

Male Speaker: Can you please say your name and spell it?

James Hahn: My name is James Hahn, H-A-H-N.

MS: Would you like me to call you Jim or mayor? I prefer to call people mayor. [laughter]

JH: Whatever you want to call me. Jim works with my friends and neighbors down here.

MS: Please tell us what year you were born and where were you born?

JH: I was born in 1950 in Los Angeles at the old Hollywood Presbyterian Hospital.

MS: We know that your dad at times took you down to the port. What are your earliest experiences at the port? You were not born here, but you did get down here for some reason. Talk about that.

JH: My dad served here in World War II. We can talk about that a little later. So, he had great affection for the Port of Los Angeles and San Pedro Harbor. So, I remember coming down here at a very early age to ride the ferry over to Terminal Island. We would just come down as if that was some kind of a ride, just to ride back and forth on the ferry and listen to my dad's Navy stories from World War II.

MS: What were your impressions of the place as a young kid?

JH: It seems a lot more crowded today than it did then. But then it seemed pretty busy. I remember sea lions swimming along with the ferry. I remember the freighters coming in and out. Of course, we didn't have any cranes. There was really nothing blocking the skyline in those days until the big edition of the Vincent Thomas Bridge. But it was the smells and the sites. It was a different place, very exotic. The idea that these ships were going all over the world or had come from somewhere around the world, I think was very exciting to a little kid.

MS: When did you realize that this was an important part of Los Angeles? Or did you know it from the beginning that this was an important component of L.A. culturally and economically?

JH: I don't know that I knew it right away when I was a kid.

MS: I should tell you one thing. My questions are not going to be used, so you have got to include that part.

JH: Oh, include the question. I didn't really know how important the Port of Los Angeles really was, I think, until I became part of city government. I was elected Los Angeles City Controller in 1981, and then the city attorney in 1985. So, I had a lot of interaction with the port staff here and what was going on here at the Port of Los Angeles. But for the most part, I don't think I really recognized how important this harbor was to this city, this region, and the economic clout that it really has.

MS: Let us go back and talk about your dad. He was involved in the Navy here. Why not give a little background on his connections to the port? Any stories that he told you.

JH: My dad, like a lot of young men, he was in college when the attack on Pearl Harbor came. So, the next day, he went down and enlisted in the Navy. Being in college, he was immediately told, "Well, you go to officer candidate school." He went back to Notre Dame and it was one of those ninety-day wonders. So, he was very excited about what his first commission would be, it comes out as an [inaudible]. They say, "Guess what, Kenny, you're going back to your hometown. You're going back to be a pilot at the San Pedro Harbor." He thought, "Well, gee, that's not exactly what I thought I was going to do when I signed up to be in the war. But that's okay." So, he came down here and was able to visit his mom every day who lived in South Los Angeles. So, that was his first job, was being down here. Because the Navy naturally took over all the ports all over the country. Suddenly, they were under the department of defense.

MS: There was an incident that we read about that occurred that was amusing. [laughter] It could have been worse, but it turned out to be...

JH: My dad loved to tell this story. Of course, we're in wartime, everything had to be top security. So, they would run up code flags on the vessel after the pilots would meet the ship outside the breakwater. Every day, I think the code book was changed, naturally for security reasons. For some reason, my dad said he had the wrong day's code book, and he ran up the flags that he thought he was supposed to run up as he brought the ship in. Unfortunately, the flags that he ran up read, "Enemy ship approaching."

MS: [laughter]

JH: As he steamed into the channel with this Russian freighter, I think it was, he suddenly noticed the guns at Fort MacArthur were being trained on the vessel he was on. Alarms were going off. He had no idea what was happening. Lucky for him, a friend of his, a little more senior here at the port, a man named Baldo Kristovich, knew my dad and knew he probably could get things wrong from time to time. He said, "Hey, that's Ensen Hahn. That's Kenny on board. Stand down. This one's okay."

MS: [laughter] That is a great story. Eventually, your dad became city councilman. This was part of his district, right? Was it not?

JH: No, not quite. He was a city councilman in the 8th Council District, which was kind of the center of Los Angeles. For as long as I can remember, this district has been part of the 15th Council District. It's almost like a thermometer based on the population of Los Angeles since that long, thin stretch of land that connects the rest of Los Angeles to San Pedro. It goes up and down depending on what the population adjustment needs to be. But he had a strong affection for this area. I remember when the Harbor Freeway was being built, as each year would go by, it would get closer and closer. I remember when it dumped down onto what now is John S. Gibson Boulevard. Ride to the end of the freeway, that was something that we liked to do. But he always would come down here. I don't think a month went by that we didn't come down here to ride the ferry. We'd drive over to Long Beach to the Navy base there and he was always looking

for the ship that he skippered. After he left San Pedro, what he wanted was an assignment in the South Pacific. He skippered a little coastal vessel off of new Guinea. So, he's always looking for that ship, because I remember the number, and we would always look to see if it was around. I think the thing got scrapped or something a long time ago.

MS: Talk about the Harbor Freeway. That is an important link to the city and all that. What do you know about the history and the development of that, and maybe how it relates to your dad, or it does not relate to your dad?

JH: All I remember is that my dad would rail against it going through his district and dividing the communities all the time.

MS: You have to say what we are talking about, Harbor Freeway.

JH: The Harbor Freeway.

MS: I was talking there.

JH: Oh, excuse me. I think one of the great skills my dad had as a politician, he was a county supervisor for forty years and a city councilman for five years, was he was always on the side of the community. But he always knew how to get in the picture. The one I remember was he fought and fought against the Harbor Freeway going through his district and dividing his communities. But when it was opened, he was right in the middle of the picture cutting the ribbon. [laughter] It was a remarkable thing, the Harbor Freeway. It really did connect this part of Los Angeles to the other part. In fact, folks down here in San Pedro still, when you talk about downtown, they mean 6th and Pacific. They don't mean 1st and Main Street in downtown Los Angeles. But it was an important link to the Port of Los Angeles. As a child, I remember it moving inexorably South and finally hooked up here in the Port of Los Angeles.

MS: Were you among the first who took that ride down the...

JH: Yes, I remember that. That was a big deal.

MS: Tell me about that.

JH: There was some kind of a caravan or something that we all got in when the Harbor Freeway was open to ride down to the end of the freeway. Big deal. It was the first real freeway that I remember. I know the Arroyo Seco Parkway was done first and things. But this was one that went through my neighborhood because I lived in South L.A.

MS: I know you were still a youngster in those days, but what about the Vincent Thomas Bridge? Do you remember anything about the opening of that?

JH: I wasn't at the opening of the bridge. But I remembered suddenly that there was a bridge here. It was a marvelous thing. But on the other hand, it meant the end of the ferry. Which was a real treat to ride on the *Islander* ferry back and forth. But, yes, the bridge was a beautiful thing.

I still think it's one of the most beautiful bridges you're ever going to see. When it's lit up with the late afternoon sun, that glorious emerald green color, it's really spectacular. Then since we put the blue lights on it, it's even prettier at night.

MS: Again, this is not exactly your time, but did you know Vincent Thomas? Did you ever meet him or know about him?

JH: I remember meeting him when I was little.

MS: Vincent Thomas.

JH: Vincent Thomas. I remember meeting Vincent Thomas. My dad knew a lot of the legislators from Los Angeles. His brother Gordon was in the legislature. So, yes, we'd known him. I didn't know him well, but I remember meeting him. Yes.

MS: Another name that is big down here is Glenn Anderson. Did you ever encounter him?

JH: Oh, sure. Glenn Anderson started out in Hawthorne city politics. So, Hawthorne was part of my dad's supervisorial district. In fact, Hawthorne was right adjacent to the Inglewood area where we lived. We'd go down to Hawthorne to buy the Schwinn bicycles at Phil's bike shop. That was Assemblyman Jim Wedworth's bike shop. So, we knew Glenn Anderson. I remember in 1958, my dad was running for United States senator. We really thought there was an opportunity to have a democratic sweep of all the statewide seats in 1958. Now, unfortunately, for my dad, no one knew him outside of Los Angeles County. He thought he was a whizz kid of politics. He was thirty-eight, the youngest county supervisor ever elected. He thought he was a big deal. We went up to a state convention in Fresno. I remember the Hacienda hotel up there in Fresno. That was when Pat Brown was the governor. Met Glenn Anderson up there. Glenn was the choice to be lieutenant governor. So, I got to know Glenn over the years. Great, great public servant and I knew him for many, many years.

MS: For those who do not know who he is, what is his importance to San Pedro?

JH: Glenn Anderson, after he was lieutenant governor of California, he was elected to the United States Congress representing this area. Glenn Anderson was hugely instrumental in securing public federal funds to expand the Port of Los Angeles. We're kind of a swamp here. In order to have big oceangoing vessels coming here, they needed to dredge the channel to make it deep enough to bring in larger and larger and larger ships. Without the wherewithal to do that, I don't think this port would have ever grown. So, Glenn Anderson was very instrumental in getting federal funding to expand this port over the years. Eventually, became chair of the Public Works Committee in the United States Congress, which was hugely important for all of us here.

MS: When you got involved in city politics first of all as a deputy city attorney, you began to see the city in a larger scale. Talk about how your relationship to the port, as you got into public service, how did it change in the various jobs you had? We will spend more time on the mayor but start with that. We got a siren here, which is unusual.

JH: I know. It's such a safe city.

MS: [laughter] Probably a fire truck.

JH: I started my city service in 1975 as a deputy city attorney. I never got assigned down to the San Pedro Courthouse, which I would've liked to have been. The city attorney had an office at each one of the municipal court branches, back when there still was a municipal court. Now it's all been combined into one unified court. But I think I really began to be involved with the port when I was elected Los Angeles City Controller in 1981. The controller of the city of Los Angeles, it's unusual that it is an elected position. But we're tasked with being the chief financial officer for all the city departments. That includes the airport and the department of water and power, and the harbor department. So, I began to be aware of what was going on at the harbor department when I was the city controller. My predecessor had made a big deal about going after everybody's expense accounts down here at the Port of Los Angeles. I think that they were very wary of what this new kid would do in the job. Would he be the same kind of guy going over everybody's expense accounts all the time? How much do they spend on these foreign trips and everything else? I was looking at some of that stuff, but I finally was interested in a lot bigger things than getting a headline at the expense of some commissioner going on a trade mission. Because once I finally started doing those things myself, I realized how much work they are. [laughter]

MS: [laughter] For people who do not understand the DWP and the port and LAX, they are very unique city institutions legally and economically. Can you explain to them what the port is?

JH: Those three departments, we call them proprietary departments because they're businesses. The department of water and power, the largest municipal utility in the United States. The Los Angeles International Airport, which is actually owned by the city of Los Angeles, which is the largest origination and destination airport in the country. The Port of Los Angeles, which is the number one harbor in the in the United States. They're all businesses. So, they're not supported by tax dollars. They're supported by the revenues that they produce. Even more interesting is the Port of Los Angeles, which is actually operated under a tidelands trust, since all the coastal waters and the adjacent coast belong to the state of California. The tidelands then are administered in a trust by the city of Los Angeles for the benefit of the entire state. So, a lot of people have said, "Well, this port makes a lot of money for city of Los Angeles." In fact, all the revenues that the port makes are plowed right back into the port to support what it does.

MS: But often there are complaints on both sides that the city would like to take some of that money and use it in other ways. Has there never been a push pull about that?

JH: Sure, there was. My predecessor, Mayor Richard Riordan, came into office saying, "I'm going to hire three thousand more police officers, and I'm not going to raise your taxes." So, naturally everybody voted for him [laughter] with that kind of thing. So, he went out to take money from the department of water and power and the airport and the Port of Los Angeles to support that expansion. They had a study done that said that over the years, the city of Los Angeles, which provides a lot of services to the Port of Los Angeles, the fire department, and power and lights and streets and things like that that the city really hadn't been reimbursed

properly for all those services. That they had neglected to include the city overhead in these bills. So, Riordan got this audit and said, "Well, I want to get reimbursed for all this." So, he had \$66 million transferred from the port down to the city treasury. The State Lands Commission got involved, and the attorney general of the state of California got involved. They sued to get that money back. So, unfortunately the state prevailed in that. Unfortunately for me, good for the port. So, I had to pay the money back when I was mayor. [laughter]

MS: When you were controller, what were your dealings, any particular specific dealings you had with the port?

JH: Not particularly. The port was growing. The business was booming. I think that there weren't a lot of dealings that I had with the port in those days as controller. I was only there for four years and not a lot going on. Occasionally, I remember asking some commissioners, "Was it really necessary to get all your dry cleaning done on these trips and your shoes shined every day?" But I moved past that eventually. [laughter]

MS: [laughter] Now as city attorney, did that change any way your relationship?

JH: Yes, a lot more. Because the city attorney's office is the lawyers for the Port of Los Angeles. A lot of interesting things started happening while I was city attorney. The building of the Alameda Corridor, which was a joint project between the Port of Long Beach and the Port of Los Angeles, that began here. The beginning of the coal terminals, that began during that period of time. The port was growing dramatically during that period of time. Our office was very busy defending lawsuits, working on environmental issues which really became so important during the [19]80s and [19]90s. So, yes, that was a busy time for the city attorney's office and the port.

MS: Let us take some of those issues. Let us talk about the environmental issues. How, again, did you get involved with the port?

JH: Our lawyer down here, who was our senior lawyer, Win Tyler, had a great crew of lawyers down here. We had a lot of issues as the port was expanding. As we moved into the container age, finding spaces to store all the containers, bringing in cranes, changing the shape, building islands. Those kinds of things raised the number of environmental issues. The Coastal Commission got involved as well as the State Lands Commission. Finding mitigation projects for things that were done here at the port. I think the Port of Los Angeles was instrumental in restoring Bolsa Chica wetlands, also the Batiquitos Lagoon down near Carlsbad. So, we were very involved in a lot of those issues, trying to mitigate the impact of this huge port, which I guess was at one time all wetlands, and finding ways that we could still save wetlands up and down the coast.

MS: Although, the harbor department has its own legal team, does it not? Or its own lawyers within the harbor?

JH: The lawyers for the harbor department are city attorneys.

MS: I thought they were a separate entity. Are they not?

JH: Yes. So, we had our own law office down here and I think it's around the corner.

MS: That is right. When you became mayor, one of the issues that you faced during your mayoral career which was directly involved with the San Pedro, was the issues of secession. What are the roots and what is the history? This is not the first time this has come up. In fact, Vincent Thomas, I think, won his first election with that. I think that we heard that there was a button that basically said, "Knife L.A." [laughter]

JH: I didn't move down here until 1986. So, I'm not familiar with a lot of the history about that. But I moved down to San Pedro in 1986 and raised my family here. Both my kids were born at the San Pedro Hospital. But a lot of people in San Pedro and Wilmington area felt that they got hoodwinked when the annexation vote happened to join the city of Los Angeles. I think the issue basically was then people knew there ought to be a seaport here. But the area itself really didn't have the resources to get that done. The idea of joining this big city of Los Angeles was they've got the resources to really build this port. I wasn't around, so I don't know all the promises that were made by the city of L.A. to the folks down here. But a lot of people still resent that vote and said, "Well, if we could have it to do over again [laughter] we might not have voted to join Los Angeles." Right about the time I was running for mayor starting in 1999, this burgeoning movement of the San Fernando Valley had been building for quite some time. That they wanted to be their own city. San Pedro wasn't far behind. There were a lot of people down here who saying, "We ought to be our own city too." Then some folks in Hollywood jumped on the bandwagon and said they wanted to be their city. So, the way things work is there's something called the Local Agency Formation Commission, LAFCo for short. They review applications for cityhood detachments, annexations. They reviewed the application for Hollywood and the San Fernando Valley, and determined that they would, in fact, be viable entities. They had enough revenues to support themselves. When they looked at San Pedro, they said, "This area probably couldn't be a viable entity by itself. It couldn't produce enough revenues to support the services that it was used to." Everybody down here howled and said, "Well, what about the Port of Los Angeles? That produces more than enough revenues." They forgot the fact that that is being administered by the city of Los Angeles, not San Pedro area, and would probably have remained with the city of Los Angeles. In any case, even if it wasn't, those revenues can't be used to support municipal services outside the Port of Los Angeles. So, they never got to the ballot in San Pedro. But there's a lot of people who wanted to do that. The idea was we're twenty-four miles from city hall. Not a lot of people pay attention to this part of the city. So, there's always a sense that the grass is greener somewhere else. That somebody else is getting better services. Somebody's getting better attention from the city than somewhere else. As I went around Los Angeles, I used to kid people but not nobody really found this funny. I'd always ask, "Who among you think that your area gets more than its fair share of city services?" I never found any place in the city that thought they got more than their fair share.

MS: But that was a pretty critical moment. There was a pretty big wellspring going up there. Your leadership efforts, basically, some would say it is not necessarily a good thing, but you did save the city as it is.

JH: I thought it was a good thing. Los Angeles had become the second city of America. I think a lot goes with that. I think that gives us enormous clout when we go to the halls of Congress and say, "We are an important area of America." If we had suddenly become the fourth and the sixth and the seventh largest cities, I don't think you'd have that same cachet. I think it sends the wrong message to the rest of the planet. At the time when at the dawn of the twenty-first century, I think Los Angeles is poised to be just as New York was in the twentieth century, that London and Paris were in the nineteenth century. I think the twenty-first century really belongs to Los Angeles. I think we would've sent the wrong message to the rest of the world that we weren't just breaking apart. That somehow, we were falling apart. I don't think anything could be further from the truth. I pushed an alternative. A new city charter had just come by and allowed for neighborhood councils to be developed. I thought if we could give more voice to communities through expanding neighborhood councils, that that might be an offset to this desire to be their own city. So, I led the fight to keep the city of Los Angeles together, and it was a tough fight. When we started, the polling said that forty-eight percent of the people were in favor of breaking up Los Angeles. Only thirty-two percent opposed. By the time the election finally happened, over two thirds of the people voted to keep the city together. In the valley, the vote I think was 50.7 percent to succeed. So, it wasn't as big as everybody thought.

MS: We need to change tapes.

MS: We need to change tapes. I do not know whether you know that or I might have told you.

MS: Speed.

MS: Was it 1986, you decided to move here?

JH: Yes.

MS: Tell me about why you decided. Some people would say, "My God, this is so away from everything."

JH: It was pretty easy. I got married in 1984, and my bride, Monica, grew up here. This was the house she grew up in, and she'd inherited when her folks passed away. I didn't own anything when we got married, so we ended up moving down here. We liked the idea of living around the corner from a really good elementary school. The idea of raising a family one day and having our kids walk to school seemed very, very attractive. It is geographically very inconvenient to other things in the city of Los Angeles, but what a great, great town.

MS: It has been described repeatedly as basically a dead-end town. You do not go through it. It is an end, it is a destination, and that is it.

JH: I don't like the term dead-end town.

MS: Well, not in a negative sense, dead-end.

JH: [laughter]

MS: That you do not go through it, put it that way.

JH: You don't go through it. You have to want to come here. I think a lot of people in the San Pedro area, like it that way. It's really a small town in many ways. The thing that amazed me was, I guess it was 1988, two years after we moved here. There was a little newspaper here that's since gone away called the *San Pedro News Pilot*. I guess it was San Pedro's centennial, and they were going to do a story on four-generation families, families who grew up here in San Pedro. I thought, "That's interesting. I wonder how many of those have maybe three or four families, four-generations. Because that's a lot to have everybody grow up and marry and settle and raise a family in the same part of Los Angeles." Well, they ran one every week for fifty-two weeks and they hadn't exhausted all the four-generation families here. I had never seen a place like that in Los Angeles before, where people sank their roots down this deep.

MS: Even though you have been here since [19]86, in the minds of many, you are still a newcomer because of that, is it not?

JH: Well, I think once I hit twenty years, I was off probation in San Pedro time. But you're never really a San Pedron unless you were born here and went to San Pedro High School and met your sweetheart here, in many ways. But a lot of people have come here from all over the planet, and they like this place. So, they're pretty nice to newcomers. You just know you're never really a member of the club.

MS: [laughter] Well, also, once you say San Pedro, you are out to start with.

JH: It's interesting. I was surprised that I guess San Pedro is about fifty percent Latino and everybody, no matter who you are, says San Pedro, they don't say San Pedro.

MS: Cabrillo Beach is another one.

JH: That's another one. Although some people say maybe that's the original Portuguese pronunciation. So, I don't know the etymology of that one. But yes, it's Cabrillo Beach and San Pedro.

MS: So, in [19]86 when you came here, describe what the town was like. Your early experiences with it, getting to know it, have them getting to know you.

JH: Over the years there was a great uh restaurant that my parents used to like to come down as their destination restaurant on 9th Street called the Olson's. Now it's, I think, the Copper Room. So, I remember coming down here to dine there, and of course, the Ports O' Call when that was built over the years. So, I knew it was a great place to eat. Whether it was Papadakis or Italian food, this was a great place to eat. So, it was fun getting to know the restaurants. There was a neat restaurant called The Grand House. The woman who started that great restaurant then started The Whale & Ale, which I think was the first all non-smoking restaurant in L.A., if you can imagine and it's not that old. But that was a new concept. Even the bar didn't allow smoking.

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