

Port of Los Angeles Centennial Oral History Project
Stephen Cole Oral History
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Interviewer: MS – Unknown
Transcriber: NCC

Male Speaker: Please say your name and spell it.

Stephen Cole: My name is Stephen Cole, S-T-E-P-H-E-N, C-O-L-E.

MS: Okay. Good. Look at me. What year were you born, and where?

SC: 1942 here in San Pedro at the old San Pedro hospital.

MS: Great. Tell me about your parents. When did they come here? What did they do?

SC: Actually, my mother was born in Oakland but came to San Pedro as a very young girl, maybe only a year old or less. Her parents had already been here and were somewhat established. Somehow, they just happened to be in Oakland when she was born. My father came here in around 1918 or 1919. He came from Nova Scotia – came from Amherst, Nova Scotia and was a machinist, came to San Pedro, and worked in – what was it called? Los Angeles shipyard, which later became Todd Shipyard.

MS: What brought him to San Pedro from Nova Scotia?

SC: He had a friend –

MS: My father had a friend.

SC: Yes. My father had a friend. I believe it was (Ernie Janai?). Janai was probably Italian, probably had Italian relatives in San Pedro. Somehow, they travelled across Canada and worked their way down here, then came in here. Actually, when my dad got here very soon after, he – the reason I take the Italian connection is he lived with an Italian family named the DiRoccas, which were a big family, an old-time family in San Pedro. He rented a room from them or something and learned how to cook Italian food from a girl named Rose Dirocco.

MS: What stories does he tell you about the early days of San Pedro – did he tell you?

SC: My father would spend time with the Italian families and tell me about it. One story in particular, the Italians always had plenty of wine around. So, my dad's good buddy was Danny Vince Dirocco? who ran tugboats. My dad had a motorcycle with a sidecar. So, Vince and my dad would go out at night, but Vince's mom wouldn't give Vince any wine. But if Harry had a little bit of a cough, the wine seemed to be good for Harry's cough. So, she would give Harry a bottle of wine. Harry didn't particularly like wine, but Vince did. They would get the bottle of wine and go out partying, I guess. Then Vince ran the tugboat to Catalina. My dad would sometimes ride with him at night to Catalina and back, then go to work the following day, just kind of as an interesting thing for the evening.

MS: What did he do? What was his job?

SC: My dad actually, when he got here, he's a machinist, worked for LA shipbuilding.

MS: When my father got here.

SC: When my father got here, went to work for LA shipbuilding. Then at some time about that time, he started night school and took electric classes in night school. Supposedly, he just told me that the instructor was blind and learned electricity from a blind instructor, graduated from the school and somehow got in the electrical business that later on became Coles Battery. So, we've been in the electrical business in San Pedro since 1923 and are probably the oldest family-owned business in San Pedro at this time.

MS: What is that business? What did it start out to be?

SC: Well, it started out many years ago when my dad started doing electrical work, selling radios. I have big pictures on the wall where my dad went to conventions for different radio companies back in Chicago and all when radio was just coming in and did electrical work on automobiles. Then we evolved into other appliances when other appliances started coming in. Then when televisions came in, we evolved into television, along – we had like two halves to the business; an appliance side and then an electrical side, where we did electrical work on the fishing boats, generators, and batteries and lighting and all on the fishing boats. I grew up with that from the time I was a very little kid that as a little kid, I would go down with my dad to the fishing boats and tagalong behind him and watch him work on generators and kind of started learning the business at a very, very young age.

MS: Now, let us go back to your earliest years. What are your first memories of San Pedro growing up here?

SC: Actually, my first real memory was in, I think it was 1947 or 1948 when it snowed in San Pedro. That was a big, big event. I can remember my mom, kind of, waking up and looking out the window and screaming. She says "My, gosh, it's snowed." We got up. Sure enough, there was snow all over the ground. So, we got the camera out and took pictures of it and I guess drove around the car. We have movies of Palos Verdes and different parts of San Pedro in our old, old movies. As a kid, I grew up on a street called Harborview right down from Averill Park. At that time, there was a whole bunch of kids all the same age. So, we always had somebody to play with. There was a canyon down off Harborview. We'd play down in the canyon and make forts and build dams and dam up the little creek that ran out of Averill Park. Then as we got older – we almost lived in Averill Park – and then we got to playing football in Averill Park. I talked to somebody about this just yesterday. They were talking about organized sports. I said, "It's kind of interesting. We were kids, totally unorganized, but we had a great time." We'd all just get up to Averill Park, choose teams, and have a football game. Compared to nowadays where the kids have all the organized sports and the coaches and the parents and everybody, we did a total, total different thing, totally disorganized.

MS: What kind of town was San Pedro when you were growing up?

SC: Well, it was an industrial town.

MS: San Pedro.

SC: San Pedro was an industrial town in those years. It was a fishing town, very, very huge fishing fleet. In fact, I think at that time, it had the biggest fishing fleet maybe in the world. Also, the shipping industry was big. Shipbuilding and ship repairs were still a big, big part of the town. The canneries, along with the fishing industry were a big part of the town. It used to be kind of a joking matter that just a block from here was the ferry building. The cannery workers would take the ferry home every night. They were just in whites like nurses, strangers from out of town. Because San Pedro had a big hospital around here. Well, then if you got too close to them, you realize they weren't nurses, they were cannery workers, by their odor. That they, just on the bus and all, would just reek when the girls would go home in the evening. But it was a very nice little town. There were, kind of, maybe different groups if you analyze it. There was a Hispanic group. Then there was a Slav group. There was the Italian group. Then there was kind of, all the rest of us and all. But it was a very, very nice town.

MS: What about the downtown? Were there good shops and restaurants and theatres? What was downtown like?

SC: Well, Downtown San Pedro had at least four theatres; Warner Brothers, Strand, Cabrillo, and the one down in Pacific that I never went to. It was kind of off the beaten path. Maybe it was down by Bandini or something. It was kind of off our beaten path. It had the drugstore and the Ramona bakery and all the little shops. We would go downtown, take the bus sometimes, and go downtown to San Pedro and go shopping or just playing. You had a real downtown like many towns that time had.

MS: Did you have, kind of, a favorite place that you would like to go to when you were a kid?

SC: Well, actually I spent more time in the upper part of town around 8th Street. There was a drugstore there. But I got a mental block on the name of the drugstore, right across from Peterson's market on 8th Street. My grandmother used to live across the street, across Weymouth Street from Peterson's market, and I watched it being built as a little kid. I'd never seen them do cement block before. As a little kid, it was entertaining to me to sit on her front porch and watch the bakery being built – or the market being built.

MS: Let us just start again. When I was a little kid, I would sit on the front porch.

SC: Okay. When I was a little kid, I sat on my grandmother's front porch across the street from Peterson's market. I had never seen men laying block before. So, it was very interesting for me to see the building go up, day by day, as the men laid the cement block. That's at the corner of 8th and Weymouth. So, that was, in a way, more of my stomping grounds. There was another place there called Perry's Variety Store. That was obviously a variety store and had all the little things. So, that was kind of a place we'd hang around and –

MS: Well, tell me more about the store. What was Perry's Variety Store? What would you see and do there?

SC: Well, we just go and, kind of, wander around –

MS: Perry's Variety Store.

SC: Perry's Variety Store was on 8th Street, and we would go in there and just wander around, maybe buy bubble gum, buy chewing gum, buy jawbreakers. They just had an assortment of toys and clothing. You might relate it to now what would have been almost a 99 Cents Store. Maybe it didn't have the food products, but it had the dry goods. Mr. and Mrs. Perry were there. They would watch us wander through the store and pick around, look at things, and buy little things, gifts or whatever it be.

MS: What about things that you did for fun as a kid. Were there family things that went on? Or what was it like?

SC: We'd go for drives. One place that we went – and I've been through there recently – Brea Canyon. Somehow, we'd go have picnics in Brea Canyon. Again, you remember certain things in Brea Canyon. They had oil wells. But they had like five oil wells. All worked from one, let's call it a power station. It had a cable thing that went around. The cable would pull the oil. As one oil well came up, another one would be going down and would do these different groups of oil wells. I always remembered that as a little kid. It was quite fascinating. Or for just a little close adventure, we would go out and buy vegetables from the Japanese farmers by Portuguese Bend. From that, I've been friends with them all my life, the Ishibashi family in particular,

MS: We are going to talk more about that. Did you get into Los Angeles, downtown LA?

SC: No. Going to downtown Los Angeles, I don't know, that was just too big of an adventure, too far away. I would go sometimes with my mom over to Long Beach shopping. That was kind of a big deal. You'd have to take the ferry boat across Terminal Island. Then on the other side of Terminal Island, there was a floating bridge. At low tide, the floor would be steep. You dropped down and then go up the other side of the floating bridge. The car would kind of bang across there and all. We'd go shopping. We bought from (Sir Bullock's?) or something in Long Beach. But at that time, they had clothing stores and all in town. So, we did, I think, most of our shopping in town.

MS: Talk about how your father started his business. How did that begin?

SC: My father starting the business, in a way, I don't exactly know. He told me about working in a bicycle shop. Then somehow, he became partners in an electric shop with a man who knew how to rewind motors, which is – there's a trick to it. If you haven't been taught, you wouldn't know where to even start rewinding one. This guy knew how to rewind motors very, very well. But he just wasn't a businessman and would maybe wind a motor and then wouldn't complete it or wouldn't follow through with the transaction. So, he and my dad were partners. My dad saw problem there. So, I remember my dad telling me, he bought him out at some time and then went on with the business but not doing motor rewinding. We never did motor rewinding after that. But he evolved into the other electric – at that time, they were just starting to get electrical systems on fishing boats and batteries were still somewhat new. This would have been 1922, 1923. So, he would service the batteries. He would actually take batteries apart and repair them,

replace the insulators in them and stuff and reassemble them and charge batteries and put electrical systems into boats that, before that, would have just had gas lanterns. He would rig up electrical systems on there with generators and batteries. There still might be some of the older, older fellas around town that knew my dad from back in that time.

MS: Talk about your mother's side of the family. How did she get here? What's her background?

SC: Well, that's very, very fascinating. I give a talk about that to the San Pedro Historical Society, the Los Angeles Yacht Club about my grandparents. My grandfather was Latvian, came to the United States as a young man, worked on sailing ships. I have his shipping papers from about 1880-something up to 1890 something. You can see how he went up the ladder. By 1902, he was a captain and captained different sailing ships between here and Honolulu or hauling lumber up and down the coast. My grandmother was of Scottish descent. Her family came over in around 1870-something. She had five brothers. Her maiden name was (Cafel?). I have a lot of stuff. I have photographs from my great grandparents and all from the turn of the century and earlier. I just looked at her diary before I came down here. On January 21st, 1902, my grandmother and grandfather were married in Oakland. The day following their marriage, they went to Eureka on a sailing ship – no, excuse me, on a steamship.

MS: Okay. Start again. Start with your mother's side of the family and go back to their meeting and married in Oakland and then what happened. So, you just repeat yourself.

SC: Okay. My grandmother and grandfather on my mother's side were married in Oakland, January 21st, 1902. The day after their marriage, they took a steamer up to Eureka, where a ship was being built, a four-masted lumber schooner. It was owned by a company called Sudden & Christenson Company. I have the whole wedding announcement and all. Mr. Sudden and Mr. Christiansen were at the wedding and all. So, apparently, they were very good friends. The following Saturday, my grandmother christened the ship. It was launched. They fitted it out. My grandmother made a beautiful diary of every day, the things they did there, and then sailing out of Humboldt Bay, told by getting seasick, sailing down the coast. By about March 11th, they were off Catalina. The weather was clear and calm. They sailed into San Pedro on, like, March 12th through March 13th, 1902. So, it's very fun to have that in a diary and know exactly when something did happen. Then she tells about the different people she met around town.

MS: Well, talk about that. What did she tell you about San Pedro in the diary?

SC: Well, that's what I'd tell you. One of the first things she did, number one, she walked up and down the beach, picked up seashells and all, then she went up to what would be the Point Fermin Lighthouse. She said they had real pictures of real war scenes, which would have been of the Spanish-American War that had just happened before that. So, she told about going up and the different people she met that sounded like a lot of Norwegian people. I remember the name Rasmussen and different Norwegian names. Then after about two days, she took the trolley car up to Los Angeles, walked around Los Angeles a little bit, took the trolley car out to Pasadena, walked around Pasadena a little bit, got back on the trolley car, went out to Altadena. At that time, there used to be a cable railway going up to Mount Lowe, took the cable railway up

to Mount Lowe. She tells about the elevation was, like, 5,000 feet, had lunch at Ye Olde Inn, came back down, went to the ostrich farm in South Pasadena, and then back to San Pedro, which she would have a hard time doing that today. That would be a full day. This was in 1902 in the rail car and no big deal, just [inaudible]. As a matter of fact, didn't tell who she was with or anything, but just notes that. Then they started sailing up and down the coast. She would tell about sailing up and down the coast. Sometimes she would go with him. Other times, she maybe would take a steamer and go to Oakland or maybe take the train and go to Oakland and meet her husband in Oakland when he would come into San Francisco. So, she travelled a lot. Then her first child, my aunt Eva was born. When my aunt Eva was two months old, they took the sailing ship by the name – by the way was named *Espada*, which means sword in Spanish. Took the *Espada* and sailed over the Philippines. She logs in everyday sailing, the water temperature, the air temperature, the longitude and latitude, the mileage that they made. They made some good days. They made some days 220 miles. When they got around Honolulu, got out in the Tradewinds, told about things she met, when she ate her first mango, and the different foods that they got in the Philippines and all and –

MS: Have you put that in a form where it could be published?

Female Speaker: I had asked him to do that.

SC: Or I guess somebody could if you're really a writer. I've made many, many copies of it and given them out to people and had a lot of fun with it.

MS: Because the trip you took was known as the Balloon Route. It was a famous trip that she took –

SF: On the Pacific Electric.

MS: – on the Pacific Electric.

SC: Yes.

MS: It was just someone's –

FS: Somebody's personal memories.

MS: – firsthand description of that.

FS: Incredible.

SC: Yes. In fact, everything she did was – like today, to take a child on a trip like that, you'd get arrested for child abuse almost. She did everything very, very casual, had a few problems. Her husband fell off a chair one time when they hit a big wave, and the baby fell down and little things like that. One of the big problems when they left Hawaii – or left the Philippines was the chicken flew overboard, and they had to lower the lifeboat down and go [laughter] rescue the chicken. But apparently, they had fresh eggs on the trip and all. Even going outbound, they

were about 14 days to the Hawaiian Islands. You would have thought, "Okay," would have stopped and maybe got fresh food and water, sailed right on by. They couldn't be fooling around there. They were on a journey. They didn't want to fool around for the three or four or five days you would have been in port. So, they just –

MS: Do you know of maritime historian named (Bob Weinstein?) who did a book about the whole coast and particularly up in the Puget Sound area?

SC: I've read different books, but I don't remember the name Weinstein.

MS: Let us go back and get back to San Pedro.

SC: Okay.

MS: How did they come to –

SC: Well, they –

MS: How did they come to live here, your mother's side?

SC: By 1908, My grandfather retired. Probably through his connections with (Soren Kristiansen?), he became a ship chandler. He bought out a company called, I believe it was Wentz Brothers and had a ship chandlery almost exactly where this building is. It was a little bit down on Harbor Boulevard in about 3rd Street. I've got old pictures of it. In one year, they used a picture of it in a calendar. You can see J. C. Redbach on the side of the – or on the side of the building, you see J. C. Redbach on the calendar, and then I believe a Coca-Cola emblem is underneath it. Then years later, he moved up on 7th Street to 297 Street. The building is still there. A computer business is now being run out of there.

MS: For those who do not know, what is a ship's chandlery? What does it mean?

SC: A ship chandler is a supplier of equipment to ships, everything from shovels, to paint brushes, to paint, to groceries. In those days, the ship would probably come into port. The captain would – or maybe he had a purser on – no, probably the captain would get all the information together from the crew and all of what they need, the rope and the block and tackle and different things they would need, give that list to the ship chandler, and then the ship chandler would provide all that. Nowadays, of course, the ship sends in a fax, sends in a computer message. But they still have ship chandlers. I do business with them on a regular basis myself, providing batteries to them.

MS: How did you get involved? You talked about your father taking you out to the docks. How did you get personally involved in the docks? Talk a little bit about that and what it was like when you were out as a kid.

SC: Well, as a very, very young boy, I would just go with my dad. I don't know how young I started. As a very little kid, I knew all the fishermen, and they knew me as a little kid. We'd

have lunch on the boats when we were down there, when he was working, and I was tagging along. I would crawl down in the engine room with him. I remember, one particular day, I was down in the engine room. They had big slow-speed engines there. Some of them were called Atlases, and other ones were called Enterprises. My dad was up working on a generator, and I was, kind of, walking along the side of the engine. The air intake were just pipes, like, one-inch pipes going into the engine. So, that's kind of interesting. I'll put my hand on one of those pipes. Well, it pulled the horrendous vacuum. I thought it was going to suck me right inside the engine. When I pulled out, I went right back and found my dad just stood there and watched. [laughter] I was just kind of shaking, one of those unforgettable experiences. But it was a tremendous experience just having lunch on the boats. Some of the guys could barely speak English, spoke heavy Italian, and just have lunch with them and eat the different good, good, good Italian food and all the things that they provided. Then in about 1948 or somewhat about, by the time, maybe a little later, [19]49 or [19]50, I went to the Fishermen's Fiesta with my dad. Somehow, he knew the people. So, we got on the lead boat, and the mayor and his wife were on the lead boat. Well, when I left the house, I just had old blue jeans with the torn knees and then worn out. We got home, and my mother was just disgusted. "I met the mayor. The mayor's wife cut me a piece of cake, and I talked to the mayor and his wife." So, my mother was just totally disgusted [laughter] that I would be there with torn knees. I'm sure the mayor's wife wasn't the least bit concerned. But that was one of our big adventures.

MS: What was the Fishermen's Fiesta? What was that?

SC: Fishermen's Fiesta was kind of a – let's call it a Catholic religious celebration of the success of the fleet. It was a big, big thing in San Pedro. In the 1950s, it was like the second most photographed event in the world, maybe next to the Rose Parade. They would have a big celebration at the church. Then they would walk in a procession down to the fish slips. The priest would bless the fleet. Then they would have a big party and do a little tour of the harbor on the boats. They would dress the boats all up with flags and different – like floats from the Rose Parade. It was a big, big deal in San Pedro. Then they would have a regular fiesta with all the booths. The Rotary Club and the Lions Club and all the different clubs would get involved and have food booths and beer booths and a regular carnival atmosphere.

MS: When did it stop?

SC: To be honest with you, I can't tell you. Actually, it stopped and then restarted a number of years later. I was on the board of directors when it started, and they tried to resurrect it. But it was too late. It just didn't fly.

MS: When you were going down to the docks with your father, were there any particular characters or any particular incidents? You talked about having lunch or – aside from touching the engine's intake, are there any other, kind of, stories or the kind of people who were down there and what you saw and what you heard? Any particular characters that stood out?

SC: Not really. Or not that I can really put my mind to right now.

MS: What about –

SC: Years later, when I got older, there were some – just some wonderful, wonderful people that I met. One man in particular, he was a nice man. His name was (Mike Tomino?). He could speak a little bit of Japanese and a little bit of Portuguese and a little bit of Italian and, of course, very, very good English. In fact, I think he was born in San Pedro. He was just an absolute gentleman and just a pleasure to work for. We became quite good friends. There were other fishermen as I got older. One particular fisherman I think about, his name was (Joe Laurel?). His nickname was Joe Brown, for some reason. Joe Brown inevitably would call me at about midnight on Sunday night when I just got back from the Colorado River and just barely gotten back. The phone would ring. I'd pick it up. He wouldn't say who he was, but he just goes, "I can't get my engine started." I would be half asleep. I go, "Who is this?" And he'd go, "Hahaha, you know who this is. Come down and get me started," and click, hung up the phone. So, that'd be Joe Brown. So, I jumped from my truck, ran down to the shop, get a battery charger, got out on the boat, get Joe Brown's boat started, and off he'd go. So, he was – and just the nicest, nicest person to do business with and all.

MS: We started talking about James Ishibashi. Tell us about your relationship to him, what his story is, and then –

SC: Well, I go back, again, as a small kid to the Ishibashi family, that we would jump in my dad's old DeSoto –

MS: Why do you not start, "When I was a small kid, we would –"

SC: When I was a small kid, we would jump in my dad's DeSoto. I don't remember what year it was. It was kind of a brown colored DeSoto. We would drive out by Portuguese Bend. The Japanese farmer had their little vegetable stands there. We'd buy carrots. I would always remember the Chinese peas. I'd sit in the backseat, and I'd start eating the Chinese peas on the way home. My mother would kind of say, "Don't eat all the peas before we get home." I just remember the name Ishibashi. He was also a customer of ours. His parents came here in about 1911. Actually, his dad and his uncle kind of started the migration of the Japanese people to the Hill. They leased the land from the Biggs V. family and never could own land. There was the Asian exclusion law. So, they had a hard time owning land, which we'll go off on that a little bit. But James Ishibashi, when they started Green Hills Cemetery, they could buy cemetery plots, but they couldn't buy land. So, he bought a whole bunch of cemetery plots. As far as I know, the family still has numerous ones. But then when I got older, he would come in the shop. We would do business. I rigged up a generator for him one time that he wanted to use out in the fields to have a portable cooler for his flowers when he picked the flowers, so he could cool them right in the field. Then as I got older and had children, I would go out and visit him in the fields on Saturday afternoon. We just sit and talk. He would tell me all the stories about the problems they had during the war and how they got – they voluntarily left. There was a deal they could do a voluntary evacuation, how the volunteers left.

MS: What were the stories he told you about [inaudible]?

SC: The story he told me about that –

MS: Start with, James Ishibashi told me.

SC: Yes. James Ishibashi told me the story – and I can almost remember the general's name, but I can't think of it right now – that they apparently posted an article all around town that all people of Japanese ancestry will be out of the area by such-and-such a date. So, his family got a truck loaded, what equipment they could on the truck. The ironic thing is the other equipment, they stored in my grandfather's building down at 7th Street. He didn't own it at that time. A guy named (Avery Hall?) owned the building at that time. They stored all – had a huge basement, and they stored all their personal goods that they couldn't get on the truck down in the basement and moved up around Porterville or Lindsay, got some property, got their crops in, they mowed. They just about got ready to harvest them. Apparently, government came along and said, "Nope, you're still too close to the ocean. You've got to move inland further." So, they loaded up, moved up to someplace in Utah. Again, maybe didn't get crops set up but got working at farms outside of the detention center, let's call it. Then he got drafted, which was kind of the ultimate insult that here you get chased out of everywhere, but you're going to be drafted. So, he went into the Army. His brothers went in the Army, told me one of his cousins said, "No, I'm not going to go in the Army." I think they threw him in jail. He didn't go along with the game. But Jim went into the Army. I believe it was in Europe that he told me he was a typewriter repairman. Then when they bombed Japan, he went over to Japan and had a sister there. I think helped his sister out – she was still alive and all, maybe helped her out and all. But then they came back and with hard, hard work, after the war, went back to work. I guess their property was still available, leased their property, and went back to work and became very, very successful with hard, hard work. He worked very, very hard. We'd go down to the flower market maybe at 2:00 a.m. and take flowers to sell and buy flowers and trade back and forth and all. In fact, one of my Saturdays, he came into the shop one time – and he was older then. He was probably in his 70s. His face was all broken up. They had robbed him in the back of the truck in the flower market and beat him up, just beat him to a pulp. It made me cry, sad, sad things. His eye was never right after they had broke his eye socket and all. But he was tough enough. He'd half laughed it off. He'd say, "It's part of life." They were very hard-working, understanding people. They would kind of accept things as just being part of life.

MS: [inaudible]

SC: Excuse me. One other thing, I had the honor of doing part of the eulogy at his funeral. It was a tremendous honor for me to be able to do that and talk about him and tell some of these stories to the people at the service.

MS: Well, this is so important I am going to have you go over some of this again. How did you meet James Ishibashi? Who was he? Even if you repeat yourself, go over this ground again.

SC: Okay. When I was very young – I'm talking about maybe 8 or 10 years old or something – we would go out in my dad's DeSoto out to the Japanese farms in Portuguese Bend. They had the little stands set up there. We would buy carrots, and we would buy peas and all from them. The name Ishibashi just goes back in my memory from the time I was a little kid. So, as I got older and started hanging around the shop, I realized that he came in the shop. He was a

customer of ours, probably our oldest customer from – because he was born in the 1920s. So, he would come in from the farm to get stuff for his dad and for the farm, little engine parts and batteries and different things. So, he was one of our longest-time customers. So, as I got older, I just started hearing the name. Then he started coming into the shop. I just did little jobs for him, and our friendship just grew. He was just the most upstanding, honest, hardworking person I ever knew. As I got older, I just started spending more time with him. I would go out and visit him on a Saturday afternoon. When I started having children, I would bring the children out, number one, because of my friendship with them, but also so they could see what a hard-working wonderful person is. I can just go on for hours and hours with just the little stories. In fact, one of the stories, when my son Antonio was about 5 years old, that would have been 1986, Jim came by the shop one day. When he'd come into San Pedro, do his banking or whatever, he'd stop by the shop, and we'd talk. He was, "You know, that field way up there on the west side, the strawberries have gotten too ripe on there. It's not worth us picking them. Go up after work, you take your son up there, and make yourself at home. Just pick all you want." As far as I know, I'm the only person that he ever did that with, that ever allowed to touch any of his stuff. So, my son and I just went up there and picked those big beautiful dead ripe strawberries and just take one bite out of one and throw the rest away and – in the room was the ripe strawberries, just beautiful. So, we did that for a few nights. Then a few months later, when the strawberry season had kind of ended, went again with my son to visit him on a Saturday afternoon. To be nice, Jim went out and just picked a few of the little strawberries that were left and put them in a little basket and gave it to Antonio. He looked at him. He goes, "Oh, no." He goes, "I want those great, big ones." He goes, "I don't want the little ones." So, I said, "Jim, you ruined him already. He's 5 years old. You've already got him spoiled." So, then Jim says, "Well, come on. Let's go get some carrots." So, we walked a few yards over. Jim got a big pitchfork. There were some carrots that had big, big stems on them. Actually, it started to go to seed. I thought, you know, "You can't get much out of a carrot that's gone to seed." So, he said, "Here, Antonio, you pull on the carrot." So, Antonio pulls on the carrot, Jim breaks it loose with his pitchfork, and out comes a carrot, this big around and that long. I'd never seen anything like it. I didn't know carrots got that big. So, we cut it up. I start eating it. It was sweet and delicious. So, we got about three or four of them, took them home. My wife cooked them. They were sweet, like you put honey on them. He used to teach me about overwatering things. You never overwater things. Another classic story told me many, many times is in the earlier days, he'd grow tomatoes. He contended they would grow a tomato plant with one cup of water, that they would dig quite a deep hole in the black adobe dirt, planted the tomato plant down in the hole, so it was shaded most of the day, give it one cup of water. Then maybe, with the right time of year, to get some rain and everything, and they would grow the tomato crop off of one cup of water. The fog, that was another very interesting thing that he told me, maybe ten or fifteen years, when he said, "There's not as much fog as there was many years ago. We used to get a lot more fog." Now, two years ago, I read in the paper that all the scientists and all now figured we don't get as much fog as we used to get. [laughter] He figured that out many, many years ago having grown up with it and lived with it.

MS: Now, this was Portuguese Bend. Was there a community there, or did he live on a farm by himself? I mean, what was out there?

FS: Also talk about Annie, his wife.

MS: Yes, also talk about his wife.

SC: Yes, there was a Japanese community, oh, absolutely. In fact, James donated a picture that he had, a small picture, and had it blown up into a huge picture. He donated one to the Japanese Museum in Los Angeles, donated one to the museum at Malaga Cove. My friend (John Shaheen?) has a copy of it – or his widow has a copy of it now. He had three copies of it. It was at a place that years later we called Camp Archie Shields. It's if you go out Palos Verdes, drive south, just as you start in the slide area, there's a hill up to the right. That was the Japanese Centre at that time. This is a picture of all the Japanese people that they took. I feel it was – there were maybe forty families. So, if you took husband and wife, eighty people, maybe one hundred-and-some people, all in the picture with, kind of, their dogs down in front and everything. But there was all very strong Japanese family – or Japanese community.

MS: What was the relationship between that community and Terminal Island – Japanese community in Terminal Island. Was there any –

SC: Well, it's very interesting that the Japanese on Terminal Island were called Terminal Islanders and were, kind of, a different group that, in a way, they didn't mix too much. A few years ago, I went to a meeting at Anderson Memorial here in town that the Terminal Islanders put on, and James Ishibashi gave a talk about – it's called the farmer Japanese. Other people talked about it, and they – it was interesting to be at that meeting, and then they didn't intermix too much, that they were kind of a separate group. In fact, there was a guy there named, (Ryouno?). I went to high school with his son, Eddie Ryouno. After he got done talking, I talked to him, introduced myself, and I said, "How's Eddie Ryouno related to you?", "Oh, he's my nephew." He said, "Would you like a copy of my book?" So, he mailed me a copy of his book, autographed and all. I loaned it to Jim. Jim loaned it to his cousin (Moss?). His cousin, Moss, became senile, and my book somewhere is lost [laughter] in Moss' house.

MS: But most of the communities did not relate because one was a fishing community, one was a farmer's community.

SC: Kind of. It seemed like from the meeting that I went to, it seemed like they were, kind of, distinct groups. Like, the Terminal Islanders would talk about taking the ferry across and walking up. They talked about walking right through Anderson Memorial and going up to high school and all. They just seemed like they were distinct groups. That the farm group were probably hard-working folks and didn't play too much. That they were on the farm there, and they were expected to work. In fact, when they talk about the slide area out there, Jim told me when he was a very young man, and they would plough the fields by hand, that there were places that were sliding. Then they had to be careful the horses didn't step in the cracks on the ground. In fact, in the last slide area where the Trump golf course slid off, Jim laughed. He goes, "We knew that was a slide area fifty years ago", that his cousin, Moss, happened to farm that area. He said he would plant his plants in a true, true line. By the time they got ready to harvest, they'd have a little bow in it. So, he said, "I'm not surprised in the least that that fell in."

MS: Part of the reason they had that land out there, because this was not particularly desirable

land. Tell us about the whole restrictions again on land holding and owning.

SC: Well, I don't know exactly how the laws worked on the Asian exclusion laws. But I just know that there were laws in effect that they couldn't buy land, but they could lease land. The Ishibashis came over here in about 1911, I believe. Jim was always amazed about how his dad and his uncle communicated with each other, how they got here – they came through Mexico – how they handled financial transactions and had money to deal with and all. But somehow, they did it. His cousin, Moss, one time brought down one of the original leases where they leased the land. It spelled out the terms, lease so many acres, water provided, and not for crops, but only for animal and for household use. I don't remember the amount of lease, but at the bottom it said, "Payable in gold." It was signed by Biggs V., who owned the hill at that time. So –

MS: Other relatives of him are now around?

SC: Yes. His brother's family still farms over by the Torrance Airport and has their stand right on Crenshaw.

MS:

So, his only relationship to San Pedro was to come in here to shop or to get things repaired, or did he have any relationship directly with San Pedro?

SC: Well, when you say relationship, they would do business here. He didn't live in San Pedro.

MS: But aside from you, did he have friends he visited here?

SC: Oh, absolutely. Actually, he had other friends that he would make the rounds, Mike and Joe Good and other people that he would visit in town. Absolutely, had friends here. His wife, Annie, I have to say she was maybe harder working than him. He took the liberty to go into town and meet the people and all. She worked long, long hours. He would bring the flowers down from the flower market. She would trim the bottoms of them and get them all set up in the cans and everything and work from sunrise to sunset, very, very hardworking people. So, she didn't take the liberty to, let's call it, maybe relax a little. He relaxed maybe a little more than her. In the later years, my wife would talk to her. She kind of begrudged it that they had made some money and all but really never enjoyed it. But another very interesting thing when you talk about the Japanese, the Ishibashi family had ties back to Japan. When he was a young man, he went to their hometown in Japan and lived there and got educated there for a couple of years. Then in about 1936, 1935, 1936, 1937, he was on, either a judo team, or jujitsu team. Don't remember exactly the difference at all. But they were very, very skilled at it and all. So, a whole group of the Japanese people went to Japan – all younger men – and toured Japan, actually wrestled with the Emperor's guard, which they were the only Japanese people ever do that, maybe even met the Emperor and all. They brought them over things, brought them over rattlesnake, and different things from the Hill. Then they toured all over Japan, went up to Manchuria, and knew a lot about Japan. If you kind of analyze it, when the American government – when the war did start, and they got asking questions, "So, when were you last in Japan?" "Oh, I was just there five years ago?" "Oh, you maybe have too many connections with Japan." And could it look bad for them? If you look at it in that light that they still did have text,

still spoke fluent Japanese and all, and they still had connections with the country.

MS:

I want to go back to your business again. We started to talk about it and how it changed over time. How has the whole business community in San Pedro changed since the early days, and your particular business?

SC: The business community in San Pedro started off, you might say, as a fishing port, and as a lumber port, huge, huge lumber port. Then maybe with the Second World War, shipbuilding got to be a big, big, big thing. We had at least three large shipyards, Todd Shipyard, Bethlehem, and another one. I can't think of the name of it but three substantial shipyards and then many, many small boat yards. But as the maritime community in the United States has just died away, the shipping industry has died with it. The fish, a lot of them have been fished out. They used to just catch albacore tuna right out in the Catalina channel on a regular basis and all. The labor is cheaper in other places in the world for canning the tuna. So, the fishing industry and all these different industries have just died. It's been very sad to see them go. It has reflected on my business, that we were geared to working on the fishing boats, we were geared to dealing with the shipyards. With the demise of them, it also has hurt our business.

MS: This is great. Thank you very much. Before we go, I want you to tell me that story again. Give me a sense of when it was, what year when Ishibashi came back from the flower market, that they beat him up and – well, tell me that story again and what year –

SC: Oh, boy.

MS: – roughly.

SC: Maybe in about 1983, James would come and visit me, once or twice a week at the shop on a regular basis and all. One time, he came in to visit with me in the afternoon, and his face was all, kind of, black and blue and beat up and all. He told us that he'd gone to the flower market that night. He was in the back of – he had a van, like a 1-ton van they do take the flowers in. He was in the back of the van, and two guys jumped him in the back of the van to get his money. Because it was a cash business, apparently, with the flower market, so they knew he had cash on him. Took his money and then just beat him to a pulp, just broke his eye socket. His eye was never right after they had broken his eye socket. It was just a very, very sad time to see him in that position.

MS: How did he take it?

SC: He took it quite well. They were tough, tough people. They had gone through a lot all their lives and all. He just kind of accepted it as part of life and just being at the wrong place at the wrong time and went on about his business. Got his eye fixed as best he could and all, but his eye was never right after that. In fact, another adventure we did after that, a man who he introduced me to, John Shaheen, myself, and another fella by the name of Danny, did a motorcycle ride. Three of us on motorcycles, Jim riding double with John Shaheen and myself. We drove up to Hearst Castle and camped out for a night, just had a wonderful time. There's a

little dirt road south of Hearst Castle called San Simeon Creek. I put Jim on the back of my bike, and we rode up San Simeon Creek. There were farmers that had farmed. There was some corn growing up in there and maybe some strawberries and other crops. He got the biggest kick out of that. San Simeon Creek is like a back way. It's like a dirt road that goes up to the backside of Hearst Castle. So, we just had a good time, I'd say. At that time, he was maybe closing in on 80. So, it was a lot of fun to do that with him, spend the time with him and all.

MS: Tell me about when he died and how he died and how old he was.

SC: When Jim passed away, he was maybe 83 or 84. He just started getting different kinds of illnesses. I don't remember, maybe pneumonia and different things. He kind of just started weakening. We could see it over about a year's time that he just weakened and weakened and weakened. Exactly what he had, I can't really recall. I went and visited him maybe two days before he passed away. He tried to smile. He was in the house and tried to smile and be friendly and all, but he was having tough, tough times doing it.

MS: You said you did his eulogy. Talk about the funeral.

SC: Well, again, it was an honor to be able to do part of the eulogy and just kind of tell some of the stories I've told here and talk about my great admiration and love for James. That we just had good, good times together. It was always just such a pleasure to be with him and see him. There was another, kind of, a complicated thing in his life that, in a way, many of the Japanese people are Buddhists and all, and others are Christians. He was more Shinto. I don't fully understand Shinto, but it's maybe a belief in nature and all. He considered himself more Shinto, that he believed in nature and kind of the power of nature, in the plants, in trees and all.

MS: To get back to San Pedro, into your experience, I mean, we could talk forever here. For people who do not know San Pedro, do not know its history, do not know its present importance, but personally, to you, what does San Pedro meant to you, when you think back?

SC: Well, I have a tremendous closeness to San Pedro. Number one, just growing up here, I virtually – except for two years in my life, I've never lived within a mile and a half of where I was born. So, I have a tremendous closeness to it. I can tell little stories about that. Like, when I was in the Army, I was in the reserves at Fort MacArthur. Other fellows would come from out of town. We'd go to lunch together. I'd be driving down Pacific Avenue and just waving to people that I knew. This guy – I can't think of his name right now. Anyway, he said, "Why do wave to these people?" I said, "Well, those are all people that I know." He goes, "You can't know them." He goes, "If I see one person a year out in the valley, that's a big year." He goes, "You can't know all these people." So, I just started telling who they – I go, "That's so-and-so. Oh, that's so-and-so's cousin. That's his cousin on his mother's side or something." He just couldn't believe it. So, the community then – and I still see a lot of that when I go to the market. If I don't run into somebody that I know, I say "Something is wrong here." Another thing that really put me into San Pedro was when my stepfather died. He was a sea captain and was chief port pilot. His name was (Olaf Meyer?). He was chief port pilot for the city of Los Angeles. My son said where can we have them – or we talked about having a memorial service. My son said, "How about at the brass room at the Maritime Museum?" I said, "Yes, but I don't know

how we do that." That day at lunch, at Kennedy's restaurant, happened to run into a guy named Jackson Pearson who was also a port pilot. He was an old buddy of my stepfather's. Ran the idea by him, he said, "Great idea. You talk to Pete Lee. Tell Pete Lee at the Maritime Museum that I told you to call." Got home, called Pete Lee, introduced myself, told him my business. "When do you want it, and how long do you want it for?" That he could have played bureaucrat. He could have said, "Oh, no. You have to give us two months' notice and \$1,000 deposit." But he didn't. He just said, "You've got it for whenever you want to use it." I said we'd like [inaudible] on days to cater it. No problem. It just made me feel so much a part of the community, that things like that can happen without a big production. That was just one thing in particular that just gave me a tremendous close feeling to San Pedro.

MS: We knew Pete Lee.

FS: Yes.

SC: I beg your pardon?

MS: We knew Pete Lee.

FS: We knew Pete Lee.

SC: Oh, did you?

FS: Yes.

MS: Yes.

SC: Oh, he was a great guy –

FS: He is still alive.

MS: He is still alive.

SC: Sure.

FS: We know when he was heading the Maritime Museum.

SC: Yes.

FS: Yes.

SC: I saw your face, kind of, light up when I said it. That's what just made me feel so much a part of the town. He did such a great job. We had such a great time doing that.

MS: Well, let us finish this if we can with –

SC: Sure.

MS: – just start a sentence from your point of view. San Pedro is –

SC: Oh, boy. San Pedro is my town. It's been my town my whole life. Increasing property values have made it very difficult for the next generation to call it their home without having some help from family and all. I just helped my son and daughter-in-law buy a house and all. Without my help, it'd be very, very difficult. It's almost to the point of even if after you get a house or help getting house, just the taxes on it are so high that it's just very, very difficult. I don't know how the evolution of it's going to be. The traffic in San Pedro, we have this building in the downtown, these new condos and all going in, upgrading the downtown. It's beautiful. But can the traffic hold it? They're talking about the big project, 2300 homes or 2100 homes up on Western Avenue. There are times in the day when Western Avenue is almost gridlocked. Can that handle it? We are, kind of, a dead-end town. Business-wise, my dad taught me at a young, young age that San Pedro is a dead-end. Business-wise, it makes it tough to – after 39th Street, the fish don't buy any products. It makes it a tough, tough business community. So, in the overall evolution of it, the upgrading, the new condos and all are going to be very, very nice but I do have concerns with the traffic and congestion in the town.

MS: Good. I think we are going to have to stop there. Yes. Great

SC: Well, like I said, I just love the town. I love my life. I kind of enjoy telling stories.

MS: Well, you tell them well. You tell them well.

[end of transcript]