

Interviewer: [00:00] Okay, we have speak Yes. Let me give you the hard question. First, please say your name and spell it.

Andrew Kuljis: [00:06] My name is Andrew Kuljis. That's Andrew A-N-D-R-E-W. The last name Kuljis is K-U-L-J-I-S.

Interviewer: [00:18] And Andrew, what year were you born? And where were you born?

AK: [00:20] I was born actually in Long Beach, California. My family lived in San Pedro in 1932.

Interviewer: [00:29] 1932. And tell us why did your family come to this area, initially?

AK: [00:35] My father immigrated to this country in 1921, leaving my mother behind in the old country, which was what is now Croatia, Yugoslavia. The island of Vis Komiža, is the town and my father came here in '21. But he first went to Tacoma, Washington where his brother dwelled, and they were in the salmon fishing industry in the Puget Sound area. And with the advent of the discovery of how to pack tuna, a lot of the people up there came down here to get into that industry. And, my father, being a fisherman from the old country it was a natural thing for him to do. And he came down here, began fishing commercially, and in – it took until 1927, for him to bring my mother over here. My oldest brother was born in Yugoslavia, and was seven years old when he first saw his father. So that's what brings us to San Pedro.

Interviewer: [01:46] Any stories your father told about his days here before when you were still very young.

AK: [01:51] Yes. But I learned more on my own than I learned from my father. My father was very busy being a skipper of a fishing boat and involved in fishing. He was gone very much at the time. I was raised more by my grandfather, who emigrated here in 1903, when my mother was born. He came over here and when my folks – my mom and dad got together – my granddad lived with us. And he was a fisherman also. But he had a smaller boat, and had more time at home. So, I was kind of his charge.

Interviewer: [02:37] So what kind of stories did your grandfather tell you.

AK: [02:40] My grandfather – he was a very interesting character. He was – he claimed to be Austrian because when he left the Europe Austro-Hungarian Empire

ruled all of the part of the country that he was from, so. And he was an Austrian Navy sailor. And he told me that he sailed square rigger around the world when Dewey was a pup, you know, he's really a colorful guy. We lived on 15th Street, across the street from San Pedro High School. As a matter of fact, we moved into that house when San Pedro High School began construction. And they were moving the Dodson mansion out of there, who was one of the town's early founders, [James H. and Rudecinda Sepúlveda de] Dodson. And they had a mansion there on 15th Street between Alma and Leland [Streets], where the high school now sits. They move that house down to 13th Street and Parker, and it sits there today across the street from Daniels Field. So, we saw a lot of interesting things happen there. There were a lot of vacant lots. And that was – who...the tract was named Vista Del Oro, and they just started building up towards Palos Verdes and if you lived in Palos Verdes you almost... that was another world to us at the time.

Interviewer: [04:12] This was in the 1930s? Or 20s?

AK: [04:14] This was in the 30s. We moved to that house in early 1936. I was only four years old when we moved there, but I remember it vividly.

Interviewer: [04:25] Any more stories from your grandpa about the port and his activities?

AK: [04:29] My granddad used to tell us stories that were, I think grim fairy tales, if I remember. He was a cook on the fishing boats and he could whip up bread pudding in a heartbeat. And half of the kids in our neighborhood used to hang around our house mostly because they could get something to eat once in a while Times were pretty tough. Just the tail end of the Depression. So we had our lot that we had, we raised two goats in the backyard; ducks, chickens rabbits. It was like a small farm and vacant lots around people used to avail themselves of any piece of ground that they can put a seed in, and grow a crop and make life a little easier. Coupled with fish that my father would bring home, and we would trade for meat in the local establishments. We did really well, for poor people we did well.

Interviewer: [05:36] What are your earliest memories as a little boy growing up in town?

AK: [05:40] San Pedro was a town where young people like myself could walk about unmolested; didn't have to worry about anybody going to grab you off the street. Everybody in town seemed to know everybody. You couldn't get away with much when you were kid. Somebody would've called your mom and tell. But I

remember. And I sold papers when I was a youngster. A lot of my friends did. And I sold papers and I chose the corner of, between 5th and 6th on Beacon was kind of my bailiwick, and I knew everybody around there. And I sold the *Herald Examiner*. And the *Manchester* boat had a paper called *The Daily News* in town. And I sold that. I remember being on the corner of 6th and Palos Verdes one rainy day, standing there, waiting for somebody to buy my two-cent paper and the manager of the bank there at the corner of 6th and Palos Verdes came out with a gentleman that was dressed kind of out of character for the neighborhood. He had a derby hat, cane, probably a camelhair coat, and I remember the diamond stick pin. And I thought to myself, "Wow, this guy's somebody special." And I didn't know what really was going on. But what was happening is that had just become Bank of America at that location. And the manager who was a friend of my dad's – we knew him knew his family – he walked out with this gentleman, and obviously he was his superior, the gentleman was. And the guy looks at me and says, "Hey, young man, you got any money in my bank?" I didn't have two nickels to rub together. I said "No, sir, I don't." And he said "Come with me." Took me inside the bank, and he slapped the coin on the counter. I don't know if it was a silver dollar or a 50-cent piece today. But he said to the teller, whom I also knew, she's smiling at me. And he says, "open a bank account for my friend here." So, somebody's given me money, I'm not going to object to that, especially, you know, seven-year-old kid. And so then we walked back outside and I got a little bank book in my pocket with whatever it was he deposited for me. And they talked for a little while, and then they walked down to the P station on Front Street. And the gentleman got aboard a train. And I assume he went to Los Angeles to catch a train to wherever else he was going. So, I maintain that bank account and years, years and years later, I thought about that when I got a Versatel card. And it said on my Versatel card "member since 1939." And this was - I was a 50-year-old man at the time this happened. I got to thinking about it and I asked a lot of people around town if they thought that this gentleman might have been A.P. [Amadeo Peter] Giannini himself. And we all concluded that it had to be the most logical explanation for it. So, I met A.P. Giannini, the founder of Bank of America at 6th and Palos Verdes in San Pedro in 1939. That's my claim to fame.

Interviewer: [09:41] It's a great, great story. What was Beacon Street like in the 30s?

AK: [09:46] I remember it well. It used to excite me as a kid.

Interview: [09:49] Say Beacon Street.

AK: [09:50] Beacon Street and all of the streets in that area – that was reputed to be the toughest area in the world by the head, just people from all over the world walking the streets there. British sailors, merchant men from all over the world. And a lot of sailors. Pacific Fleet used to be quartered in Los Angeles Harbor. And that was a pretty exciting part of growing up here. All the Navy ships – we used to be able to go on a Saturday and catch a launch out of the 22nd Street Landing and go out and have lunch on a battleship. I mean, you know, not too many people can say that. And then my brothers and I, we did a lot of that. And we used to shine shoes in the harbor, we used to wait at the Navy landing for the officers to come over there. Wore white shoes, and we used to buy new Ace [shoe polish] and fix their shoes up for them and they treated us really well. It was a pretty exciting time.

Interviewer: [11:05] Any adventures you had on Beacon Street?

AK: [11:08] Well, some that – one particular unsavory event – there was a pool hall on Beacon Street between 5th and 6th. And it was frequented almost solely by Filipino people. And I was standing on the corner selling papers. And this guy got out of a taxi cab, and he had a bolo knife in his hand. And he ran inside and you heard a bunch of screaming and hollering and pretty soon he came running back out, and he's looking up and down the street and guys are trying to grab him from inside and he turned the bolo knife on himself and cut his own throat right in front of me. That was a pretty traumatic experience for a kid. So that kind of strengthened my conviction that this is pretty rough part of town.

Interviewer: [12:08] Yes, any other stories you remember?

AK: [12:12] You know, I'd heard stories. I wasn't there because what happened called Black Tuesday, I heard the story from the local residents down there like Shanghai Red. You know, I used to walk up and down that street there and there were often fights between sailors and whoever; somebody come running out of a bar duking it out and Old Red would grab a handful of my collar and pants and throw me over the bar and say “stay there kid until I tell you to come out.” Now, and I'm wondering when it will all blow over. Then I'd come up. The Longshoreman's Hall was right there on 4th or 5th and Beacon and it's since, long since moved over to Wilmington. But that used to be kind of the hub for working people in town.

Interviewer: [13:07] Tell me about Shanghai Red. What kind of man – who was he and what kind of man was he?

AK: [13:11] You know, I'm trying to remember his name, Red.

Interviewer: [13:15] [Charles] Eisenberger.

AK: [13:15] Yes, Eisenberger. He was a gentle person.

Interviewer: [13:19] Say Shanghai Red.

AK: [13:19] Yes. He was...

Interviewer: [13:20] Say Shanghai Red so we know who you're talking about.

AK: [13:23] Oh, Shanghai Red. Eisenberger. I used to call him Red when I was a kid didn't know any other name. He knew everybody. I mean, you know, he was an institution himself. But he was...he used to say "Hey, kid, did you eat?" You know, if you said no, he'd say "Come on in." He'd make a sandwich for you treated you like you're family. And he loved everybody on the block. But nobody, but nobody gave him any guff. You know, if he said something was going to be done a certain way. That's the way it was done.

Interviewer: [14:04] What did he look like?

AK: [14:06] He's kind of slim, Red

Interviewer: [14:08] You have to say Shanghai Red

AK: [14:10] Shanghai Red seemed to me, when I was seven years old, like he was maybe six foot tall, slim, balding, Nordic-looking man. That's about all I could say.

Interviewer: [14:25] Red hair?

AK: [14:27] That's how he got his name. I think Shanghai Red was because he was a redheaded man.

Interviewer: [14:34] Tell me about Black Thursday.

AK: [14:39] You know, I heard... Black Tuesday. Black Tuesday was I heard it was 1934 is when that day was and that the longshoreman had demonstration [Editor's Note: this refers to a strike held in every West coast port that began on May 9, 1934, and on Tuesday, May 15, police in San Pedro shot at demonstrators and killed 2 longshoremen and injured many]. And the police intervened. And there was a scuffle and some fighting and one police officer shot one of the longshoremen and killed him. And since that day, Black Tuesday is become a

holiday for longshoremen. They don't work that day. And the officer that shot the man was policemen that lived here in town. Had a daughter. I went all the way through school with – I don't want to say the name – they probably wouldn't appreciate it. But that's part of the history of the area that time.

Interviewer: [15:41] Tell me about Al Miller. Who was he? What's his story?

AK: [15:46] Al Miller was a sweet guy that had a clothing store. He, I think the name of the firm was Al Miller Naval Tailors. And he used to sew uniforms almost exclusively for the Navy until the shipyard workers in the defense industry opened up in town. And he sold uniforms from blue serge was the main material they used and denim for dungarees, but he branched out into firemen's, policemen's uniforms. And I used to get, I used to deliver his paper to him every day. And Mrs. Miller, who never kept books, she but she was an amazing person. She could tell you to the penny, how much you owed them. And, but they would sew me a shirt and a pair of pants every year. That was my birthday present. And when I went in the Navy sewed me tailor-made blues and didn't charge me a penny for it. When I came home, got married, thinking about going on the fire department when I went on the fire department, everybody had to buy their own uniforms. The city didn't provide anything. Then you had to have your own bedding, uniforms, safety equipment, and they were [purvendors? – does he mean purveyor?] of that. So I got it all there. And other fellows were going to the fireman's credit union getting a loan paying it off down there. Millers carried me themselves. I had a long, long friendship with them and their son Joe took over after Mrs. Miller died, but with her the business went down. They couldn't, didn't know what who owed them. I guess. It just failed.

Interviewer: [17:53] Why do you think he takes a liking to you? I mean, what was he like?

AK: [17:57] Well, I was there all the time. And didn't look like I was going to go away. And they treated me like I was a member of the family if they had cookies, there, have some cookies handy. There was no fuss made when I walked in. I just was like one of the family walking in and out of the store. I remember being this...all of the uniforms and everything hanging around stacked, and they were busy sewing and the floors were, they were so worn they had grooves in them. They were there for a long time. I don't know what year they started their business in but clear up through the time I was a young man and went on the fire department. I always got my uniforms there. All my friends did. He was an institution on the LA City Police and Fire Department along with along with the Navy and military people that bought uniforms. So had quite a business.

Interviewer: [19:07] Now your father was a fisherman....

Third person: [19:09] We're going to change tapes.

Interviewer: [19:11] This is terrific. Your father was a fisherman. Is he growing up? Did you have any experiences with fishing or the fishing business?

AK: [19:20] I did. I had a great deal of experience in the fishing business. My father was a commercial fisherman and worked on some of the most successful boats in the harbor. He was fortunate. Fishermen they tend to be professional from the standpoint of my father was reputed to be one of the best masked men around. And the masked men is the guy that sits in the crow's nest and spots a fish. He has to know all the telltale signs. There was no electronic equipment in those days that just had to be experience that brought home the bacon there. And he was reputed to have an eagle eye. And he knew the signs that would tell him that there are fish present. So he enjoyed a good reputation. And he was sought after. He could fish aboard any number of boats, he was invited to be a crew member. So...

Interviewer: [20:33] What about yourself? Did you... what was, well first of all, what is what was the fishing harbor like? What did it look like in those days?

AK: [20:40] Fish – San Pedro slip where they parked the fishing boats is just around the corner from where the now-commercial fish market is, as you probably have pictures of the old fish market which was up channel. When I was a boy, it was our playground. Fish Harbor on Terminal Island. And SP slip on the San Pedro side and clear up channel there was a place called, that we referred to as B.A.B. Bear. You know you used to swim naked there and moon the red cars that went over the trestle going to Long Beach there. That was our sport [laughing]. But we did a lot of that and never got in much trouble. But we used to play around Fish Harbor. And when the fishermen were working on their nets, most of the time when they're in harbor, there's something to do when the season is on. They have nets to mend, they tarred the nets to keep them from rotting. All of the things and kids that hung around there used to get fed lunch on the boats because they cook just like they did when they were out to sea. So was a good place to hang around because you're going to eat but you used to fill the shuttles with the twine so that the fishermen could use it, help them pull net load net and be useful around there if there was any painting to do. We learned to paint; we learned to handle a paintbrush at a very young age, free labor. And it was a community that was very close. I don't know of any fisherman that my father didn't know. We used to go walk down the wharf, like on a day off, he'd stop and talk to everybody. I thought "gee, we're never going to get home. He's a pretty popular guy." But...

Interviewer: [22:48] There was a Japanese community in Terminal Island. Did you know anything about that?

AK: [22:51] Yes, I knew about it. You know, I never visited it. If I did, I don't remember it but McCollins Market which is on 21st Street and Walker now. The McCollins owned a market there next to the Japanese community. And I heard from him some of the things that went on over there and they had a beach over there that was called Brighton Beach. And we used to go over there. It was a neat place to go swimming because it didn't have waves on it like Cabrillo Beach did so if you wanted a nice calm atmosphere to take a young family around and play in the ocean. It was an ideal spot. So in the canning, the fish canneries over there... Old Joe [Joseph P.] Mardesich that used to own Franco-Italian Packing Company which later became Chicken of the Sea, he was my mother's cousin. My grandmother was a Mardesich, on my mother's side. So we had, anytime we needed extra work, we'd work after school, we'd go to – when the season was on, tuna or sardine. There was always some work for us young guys over at either. What StarKist used to be called French Sardine [Company], and that was Joe Bogdanovich. And almost everyone in town was from an all the Slav people were from pretty much the same area in the old country. They were fishermen by trade and they lived on the islands off of the coast of Split [Croatia], roughly. There are many islands there.

Interviewer: [24:47] Well, what do you remember? Did you ever see or know anything about Joseph Mardesich, Joseph Bogdanovich?

AK: [24:53] Joe Bogdanovich was...yes, I remember him. My father and a lot of people that worked in in the fishing trade looked up to Joe Bogdanovich as being one of the innovators that brought them their livelihood. The tuna industry was dependent on people like that. And he hired people that made his product better and marketed it worldwide. My mother worked for Joe Bogdanovich. She was supervisor of ladies that StarKist for 30 years. She, so...

Interviewer: [25:37] What kind of man was he?

AK: [25:39] Benevolent. He...

Interviewer: [25:40] Joe Bogdanovich.

AK: [25:40] Joe Bogdanovich was a benevolent man. He was instrumental in the found the founding of the Yugoslav American Club. We used to call it the Slav Hall when we were kids. And we used to have family picnics and old country type of music, entertainment, plays. It was a rallying place in San Pedro, for Slav

people. And when I got to be high school age, we used to have dances down there and everybody in town used to come to this live hall on a Friday night to a dance. That was some good times there. The place was always packed. And that place was built largely due to the influence of Mr. Bogdanovich – Joe Bugs they called him. Always tousled my hair when he saw me and was friendly, knew everybody. Very well-respected man.

Interviewer: [26:48] So tell me about some of these old country performances or dances as a kid. Did you go there and say “What am I doing here?” Or what was that like?

AK: [26:54] When I was a boy almost everybody I knew – I say almost – the large number of people I knew were the same persuasion as I was. Folks knew one another when they were kids in the old country. And when we built the Yugoslav American Center, it was a playground for us. We used to go there and look forward to going there. Most of the young people at that time spoke the language. And I still do and we get together. It's kind of fun to talk old country. But we used to see plays and things that just brought forward what our heritage was. And the women used to wear the costumes. My oldest brother played a musical instrument called tamburitza. It was long-neck mandolin, and they had an organization called Pelagich [Club] which was strictly old country music and we used to sing and dance and look forward to it. We didn't think that it was something square we had to do with our parents. It was something that we loved and looked forward to. It was, those were good days. I remember those.

Interviewer: [28:21] Did you have favorite songs that you liked to sing when you went there?

SK: [28:27] [Laughter] The songs that we sang were like “O Marijana.” I think every kid my age knew that song. And there were several of them. I can't remember the words to all of them. But “O Marijana.” was by far the most popular. It was a love song; ballad. We even taught the Italian kids the words to them; they used to sing with us at the Slav hall; we'd invite them over. And just the same thing - the Italians would teach us “O Sole Mio” and all the Italian songs that were the favorites of them. So you can tell who was who.

Interviewer: [29:15] What about dances? Did you learn the folk dancing?

AK: [29:18] We had - the Yugoslavian, we used to call them Kolos. Much the same as Russians dance. And the women used to wear the full skirts -white with embroidered flowers on them, the bright colors and it just was very festive. Had

some wonderful times. My dad, he fancied himself a good dancer and he was pretty nimble. He would do a dance called the Constantine Polka. And my mother didn't dance much but my dad he was in demand. The gals used to like to dance with dad. They were all there that same hall and they have the Pelagich tamburitza band up on the stage and everybody would just be having a grand time.

Interviewer: [30:15] Did you learn the dances yourself?

AK: [30:16] Yes, I did.

Interviewer: [30:17] Tell me about your favorite kind of dance.

AK: [30:19] Oh, when I started dancing seriously it was boogie woogie [laughter], jitterbug. Stan Kenton and the big bands were the all the rage. And we used to have dances there that were...we'd have combos from all over the country do gigs there. It was a pretty good dance floor and always well-attended. Of course, they had a good bar too. And I think they used to have trouble keeping the underage kids from drinking there but...

Interviewer: [30:54] What about your traditional dances? Did you learn the traditional dances?

AK: [30:57] The traditional dances were kind of when the Kolos - and I don't know the name of the dances but they were danced by everybody and hardly anybody left in chairs around when they'd be doing these. And it was, for lack of a better description, the rounds that they would form big circles and dance had steps that were pretty simple to learn, and it was just rhythm stuff. I never, I have never danced that since I was a kid. But I remember it vividly.

Interviewer: [31:50] And what about the food? Was there...what was the traditional food?

AK: [31:54] Well you could go down to Ante's Restaurant today and find what the traditional food was. One of the staples in, you know, in American life - if you go to a lot of dinners, you talk about the rubber chicken circuit, you know. In the Yugoslavian community, pretty much when you get together, must have choli which is the noodles that are bevel-cut ends and spaghetti-type sauce, and then sauerkraut and spareribs and stuffed cabbage. And if you want to get seafood, they call it cioppino today. We called it *brudet* - it was the same thing [cell phone rings] I thought I turned that off, sorry. Mind if I answer?

Interviewer: [32:44] Sure.

Interviewer: [32:50] We are talking about food, traditional food.

AK: [32:53] Yes, traditional food. I remember my mother at Christmas time spending a week before Christmas baking and some of the things that we would have would be a strudel. She'd roll out the dough, this as paper, cover the whole dining room table with it. Then she would string up the, even bananas, pineapple, every kind of fruit you can imagine, and nuts. And then this thing had get rolled up and it was a precision job; everybody had to participate in rolling up the tablecloth and making everything come out even. And then the amazing part about this whole thing that she'd have this big long loaf about six foot long that she would work into a snake on a baking pan. And that stuff was the strudel. You can smell it cooking all over the neighborhood, and it used to set the neighbors while the kids especially. My grandmother, when she came from the old country at a time Hitler was marching through Europe – we got all the old people out of the country - she was raising my cousin, my – her grandson – my aunt had died and my grandmother raised him over there. She didn't want to come. But it was either come over here or die. So we got her over here and my granddad and my dad built a dome oven in the backyard. Now this is a big oven – it was not a small task. Anyway, this oven; my grandmother was a baker in the old country. So she would go to Gaffey Canyon, which was up on 10th and Leland Street, which was about five blocks away from [the house]. She'd go up there early in the morning and gather up wood, sticks and all the fallen wood that she could find, and she'd stack them on a rock and she had this thing like a doughnut she'd put on top of her head. This is a sixty-year old woman. She rolled that thing off onto her head. And she looked like she had a huge load on her head that weighed a couple hundred pounds. I don't know how much it weighed. But she'd walk home with that. She'd stoke a fire in this brick dome oven in the morning, and she would cook most of the things we ate that day in there: roast meat, or whatever. First she'd bake the bread. And we had every neighborhood kid hanging over the fence when she was doing this. She used to give away a couple of loaves before she ever got it in the house, to these kids. But she was a great cook, and baker, and she baked every bit of bread that I ate until she moved away from there when - she and my granddad bought a house and that was the end of our baking. But the food that we ate was mostly food we raised and we always had a lot of eggs. My mother kept chickens and we'd trade other people for food. There was a lot of bartering that happened.

Interviewer: [36:29] What about traditional festivals? What were the big festivals of every season?

AK: [36:35] We had, the festivals that we had were...the biggest thing was the Fisherman's Fiesta. And the Fisherman's Fiesta was looked forward to by

everybody. You had - if you had a ride on a boat you had arrived, you know and kids would get a ride wherever they could. And wasn't always the boat that their dad worked on or anything. You know how kids are, they'll tag along with one another and I'll go with my cousin on his dad's boat. So it was just...the SP slip was alive with people that were just enjoying himself. It was just a wonderful time. And then the only other fiestas that we had were: the Catholic Church had their annual fiestas...

Interviewer: [37:28] Well as before we leave the Fishermen's Fiesta - people don't know what the Fishermen's Fiesta was. What was the Fisherman's Fiesta?

AK: [37:32] The Fisherman's Fiesta was their Thanksgiving for their season. And it was just a way of showing the community that they appreciated their support. And they were thankful that they had a good-enough catch to make a living with and it was just kind of spontaneous. And they had prizes: who could decorate the boat the nicest, and some of them were pretty simple. Some of them got elaborate. The competition was pretty fierce, but really good natured.

Interviewer: [38:05] So what was the process? What was the procedure? What would happen?

AK: [38:09] We'd go down to the harbor early in the morning and people would be all over the docks. And the boats would have a soda pop and a lot to eat. And everybody's enjoying themselves eating a sandwich with the, you know, things, things that are today you look at them as expensive cuts of meat like prosciutto. That was one of the mainstays down there. French bread from DiCarlo's Bakery. You know, that was that was the main [purvender?] of bread in the Harbor area for years and years.

Interviewer: [38:51] So there's a blessing of the fleet, or something?

AK: [38:52] They had a blessing of the fleet. We would then have a parade out into Long Beach Harbor, and back to San Pedro Harbor and you know, maybe have one-hundred boats, you think that it'd become a navigation problem, but it just was smooth as silk. Everybody having a good time. Kids got to drink all a soda pop they could hold. And there's beer and wine and food. Food was a big thing. This thing would last from early in the morning until late at night, and in some instances way into the early morning, depending on how big the party got aboard the vessel. But I enjoyed some of that, even when I was older. It was certainly a disappointment when they discontinued it.

Interviewer: [39:47] And you talked about the church festivals. What were they?

AK: [39:50] They were just a carnival type of thing, you know like...the church would have a fundraiser, everybody had a get-together there. One of the biggest things in town was a Lions Club put on a fair. And they pitched a tent like a revival tent at 13th and Gaffey Street that was all a vacant area. Used to be the playing field of Old San Pedro High School, which was located at 13th and Gaffey Street until the 30s when they built San Pedro High School. And they'd have this tent on there. And they had just a standard carnival; they did have all the carnie things that you would have; just a place to have good time. And [the] Boy's Club, which was right adjacent to it - Nick Trani was the director of the Boy's Club and they - we had pretty active coaches up there, and they would get us kids and trained us to do some trapeze acts. And put on a show for the people [inaudible]. But it was a pretty-well, pretty-well done.

Interviewer: [41:10] Did you ever get involved in doing...?

AK: [41:11] Yes, yes.

Interviewer: [41:12] What did you do on it?

AK: [41:13] Well, I was a gymnast in high school. And in my earlier days, I was always able to do a flip and a handstand in those things. So we would do a gymnastic show. They'd put out mats there and then we run down here and do a bunch of backflips and backhand springs and it's just more of a fun thing. And it was a laugh in some instances. See a kid trying to do a flip that couldn't really do a flip, you know, it was pretty amusing. And the nice part about it: is most everybody knew everybody. Town was at one time ten-thousand people. And that's not really a huge town when you start talking about seeing people repeatedly.

Interviewer: [42:02] What about the Elks Club?

AK: [42:04] The Elks Club, my recollection of the Elks Club was - almost everybody that was in business in San Pedro belonged to the Elks or the Lions. And the Elks Club was at 7th and Palos Verdes at that time, and across the street from it on 7th Street was the Cabrillo Theatre, which is long gone, but that's one of the places that the young people hung out. Elks Club had dances also. And I regret never having joined the Elks. I had a chance - when I went into service, they offer this free membership to the Elks. I kicked myself for not having [inaudible] myself of that.

Interviewer: [42:54] And what were the other big institutions in town? You talked about the Slavs club, the Elks Club, the Lions Club. What are the other big community institutions? The churches, I guess, were big?

AK: [43:09] The churches, churches were big in San Pedro. They were because there was no TV. And entertainment was not what it is today. Church life was bigger in those days than it is today. So, the church was more involved in people's lives at that time. They found things to do. They had, you know, their, like the festivals that the Catholic Church would have, were, were a main part of what people did in those days.

Interviewer: [43:51] Now you were briefly a fisherman?

AK: [43:55] Yes.

Interviewer: [43:55] Tell me about that.

AK: [43:57] When I was growing up, I thought that that was what my life was going to be because my family were fisher people. And I thought that when I graduated high school, I was going to jump aboard my dad's boat and become a fisherman. So, I was always very good mechanically, and I took classes at high school and machine shop. And I was preparing myself to work aboard my father's vessel as a engineer, and also went to navigation school. In those days. They had made up some federal rules that vessels of a certain tonnage had to have a navigator aboard and my father was sending me to a navigation school to learn to be that person. It was [a] required thing. And when I graduated from high school Korea had broken out and war was on and incidental to that the tuna industry was going; foreign markets were delivering tuna here cheaper than we could go out and harvest it. So, the tuna industry died. There are no canneries left in fish harbor in San Pedro. As a matter of fact, I don't think they pack tuna anywhere on the Pacific coast of California. I think it's all from Pago Pago [American Samoa] and, and the Orient.

Interviewer: [45:30] So you went into, you went to the fire department?

AK: [45:42] First I went into the Navy. I was a member of 11-7, the Submarine Reserve, which met on Terminal Island, as were several of my friends. So we used to go to reserve meetings over there. And when Korea broke out, our unit got activated. We found ourselves in the service. So I went to San Diego and a bootcamp and from there to New London, Connecticut where I attended submarine school, and then back out here into the Pacific Fleet until I was discharged. And it was...when the Korean War veterans came back to town, there wasn't a great deal

of work to be had. It was a pretty tough time. And I got married and started a family and I was desperately seeking a good paying job and the fire department came along and I got lucky and scored very high on the exam. I got selected and the rest is history. I did thirty-two and a half years on the fire department and retired as a captain on a fire boat for Station 49. So I've seen a lot of things on the fire department. I've been to some of the major fires down here.

Interviewer: [47:05] Were you here for the *Sansinena*? [Editor's Note: an explosion aboard oil tanker SS *Sansinena* on December 7, 1976 caused a massive fire and killed nine and injured forty-six people].

AK: [47:05] No, I wasn't I was off duty at home. I live in Orange County now. And, but my mother-in-law [inaudible] called me on the phone and says "are you aware of what's going on down here?" And I said, I had to tell her I heard the blast from Anaheim.

Interviewer: [47:24] What were the memorable fires that you were involved with down here?

AK: [47:29] There was one big fire – was the Matson dock fire. They had...

Interviewer: [47:40] Start again.

AK: [47:41] Okay. One of the largest fires in the harbor that I was involved at was the Matson dock fire [Editor's Note: this was a fire that occurred on March 17, 1960 in the Matson terminal]. It was a pier and a facility for the Matson line that was under construction. And the brand new pilings at the time – wharf construction was creosoted poles driven into the ocean bed, and they burned pretty well in the smoke was very toxic. And we didn't have a lot of breathing apparatus at that time so that a lot of firemen were affected by burning creosote and probably one of the reasons my lungs aren't what they should be today, it was pretty dangerous.

Interviewer: [48:29] Can you described fighting that fire? And what year was this?

AK: [48:32] That fire had to be, you know, I'm only guessing that the Matson dock fire had to be in in 1958 or '59. I only had a few years on the fire department at the time. And I was working that fire station, at 182nd and Vermont. I was the acting captain. We came down with a 1926 Seagrave which was an old, old pumper. And that pumper pumped without fail for nineteen hours. It was a – you had to lubricate the rocker arms by hand, they had no pressure oiling system on that. And by the time we'd got done, there was a puddle of oil under that. A fire truck we had to dig

a big hole to eliminate the mess we'd made sitting there. But that was...that was quite a fire.

Interviewer: [49:28] Any other fire you remember down here?

AK: [49:30] In the harbor. I didn't participate in too many of the other large fires. I was standing in front of San Pedro High School, which was across the street from my home, talking to a neighbor, a girl that lived next door to me. And I think it was 1947 when the *Markay* blew up - it was a gasoline tanker [Editor's Note: explosions aboard the oil tanker SS *Markay* on June 22, 1947, occurred after seventy-thousand barrels of fuel had been loaded while it was docked at Berth 167 (Shell Oil Company), setting fire to Berths 167, 168, 153, and 159]. It almost took the whole harbor with it, but... We first saw the light turn the walls of the high school, orange. And that was a surprise. And then the sound and shockwave hit us. It was the most amazing thing. So we ran down to the end of the block where we could see the harbor and saw that, that it was clearly the biggest fire we had ever seen. During World War II there was a great deal of military activity in San Pedro, because of the Navy and Fort MacArthur. And in Torrance, they had the Navy, I think it was the Army Air Corps, had P-38 Squadron. And we watched a P-38 crash. Palos Verdes, when I was, I don't know - about the sixth grade - everybody ditched school and ran up there to see what had happened. That was the most excitement we had had in a long time.

Interviewer: [51:06] Tell me about the *Markay*; you went to... need to change tapes here. Get to the end here. Start from the beginning and tell me the story of *Markay* and the year it happened.

AK: [51:18] Okay. I was standing in front of San Pedro High School, where the lunch pavilion is across the street from my house talking to a girl neighbor of mine, when the San Pedro High School absolutely turned orange, and it was a phenomenon. And then the shockwave came, and it was obviously an explosion and fire. We couldn't see the the harbor from that point. But we ran down to the end of 15th Street between the high school and junior high school and you could look off and see the whole harbor. And it looked like there wasn't any of the harbor that wasn't burning. Later I learned from firemen I knew - because they had worked on a fire - what the full impact almost was. They almost burnt the whole harbor down, hadn't it been for Fireboat 2, which is the boat that's retired now and sitting on dry land - it's to become a museum. But they did a yeoman's job on keeping that fire from spreading down the harbor. And citizens stopped to help. My brother was coming home from Long Beach with a friend of his and healthy,

strong teenager - they helped pull hose and to help the firemen. They had their hands full. There was there was enough fire, like they say, for everybody.

Interviewer: [52:50] What did it look like? What did it look like?

AK: [52:54] It was a giant ball of flame. When we first saw it seemed like it went four, five-hundred feet into the air, is a guess. But when we got down to where we could see it, the ball of flame had died down. But the fire had spread out hundreds of yards across the whole channel. Things were burning that you wouldn't, you wouldn't dream that it could reach. But burning gasoline, maybe a foot deep or so, racing across the harbor started a lot of work fires, uh boat fires, everything that was in the path was going to go. And the firemen with Boat 1 came around from fish harbor and they had some smaller boats that couldn't do much firefighting but they would pull these - what they call booms - they're a que Kapok-filled item on a real looks-like-a-hose, but it's rope tied around it and they pull that out and make what they call a boom across the harbor and it would contain the burning liquid and wouldn't let it spread any further, it would keep it contained until it burn out. And the nice part about the gasoline fire is you're going to run out of gas pretty soon. They burn but...

Interviewer: [54:23] How long did the fire last?

AK: [54:25] It was – it had to have been twelve hours.

Interviewer: [54:31] How long would you say the fire... the fire last?

AK: [54:34] The *Markay* burnt clear into the next day. So I would guess the fire probably until they extinguish all the fire in the ship had to be over twelve hours.

Interviewer: [54:47] Did you know it would have had to happen? Did you find out later how it would happen?

AK: [54:51] They only surmised that some electrical equipment failure had lit the flammable, or caught the flammable vapors and they had an explosion. And then another explosion which ripped the vehicle, the vessel in half. And then all of the liquid gasoline just floated out on a harbor on fire.

Interviewer: [55:17] The final question: what's your fondest memory of living, growing up, working in San Pedro?

AK: [55:23] My fondest memories were Cabrillo beach. When I was a boy Cabrillo Beach was - that was my life. I loved the place and my wife and I courted

there - that was where we'd spent the most happy hours of our childhood body surfing. We used to get a mattress sack like they had in the Navy, wet it, fill it up with air and then body surf. The waves at Cabrillo Beach were just the best on the coast and we'd do that for hours and exhaust ourselves down here. And then I can remember going up to the bathhouse at Cabrillo Beach, shivering so bad I could hardly walk, flopping down on my belly in the sand and pulling a handful of warm sand up to my chest. God, that was heaven. That was heaven. And go into the concession stand there and getting a frozen Snicker. That was...everybody loves frozen Snickers and Abba Zaba bars. That was living.

Interviewer: [56:42] That's great. Well, we ran out of time. There's so many stories we may want to ask you to come back.

AK: [56:47] You know, I'll search my mind. I'll make some notes and.