooked. I mean-- the wind is blowing the right way, it stunk. It was like fertilizer. Everybody knew it was money. You know who am I, everybody in old town would say, they are cooking they are selling that fish. We going to go out and get some more. That is money you are smelling there. So all the cannery workers—they didn’t drive. We had a ferry. They would run the ferry across from the where the museum is, across from Terminal Island. That thing would be loaded with workers. Those workers would go to work in the morning, and they would come back and they would catch a bus. Right there at the museum. If you were on the bus, they were all wearing white. They all looked like nurses. These poor girls: little Filipinos, Italians, Sylvanian women, they were just—it was a job. If you were on the bus going someplace, just hopping on from Able Park to home, I mean the smell. Everybody had the windows down on the bus. Nobody said a word. You don’t want to embarrass and say anything. They are just hard working people and they just say, “My God.” The cannery and these poor people. What do they do with their clothes when they went home? That was their job. That was the cannery. It was a line of people on the assembly line you know cutting the fish.

Interviewer: What happened to the fishing business here?

MA: Well, it took its toll.

Interviewer: The fishing business here...

MA: Yea, the fishing business here took its toll, which means a lot of boats in San Diego were our tuna fleet. The sardines faded away. Then they caught Benita. What happens is we had regulations. Just like anything else, then there were emissions from the cannery and the health department. The money wasn't there if you wanted to upgrade you have to get less money for the fish to sell. I mean I spend all this money to do it right and the fishermen never progressed. It was real depressing. It was the same price all the time year in and year out. Then the sardines were the major catch. Then it took—it was dead, it got real dead. They started going farther away. Your local fishermen—the canneries were selling and moving. Samoa was big, Hawaii, everything was moving where we didn't have the regulations in California stateside. They couldn't give you a price or they couldn't sell it because they are buying it from somebody else. As time went on, it petered out actually. Now it is on a comeback but it is not like it was. There is nothing like it was.

Interviewer: Tell us about your company Mike's Main Channel Marine. How did it start?

MA: Okay.

Interviewer: What does it do? How does it fit into the story of the port?

MA: Okay. I worked for my uncle. It was called San Pedro Marine. It was at Seventy-Six Marine field dock. Basically, took care of fishing boats and servicing tugboats in the harbor. In those days, we had a tugboat or a major pusher. That is when we were building a bridge. I was there before the bridge was being built. You just had a ferry. Everything was real simple, everything got real simple. I remember delivering oil we had a customer in Long Beach. That was like a big deal. Here you are in San Pedro delivering five barrels into Long Beach. They wanted seventy-six products so we would roll barrels on a pick-up truck, my uncle and me. Then we would stay at the ferry building where the museum is at. You sit there and you wait for the ferry. You time it and you wait because they only took so many cars. I can remember it was eighteen cars or something. Here you are lined up on the Sixth Street, a little way, with your truck. You are sitting there waiting for the ferry to come to bring your truck on there. For a kid, fourteen years old working the summers, it was like wow I'm on an adventure. My uncle is up and down because he had to get back over, it was a three hour process. I remember that time. Then all the engines were pre-war. All your tugboats and barges, everything in those days came from the war forty-nine, fifty. We had Navy launchers. You had these same engines. Everybody had the same. They were called, "Six-Seventy-One." If you have been in the service that is basically the engines that we serviced. Everybody know how to work on them. We always made sure they we had oil products that wouldn't—at that time, you had an old engine so you can't use the detergent oil because it would clean the engine out. We had all these different roles.

Background noise: Telephone rings.

MA: That is my phone I will shut-it-off. Let me shut-it-off. It's probably mine. I should have shut-it-off when I came here, sorry. Okay.

Background talking: In audible talking.

MA: Yeah it was crazy, you can taste...too many stories.

Interviewer: No.

Unknown women: Never too many stories.

Interviewer: Never too many stories.

MA: All right, we'll go back to the boat, so I was fourteen years old and we are doing all these harbor tugs at that time. They were just one tug, if anybody remembers on the waterfront Wriggle's W. T. Tugboat. It was a classic story of what a tugboat looks like all wood with a little stack. It had a bridge. There was a series on TV about harbor tug like the Tugboat Annie type storylines; and W.T. Wriggly family had a little business in the harbor, which really started the five hundred-horse power. Remember, [it is] like the Lane Victory that is in the museum now? That is the type of ship. We use to fuel the tugs to push those kinds of ships. They were Liberty ships, so the five-six hundred horsepower we got is like a big deal. Today, the harbor has grown where a harbor tug is over five thousand horsepower or they won't even let you on the channel. We were proud of our service. I remember stories. Everybody fixed things. In those days, there was no gauge on the tug. You didn't know the size of the tank. It was a pre-war tugboat. They were all Navy tugs. There was no charts. Well okay, we are going to stick now. We are going to stick this tank, just like you do at home. You get a broomstick, had he would stick the tank. He would mark it and say, "Okay, we got so much fuel." We were right there on the ball. Talk about safety first. It was quite a chore. They would have to engineer; they would have to do everything. Basically, he didn't have an assistant. It was just him. You are responsible, you know. He is down below looking and I am up on top. He would be yelling at me, "Ok now shut it off." That what it was in those days, in sixty-six, sixty-seven. It was mostly wooden boats with a lot of tires on the side.

Interviewer: Besides the fueling...

MA: Um hm.

Interviewer: What other services did you have?

MA: Basically, that is what we did. We had gas or diesel. Sport fishing starting to become a big play. We had two large L.A. harbor norms landing was called, "Sports Fishing Landing" in the sixties. We also had a boat launch right there where the fish market is. I mean you can pull up there in the parking lot, right before seventy-eight. We were like fifty feet from our field dock and you would launch your boat. You had straps and you put your little outboard in the water off the trailer. You go park your trailer. You would come over to our dock or the guys would have their own boil to mix with their gas. Those days everything was like two cylinder gas engine and they would go fishing. Some guys would break down and call the coast guard. It was a little different. They would just fish three miles out. It was like a little family. We know everyone at the landing. Nobody ever really got hurt. Everybody looked for everybody's back. If someone needed something [for example], "Hey, my batteries are dead do you have a battery charger?" Well you think nothing of it to give someone a battery charger, go plug it in, and get himself a

jumper. Get him going and they bring it back. We still do that. We try to keep--I was there for my uncle. He retired like in eighty-nine so I was Mike's main channel there until ninety-two. Changes were coming. You had double tanks. You were in the ground. It's like everything. Environmental was on the right track. The oil companies were trying their hardest, you know. They won't let them expand. It was hard double piping. We had pipe running on the wharf just straight out one hundred-fifty feet, one pipe. We would visually look at it. It is not dripping or anything like that. Now, today everything is double. You see the inspectors. It did a lot of good. The port did a wonderful job on main channel with the water contaminates that were there in those days. A lot of water was really contaminated in the main channel. Now we got sea lions swimming everywhere. All the down to where I am at. I am at verse seventy-three there. The water improved ten-fold.

Interviewer: I have from my notes, that you do something that is absolutely crazy in the dead of the winter.

MA: Yeah, well dead of the winter, well.

Interviewer: Tell me about it.

MA: We started with a dare. I have three boys. It started—we used to do it early in the morning. Then I couldn't make a couple of them. A friend of mine would call me and says on six o'clock on New Year's Day, they have a polar bear club that is there every day at Cabrillo Beach. They actually go swimming all the way out to the buoy there and back. Well, we had a few dares and the boys are a little older now. They said, "Okay, on New Year's Day we are going out." They just changed the time to high noon. They made it Twelve O'clock. I said, "We are all going down? Yeah sure we are." [They said,] "Yeah, sure we are on New Year's Day and we're all going to wear some trunks and put some sweats on. We are going into the water. We all kind of looked at each other—I'm going to call him at eleven o'clock in the morning. [They said] we're going down now. Get ready we are all doing this. My wife looked at me, "yeah sure they are." She had all the towels and stuff. My wife had all the towels and everything. We would go down there and the crowd got bigger. We did it. We went in. The Councilman, Janice Hahn, she has been--before she was Councilman she was down there. She shows up and she does it. It is like a ritual. Certain people have to get going for the New Year. It is a little chili; it is like fifty-eight degrees at times. I brought my little grandson. I have a grandson there. His mother, my daughter-in-law says, "There's no way he is going." We're going to get his feet wet. He was to get in docked into this way. It became a—they then had cameras there. They have different channels there. They take pictures. It's getting bigger and bigger all the time. It is kind of—it started with a dare and it ended up being a little ritual now. It started the year off, so we all get a kick out of it.

Interviewer: Why don't you tell me again.

Person in the background interrupts.

Interviewer: We have to change tapes this is great.

Silence.

Interviewer: Tell me about—introduce me to this polar bear club.

MA: Yeah, it started way before.

Interviewer: Start again say, “We have something called.”

MA: We have something called, “The Polar Bears at Cabrillo Beach.” It has been going on for like fifty something years plus. I’m just the new comer these last, maybe fifteen years. John AllJoyn and there is a group of really hard-core health nuts. I call them health nuts. Some people call them just regular nuts. [Laughs] They got their mind set to meet there and to do this. Just like we have hard-core joggers. They do their swim in the water.

Interviewer: What are the Polar Bears guys doing? What do they meet there to do?

MA: Meet there to do--they all meet there to kinda like say, “Well I got a head cold today, I don’t know if I’m going in. Then they call you to check in.” Everybody is kinda like threatening the other person, “Ah come on. Look at the that little girl is going in. She is ten years old. No wet suits. You just have to go in with your trunks on. Cabrillo Beach has a unique stop there. There are other ones. Redondo Beach has it. There’s a couple. We just don’t have snow where those really—those are Polar Bears. We all go out there. I get my whole family to go. It is better to get the little ones, we in docked anytime first because they want to challenge the grownups anyway. So my boys go in, and now I have my little grandson. We all meet there at high noon. There is a group there. They issue a king and queen. They pick one every year from their group. It sells, they have tables and it got big where they have shirts. They give you a certificate that you were there at that time, the air, and water temperature. They have donations. They have different groups for the museum there. It is kind of a unique thing. We all kinda like---it is a big group. They say, “Get ready, go!” They just trump in there like a bunch of wild heard of crazies. [Laughs] You get wet and I would go in a little bit, dunk. I do not swim the length because you have to be in a little bit more better shape than that to get used to it. We all go in. I carry my little grandson and get his feet wet. We took some pictures of him. His mom would say, “Can’t you see he is shivering?” Well, we’ll put a towel on him. He will be fine, it’s two minutes. That’s our new year’s, bring in the new year with that type of thing. We get a kick out of it.

Interviewer: What qualifies you as a Polar Bear? You just put your foot in, does that do it? What do you have to do?

MA: You have to dunk. You have to get through the breaker.

Interviewer: Begin again I’m sorry.

MA: Okay, you have to go walk in and when the breaker is there you have dunk, you go in, pow around, or kick your feet like you are back stroking or something. You have to be wet from head to toe. That kind of qualifies you. Then you get out right away and put on some sweats. They have hot chocolate for the kids. You get a certificate that you were there. The kids get a kick out of it. It is just something after Christmas vacation--you can say what did you do after New Year’s? What did you do? Those kids can go and say, “This is what I did. I went in the water with my Uncle Mike with both feet and got wet on January first. It is kind of a challenge basically is what it is. Janice Hahn does it, she has her own little groupies there. She shows that

she is a tough enough girl that can handle anything. We get a kick out of watching her also. It's quite a thing.

Interviewer: You spent all your life growing up as a kid, as an adult growing up working here in San Pedro. What does San Pedro mean to you? For people who don't know about this place, what would you want them to know about it?

MA: Okay.

Interviewer: San Pedro is.

MA: San Pedro is really unique. We are on a dead end town. People in San Pedro-- to travel anywhere, Oh God it is like I went to Hawthorne. [Laughs] I'm in Santa Monica right now, you know. They are kinda like, hurry up and get back. I don't know if it is in the air or something, it just, I get some of that because everybody says, "Look at San Francisco bay, look how nice these little shops are." I have never been there. To get a San Pedroan out of his terranes, as we call it, or elements it is quite a chore. Then when they do make a trip some place up north, Seattle or different places they got stories for weeks. "Oh I was on this big ferry that runs, it is nothing like our ferry, you know it is just a bigger ferry." So now we get more people coming to San Pedro that are more or less—do a lot of traveling. We have artist that are coming in here, which we never had anything like that. Growing up here, my God, we have someone that has an art gallery or something, what is that? We like pictures of a lighthouse or stuff. It is just becoming—the restaurants were basically trying to change. We have Papadakis Restaurant, which is pretty well known. But to get the Slavonia's and Italian's to go to a Greek Restaurant it is kind of neat. It is different and they get a kick out of it. It is just that we are so basically, basic living people here. We don't do as much adventuring as we should, but we all live simple. They all want little gardens. Swiss chard is like a favorite of a lot of these old timers. Why is that guy so healthy at eighty-eight years old? Well he eats Swiss chard and he eats his radishes. He eat this. He doesn't eat a heavy dinner you know. Everybody tries it, I can't eat a big lunch and don't have dinner. You can't do that today in this fast pace. It is just—we get a—now with all the building going on, we see these lofts being built. Not a lot of people my age—we just don't understand it. If you go to Long Beach, it is just far away for us. Some people go to Long Beach and see the lofts and the buildings between the streets. Where is the sunshine at? Where's that? Well, it is different, so now we are headed in that direction with the buildings going on and these big cranes. We never seen a big crane like that, down there on Fifth Street next to the Grinder, the view. Just a simple old Berate Tire shop was there and everybody just walked through there. It has been quite a challenge and the prudence has been fantastic what is happening here, you know.

Interviewer: Have you ever been tempted to go to Ischia?

MA: Yeah, I never went. I plan on going. Everybody my age now, middle age, are going there. My sons went. I had a son that went over the summer. He went to see a soccer game. He went. He got a kick out of it. So I go to Catalina—I go to Catalina. My thing is Catalina. I like Catalina. It is a little town there and we get a kick out of just hanging out there. We run into people. Like this past away—there is Augie there, used to be our Camillo's, he is a boatyard guy, old timer. He would be in Catalina, just sit there on the bench. [I'd say] "What are you doing?" [He would say] "Well, I'm just sitting here." That is how we would relax. San Pedro is relax—

crazy. They want to relax, by not doing anything. They go to Catalina and just hang out. That is was like the big point in the last thirty years. People would take their vacation in Catalina. My wife was doing that since she was two. She remembers diving for coins. The steamer would come in. The kids, the local kids or the kids from San Pedro or Redondo, they are from Redondo. They would spend three or four days there. Yeah, your parents are going to give you a twenty-dollar bill to hang out there to get an ice cream, so the Kelling Steamer would come in from San Pedro to Catalina. The kids would yell out, "Coins! Hello face masks!" People thought they were in Acapulco or something. The people would throw coins off the steamer. All the locals would dive down. I didn't really go with them. I was just watching all of this happening. We just wanted to rest. We just wanted to get up. I'm not going to go fight for coins and swim around. I want to go sit on the beach or...and they would put the coins in their mouth and come up. You would put the coins in your little pocket. You would yell out, "Coin!" These people are throwing quarters, fifty cents. The water was so crystal, clear and it was like a big novelty there. It was like part of the whole trip to Catalina, was the steamer.

Interviewer: We haven't mentioned Beacon Street.

MA: Yeah.

Interviewer: Tell me about what...

MA: What is Beacon Street? Well, see I was born in Forty-Seven, so I got guys who can tell you better stories. It was more or less a Navy, bar town. Like where in Long Beach and stuff like this. They were like the White Swan, Bank Café, you know, it was a rough part of town. They had the Bank Café was there. I hear stories now, I'm not that old. I remember you put your belonging in there. It was like a safe deposit box. You would say, "Geeze I got this money and this—or I got my pictures of my family and I'm going on this sail--this ship." You would keep your—in this bank. The Bank Café had their own safety deposit box for different Seamen. They had brawls, you know, because we are territorial. The police—there were people from all walks of life here. We had ships in our slip, with a fishing slip was. We had old pictures where you can see them. Where Destroyers were a breast inside San Pedro Harbor. They would go to Beacon Street. They would party have dinner, drinks mostly, just raise a lot of hell. They wouldn't dare not serve you at one o'clock in the morning. You can't even walk. Guys would leave their wallets, leave their keys in the car, and their car would be missing. I have guys that I know, old timers tell me stories, "Ah I just went in there to see somebody and I had a beer or two." He had his car, back in those days he left his keys in his car. Well, here it is eight o'clock, nine o'clock at night and he is trying to get home. He car is gone. Of course it is gone, you left his keys in it. So it was rough, it was rough.

Interviewer: When you were growing up, what was it like?

MA: When I was growing up it was.

Interviewer: Beacon Street was like...

MA: Beacon Street

Interviewer: Start again, when I was growing up Beacon Street was...

MA: Okay, when I was growing up, Beacon Street was like still trying to hang on. We would go in there, you know, like everybody else. I'm going to order a drink. We were eighteen years old. I'm going to shoot some pool here. They had pool tables. It was just, we would just hang out and try to reminisce. They would stare down at you. There were some rough characters. They would throw—someone would get mad at you because he lost a game in pool. He would get the ball and throw it against the wall. Throw the cue and everything. "What the hell did you do that for?" You don't like. It was kind of rough. I just kind of like—You just kind of like took off, you know. We were at that age where—hey you live up the street. We are not here to fight. You never really fought your own. You just—we're all territorial. If a guy was coming in from another town, Harbor City or something like that, we were just—Wilmington was a real rivalry in that era when I was there in the sixties. Wilmington, now they are all long shore men. They all get together. Wilmington in any sports, are rivalry; but it was innocent fun. You meet at a park. We'd play—at Gable Park we would have—guys would all meet there and we would have a football game, Tackle or flag football. Then you would get these guys from Wilmington. It would be real territorial. There would be a fight that breaks out. Nothing like today, you know. It would just be innocent fighting. You went home. "What happened to you?" Your shirt is all torn and a couple of black eyes. It was just rough housing. It is basically, what it was. So we were like—everybody goes—well why—then they—they made sure that we—every time that there was a sporting event it was a big deal. They always made sure to play their games in the daytime, three o'clock. You never dare play a game at seven o'clock where you would get all these fans. They would get tremendous fans. We would play Wilmington, Banning High School is basically the big rivalry for the San Pedro in that era, in the sixties and fifties. Then things change and there are guys are all working as long shore men now. They are all side-by-side. People from Wilmington. Wilmington was the same way. They didn't want us to over there. They always tell stories. I have a couple of boys that work on the long shoring and they say, "Yeah, we are all, you know. It's like one big family now because the ports are all together." [We're all] working different sites, front loading ships, container ships, and everything like that. Basically now they are all--basically one family's got stories. They don't dare say, "Oh I'm going to push you around. I'm going to give you a crappy job." So Wilmington and San Pedro is like—they have their little rivalry, but it is basically one big family now. It is interesting the way the port has grown. It made that happen. The port did all that, actually.

Interviewer: Let's talk about the changes from when you started out as a kid from then until now. What has changed?

MA: Well the changing—the challenge in the channel has to be so much deeper. The dreading that was done in the port—years back we had Proctor and Gamble soap dispenser way under the bridge. I can't remember what pier it was. It was a lot of milky water. It was just working. It was a very hard working—we had E.K. Wood. We had a lumberyard. They would take the lumber right off there and go up the street, I think it was Fourth Street. I remember they had some fellows, old timers, working there. They would cut these wood. It was just—stuff would be just in the water. The changes that I see is when the bridge started. When the bridge was being built, we just like these [unknown word], god this bridge is way bigger than what we need to use. Today, you look up at the bridge and there are three thousand trucks and cars going by. I couldn't even imagine being—going across in a ferry. Have these cars lined up all the way up to Gaffey Street, in San Pedro. You couldn't wait. The changes—the depth of the channel. The port had to address. They had to deepen it as the ships got bigger, deeper. I noticed they just cleaned



out the whole channel. We had also in those early days that I see, to run water taxis. We had a company called, “H-Ten Water Taxi.” These were all like little cruise, they were green. They would tie up right under where the museum is at. They had agents, we had agents. My father-in-law was an agent for general steam ship. That agent had to go a board the ship, have his papers for the skipper, and whatever provisions he needed to do. If he needed banking, someone is ill (need a doctor), or taken off the ship. That was a big deal. In that era, it was the sixties and seventies. We had a water taxi, a big water taxi service. They would just zoom you off to the boats. We would fill all their little water taxis up. That was quite a older—they are old—built in the fifties. They are kind of beat up. Today, you just sit there with a little bar in the seats. It’s like tour boat. Like you see in Catalina, the little shuttle boats. That’s what they were. We had about fifteen of those. It’s called, “H-Ten Water Taxi.”

Interviewer: On a personal level. What does San Pedro mean to you personally?

MA: Personally, it means...

Interviewer: What San Pedro means to me.

MA: What San Pedro means to me that it is a real safe environment for schools and for kids. I mean we went to school. We walked everywhere. You know you are in trouble when someone spotted you during school hours in an alley. You know like you are ditching school at eleven thirty or twelve o’clock. Your parents would hear about it. That is how close nit it was. Everybody had respect for everybody. Nobody wanted to—as you were growing up you had to watch your ques. Like climbing over a fence, stealing fruit, you know, when you were coming home from school. You got to remember, we didn’t have money in our pockets to run into Von’s Market to go buy a big ice cream cone or something like that. We would go through the alleys. These alleys were real easy short cuts, where Daniel’s Field was and stuff. Where you would see an apricot tree. You this little Italian, he would have nails—he didn’t have barb wire but he would have nails pounded on his fence post. It would be a challenge—God he put all those nails there because he knew the kids would go through the alley and if they saw a ripe fruit they would pick it. He would put nails—these were all the little games you would play with the neighbors and stuff. He would put nails sticking up from the fence. Okay now these kids are coming out of school, they are walking home and they are going to see nails here. They are going to have a hard time getting over the fence. We always had means to boost the guy up and he’d come out screaming with a broom stick. I’m not saying it’s like the thirties but it was—I mean those times you remember San Pedro. Then your parents would say, “Were you over...” No, I wasn’t over any body’s house. It was somebody else. School is—You know it was hard for me at times. You always wanted to be where the action was. You always wanted to be down there where the guy say, “Hey you want a wagon?” These older fellows would—in the younger days, in the forties, they has wagons of fish and they would sell it. Everybody says, “Wow you can make twenty bucks doing that.” So money was hard to come from because it was just hard living. Everybody had the same thing. Like I said we never took vacations. Our summer time was going down, well I did, I went to work or played around where Ports of Call is and played in the water; send me to boat works and fish off piers. We used to fish and hang out with our bikes.

Interviewer: That sounds great.

MA: Yeah.

Interviewer: Well, I have to--I'm afraid I have to wrap it up.

MA: Oh.

Interviewer: Is there anything else you want to share?

MA: Regarding the Port? Well, just the way the fishing is now, Sport fishing. I don't know. Just how things have changed in that way. It's a smaller way—It's not growing in the fishing industry. That's all I can say. It's not growing anymore. It's changing where everything is coming down to an end, basically.

Interviewer: Well the rest of would like to do the same thing. [Laughter]

MA: Right, alright sounds good.

Unknown person: But two things.

Interviewer: I have to take a picture of you.

MA: All right.

-----END OF INTERVIEW-----