

Port of Los Angeles Centennial Oral History Project
Lorenzo DiCarlo Oral History
Date of Interview: Unknown
Location: Unknown
Length of Interview: 57:02
Interviewer: MS – Unknown
Transcriber: NCC

Male Speaker: So, I'm giving you the hard question first.

Lorenzo DiCarlo: [laughter]

MS: Please say your name and spell it.

LD: My first name is Lorenzo, L-O-R-E-N-Z-O. Last name is DiCarlo, capital D-I- capital C-A-R-L-O. My nickname is Larry.

MS: How do you prefer to be addressed? Larry or Lorenzo?

LD: Either way – Larry's fine.

MS: Or you? [laughter]

LD: Larry's fine.

MS: Okay. Larry, what year were you born, and where were you born?

LD: I was born in 1924 in San Pedro. I've been here all my life.

MS: Tell us about your family and really, foundation of San Pedro and the businesses you started. Give us a little background on your family and the business.

LD: Well, my grandfather and grandmother and my father came to the United States at the turn of the century 1900. They came through Ellis Island in New York. At the time, my father was only two years old, and they proceeded on to Steubenville, Ohio.

MS: Would you want some water, by the way?

LD: No, I just got a hoarse throat. Sorry.

MS: Oh, okay. No problem.

LD: So, anyhow, I believe my grandfather had some relatives there. There were job opportunities there. Being an immigrant, he needed a job. So, he went to work on the railroad, actually laying ties and tracks. One day, after he'd been there for a while, he came home and told my grandmother, "There's got to be a better way to make a living than laying tracks." My grandmother says, "You know, there's a need for a bakery in this little community. There's no bakery here. Why don't you and I start a bakery?" So, that's what they decided to do. They built themselves a little brick oven in the backyard, went out, bought some ingredients, made up their first batch. Well, they didn't realize that they had to let the yeast cure before it would make the bread ferment. So, the dough came out nice and flat. The oven was too hot and burned up most of the bread. So, they had about thirty loaves of bread. They figured, "Well, we got too much invested. We better try to sell this." People there were all ethnic people, a lot of Polaks and Italians, so on and so forth. They thought the bread was great. So, they continued to make bread

there. Then until about 1906, he decided that he wanted to move to a warmer climate. So, he came to San Francisco, moved west to San Francisco. He was offered a job opportunity there to be a baker. This man that owned the bakery also was an entrepreneur there. He owned a lot of other businesses. But unfortunately, when they got there, the earthquake struck. He didn't have a job. He didn't have anything. So, he said to my grandfather, "You know, there's a little community down south known as San Pedro. There's a lot of Italian people there and ethnic people there. It's a beautiful fishing community." He says, "Maybe you should head down there. You might find something to do." So, they came to San Pedro. They rented a house on the corner of 11th and Mesa and decided then that, "Well, we're going to start a bakery again." So, they built a brick oven in the backyard, and they started to make bread again. Well, by that time, my dad was about – I think he was about eight years old then. He was in school, grammar school. Then things got to where they needed somebody to deliver the bread house to house. So, my dad started to do that. He quit school because he had to work. So, he only got education until he was about the fifth or sixth grade. That was it. So, that's how we got started.

MS: What did they tell you about what kind of town San Pedro was in those early days, 1906, 1910?

LD: Oh, it was a beautiful town.

MS: You have to say San Pedro.

LD: Yes. Well, San Pedro was a beautiful town. San Pedro still is a beautiful town. It's changed a lot. But then it's a wonderful place. I've been here for eighty-two years. I don't think I want to move any place else.

MS: Your father or your grandfather, did they tell you any stories about what the place was like and the kind of people who lived here?

LD: Well, yes. My grandfather, he was very outgoing. He was a good baker. My father was more reserved. My father had a good management temperament and financial temperament. When we started the business up, well, grandpa took more or less charge of the production end of it. My dad got involved more in the selling end of it and the financial end of it. But there were a lot of wonderful old timers in San Pedro that they became very close friends with my father and my grandfather and my grandmother. There was a lot of, well, just hardworking people. There weren't too many people that were wealthier, well-to-do, because it was a growing community at that time. Everybody kind of worked together and helped each other. When there was dire need for help, we always were there to help each other.

MS: They were making hard-crust bread, a special kind of bread that it appealed to them.

LD: Well, they made mostly what we call French bread. It's like an Italian bread. It was hard-crust bread. Then as we grew later on, we started to branch out. We started making more of the American-type bread, like the white breads and the whole wheat breads and buns and things like that.

MS: Who were the customers in the early days for your grandfather and your father?

LD: Well, most of the customers were – they used to do a lot of retail, over-the-counter neighborhood people, and then did a lot of business. There used to be a lot of little mom and pop stores in town, family-owned places. We did business with them, supplied them with bread, who in turn supplied the community. At that time, there was a lot of fishing – fishermen in town, a lot of fishing boats. Through the grocery stores, those grocery stores, we supplied them with bread to supply the fishing boats with.

MS: So, you didn't sell directly to the fishermen or anything?

LD: No, never did. We were actually classified as a wholesale operation.

MS: What are some of the other customers that you – what about the military and places like that?

LD: Well, as we grew, we got involved in selling what we call ship chandlers in San Pedro. We, in turn, would supply the Merchant Marine, the tankers, and the cargo boats and stuff like that. At that time, there were several in town. I can remember now there was one called Harbor Ship Supply, Atlas Marine, Hall Ship Supply, Marine Marketing Company. These people were all what we call ship chandlers. They would supply the ships that would come in with whatever they needed in the way of produce and food. Then there were a lot of mom-and-pop stores.

MS: Why don't you start again?

LD: Okay. In San Pedro, there was a lot of mom-and-pop stores. They would supply mainly the fishing boats, independent fishing boats. Some of the ones that were in town I can think of right now, there was one called 13th and Center Market on Center Street. There was one on Palos Verdes called New Deal, and another one on 15th and Center called Canetti's, which also is Canetti's Restaurant now in the Harbor. There was Nizetich on Terminal Island and – oh, I can't think of the rest of them. There were quite a few. But they were all just independent, small grocery stores.

MS: So, give me a sense of your grandfather. Describe what kind of man he was. I mean, he was the founder of all of this. Give me a sense of who he was and what kind of person he was.

LD: Well, my grandfather was a very outgoing person. He had the type of personality that if you never did meet him in your life and you talk to him the first five minutes, you swear you know him all his life. That's the way he would impress people. He was really good-hearted. When he was in business, he always tried to help other people, along with my father. He used to do the same thing. He had a lot of opportunities when he was in San Pedro and the baking business just started. Of course, when you're in a business like that, you don't have much to start with. You're always trying to figure out how you're going to pay your bills and all that stuff. Well, that's the way it was with us getting started. A couple of stories that [laughter] Grandpa told me one time, he says, "You know, when Martin Bogdanovich started the French Sardine company, which became Star-Kist Tuna, he was looking for investors. So, he came and talked to

me about if I would be interested in investing in his upcoming business. He says, 'Martin, I'm having a hard enough time trying to keep my business going. I haven't got any money to invest in your venture. I know that you'll probably make a success of it. I appreciate the offer, but I just can't.'" Well, anyhow, they got to become the biggest canning company in the world practically. Then [laughter] one time, another guy came, talked to grandpa about buying some property in Signal Hill in Long Beach, which became the biggest oil field in California. I think he had a couple acres of land, and he wanted to sell grandpa for practically nothing. Grandpa says, "I'm sorry, I don't have any money." He says, "I can't buy the land. You're talking to the wrong guy." Well, anyhow, they developed into being a tremendous oil field. He probably could have made millions off of it if he had bought it. But then, yes, that's another story. He was a hardworking man. He worked very hard, and my grandmother, both.

MS: Tell me about your grandma.

LD: Well, my grandmother was just a wonderful grandmother. She practically, in a sense, raised me and my sisters because we all lived together, my parents. When I was born, a few months after I was born, my mother died. She was only twenty-eight years old. A year later, my father remarried again, married a beautiful woman, and she was actually our mother – my mother. That's the only mother I ever knew. She came from Italy, San Pedro. She was just a young lady there. I think she was about twenty-six years old, and here are four kids to raise. We all lived together with my grandparents. My grandmother was – well, she kind of ruled the roost, you might say. Because after all, here was a lady coming in to replace the mother that I had. But they managed to get along really well. She was just a loving person. She couldn't ever do enough for you or anybody else.

MS: Now, was she the original baker in the business? Did she get involved? How did she function in the business?

LD: Well, my grandmother – actually, she and my grandfather – of course, my grandmother knew how to cook. Then she knew how to make bread, homemade bread. So, I guess that's how they started. Then from then on out, they got to bake bread, develop their own formulas, and it went from there.

MS: When they came down to San Pedro, were there competing bakeries in town? Or were they the only one?

LD: Yes. No, there was already a few bakeries, little mom-and-pop operations. Anyhow, as it worked out, as my grandfather and my dad, the business continued to grow. Some of the other competing bakeries found hard times, and they decided that they were going to close shop. So, my grandfather was astute enough to get these guys to say, "Well, you close your bakery and come and work for me. You'd be one of my bakers. I will take over your business." They did that. We were able to accumulate like four or five little other operations in town until it ended up that we were the only major bakery in San Pedro.

MS: What do you think is the reason why DiCarlo Bakery survived all this and grew? What was it about your bakery that made it the best and only in town?

LD: Well, we had a good product. People liked it. As we saturated our market here as much as we could, we started to branch out. We went into different areas like Long Beach and Huntington Beach and Inglewood and part of Redondo and Torrance and part of West LA. We increased our distribution. At the time, we started out with just a few routes, maybe four or five trucks. Then by the time we moved to our plant after several years, when we went out of business or sold out of business, we had fifty-five wholesale routes going, which is pretty good operation. We were considered one of the leading independent bakeries in Southern California.

MS: Now, how would you compare to, say, Helms Bakery or those other bakeries that were in the LA area and Southern California area? Were they your competition, or were you a separate area?

LD: Well, Helms was a complete, separate – different operation than ours. They were strictly house to house, home delivery, like milk. Ours was strictly wholesale delivery. Even at one point in time, we produced French bread. We actually sold it to Helms, which they in turn sold to their customers through their trucks. Then another time, after we really got going, another man and his wife that were working for Helms, they decided to start up their own home delivery service. They started out with just three trucks. We started to supply them with bread. They grew to where when they finally went out of business or sold his business, he had over two hundred house-to-house routes. So, it got to be quite a nice operation. It got to be a nice chunk of business for us too.

MS: What was the name of that company?

LD: It was called Paul's Bakeries. We even produced bread, what we called under private label. In other words, we produced the bread and put their name on it.

MS: So, talk about yourself. As you were growing up, what are your early memories of San Pedro and this town when you were a young kid?

LD: Well, when I was growing up, I remember that I went to school in San Pedro, started out at Cabrillo Avenue Elementary School, which is on 7th. Cabrillo is still there. That was around 1930. I went through grammar school there. Then in 1936, I went to Dana Junior High School, which is still there. Then three years later, I went to San Pedro High School, which is still there. So, I got my education actually in San Pedro.

MS: As you were growing up, what did you do for fun as a kid?

LD: Well, we used to do a lot of things. Of course, I had some close friends, the buddy buddies that you'd pick up along the way. We used to play baseball and football and all that stuff in back lots and tried to stay out of trouble. My youngest sister and I, we got to be real pals because we used to do everything together. We'd go to the beach together. We'd go to the show together. We used to go down to Cabrillo Theater. It used to be on 7th Street. On Saturday afternoon, my grandmother would give us – I think she would give us 10 cents or 15 cents – no, she gave us a quarter. We'd go to the show. I think it cost a dime to get into the show. It cost us another dime

to ride the bus back and forth. We had a nickel to spend on candy. So, we used to go buy candy at the candy store. We bought the cheapest candy we would find to get the most for the buck. Then we'd go to the show and enjoy the movie. Then if it was a [laughter] Laurel and Hardy show, we'd always stay for a rerun, so we could see it twice. Because it was so much fun. So, that was a lot of fun. Then as I grew older and was in high school, a group of fellows that I knew, we got together, and we started a club. We'd call ourselves the Feather Merchants. We got the name out of a – it used to be a comic strip in the newspaper called *The Feather Merchants*. Then we all assumed their nicknames. Everybody had one of the nicknames. We had jackets. We had the whole nine yards. We used to have a lot of fun. We'd get together once a week to have dinner, either one of the mother's houses. Then we did a lot of things together. We used to go to shows. We used to play ball. We all loved to ice skate. We used to go to North Long Beach. There was an ice-skating rink there. We'd go ice skating and play hockey and –

MS: What is the term? Feather Keepers?

LD: Feather Merchants.

MS: Feather Merchants. What does that mean?

LD: Well, [laughter] it was a comic strip that was in the newspaper. They were called the feather merchants. We saw it. "Well, yes, a great name. Let's use that when we start a club." So, that's what we decided to do.

MS: What was the comic strip – or who were the characters? What did they do in the comic strip?

LD: Oh, they were a bunch of guys that were – oh, they were like elves, you might say, like the *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, like the seven dwarfs. Anyhow, it was one of those things that kids were attracted to in those days. That's how we got a rub off on that.

MS: So, did you work in the business as a young kid too?

LD: Yes. When I started junior high school, I was twelve years old. I started to work at the bakery after school. I worked on weekends – I mean, every weekend, Saturday and Sunday. Then [laughter] they always managed to keep me busy. It was good. I probably didn't like it so much then. But when I look back, it's probably the best thing that ever happened to me because it kept me off the street. It kept me from getting into mischief. It taught me responsibility. They actually taught me the business. I've been in the baking business. I was in for forty-nine years before I retired. That's the only business I ever knew. It's the most wonderful thing that I really know that I really liked.

MS: What were you doing when you were working there over the weekends?

LD: Well, at first I would just do the usual things, sweep the floor and stuff like that. Then at the bakery that we had on 11th Street, we had a little retail store. We used to sell bread over the

counter there. I used to stay behind the counter and sell bread and collect the money and bring it up to the cash register. Then as I got a little bit older, grandpa took me into the bakery. He started to teach me the trade, how to actually make bread by hand. I went through all of that training, started from scratch, up, from the dough, out the back door, went through all the different processes. That's how I learned the trade. Then later on when I assumed more responsibility, my dad took over. He started teaching me actually the management and the financial end of the business, how to run the business, and how to go out and sell and so on and so forth. So, basically, I had really good trainers, good teachers.

MS: As the only boy in the family, you were the definite heir apparent. What was your role as the only son in the family? What was it like?

LD: Well, it was fine. Now, the youngsters are growing up. They don't have a family business, or they don't have something that they know they can fall into the footsteps of. That was not my problem. I always knew that being the only boy in the family, and my father was an only son in the family, that I had nowhere to go. I was going to be in the baking business, whether I liked it or not [laughter]. Fortunately, I liked it. So, that's what I did.

MS: But as the only boy, were you the little prince of the family too?

LD: Oh, I guess so. [laughter]

MS: Why don't [laughter] you tell me about that?

LD: I guess I wasn't exactly a little prince. We always respected one another. We had the usual kid stuff, badging back and forth, but nothing serious. They'd pick on me, and I'd pick on them. You said this, or you said that, the usual stuff. But we all managed to survive. [laughter]

MS: The Depression, which we're talking about in the [19]30s, some of this time we're talking about, was a pretty rough time. What kind of impact did the Depression have on San Pedro and your family and the business?

LD: Well, they went through the Depression, and they had really hard times. 1929, when the stock market crashed, they got hit pretty hard. They didn't have probably a lot invested, but they got hit anyhow. But they managed to survive and get back on their feet again and just kept going, you know.

MS: Did it have any impact on your growing up? Did you feel the pinch at all as you were growing up?

LD: No. We had a large home. It was on 9th Street, North Terraces. But it was just recently destroyed or taken down. We had a big piece of property up there. We had about almost an acre of land, had this big, beautiful home there. At home, we had our own garden. We had our own hen house. In fact, my grandfather and grandmother even built an oven in the backyard, so they could make bread – homemade bread – at home, once in a while, which was a treat. In our yard, besides vegetables, we had several fruit trees. We had figs and peaches and apricots and plums

and you name it. We were like self-sustaining up there [laughter]. The hen house produced a lot of eggs and chickens for us. So, we were never out of food. That was for sure.

MS: Now, there's always been a big Italian community here in San Pedro. Was your family involved in the community here? If so, how were they involved?

LD: Oh, they were involved. There were a few clubs in town, Italian American clubs and things like that, Sons of Italy and so on and so forth. My dad was mostly involved in that kind of thing. He was very civic and outgoing. One time, they started a club. I think it was a club in town called the Italian American Club. I think at one point in time, I'm not sure about this, but I think he was president or something for a short period of time. Then they always managed to get involved with the community.

MS: Tell me about your father. What kind of man was he? Tell me a little bit about his career.

LD: Well, my father was a very, very intelligent man. For only having a sixth-grade education, it's amazing that he became successful. My dad was always very businesslike. He's a deep thinker. But he always was able to look out and look into the future. In other words, he wasn't a guy that would say, "Well, this can't happen because it's going to happen. I'm going to make it happen." He worked very hard to build the business to what it became. But at the same time, he was very civic-minded. He really had a financial brain. If he hadn't gone in and been in the bakery business, he probably would've gone into some kind of financial business. Because at one point in time, he became a founder and a president of the Fishermen and Merchants Bank of San Pedro, which later on, after several mergers, is now part of Wells Fargo. The bank building is on the corner of 7th and Mesa Street. The building now is being renovated. It's being renovated into those big lofts and condos down there. They're also saving the facade of the bank to keep the old feeling of San Pedro there. Then later on, he got involved in savings and loan. He started the Cabrillo Savings and Loan, which was another financial institution. He was the president of that. They ran that for many years until they finally had the opportunity to merge. I forget what the surviving company was because it's merged three or four times. But he was very successful at that.

MS: Now, this was while running the bakery?

LD: When he was running the bakery. Then when we sold the bakery in 1958, he really got involved in more civic things. At one point in time, he was a director of the Metropolitan Water District. He became president of the Harbor Department Commission. He got involved with the city of LA and was on the Zonings Appeal Board – a director of the Zonings Appeal Board. Then he belonged to various clubs like the Rotary Club and the Sierra Club. He was honored by the City of Hope. He had quite a history, quite a guy. He was really a wonderful man, a wonderful father, and he really couldn't do enough for his family.

MS: But I think the circumstances of his death were sort of sad. Could you talk about that?

LD: Well, yes. We were really sad when he accidentally drowned. It was just an accident, really what it was. It had nothing to do with being depressed or anything like that. It was just

simply an accident. He never knew how to swim. It was very unfortunate and a great loss to the family. It was a great loss to everyone.

MS: Could you back up a bit and tell me what was going on at that time and the circumstances around how – what happened basically?

LD: Well, at least, as near as I can tell, it was just about the time that I think the *Queen Mary* was being brought over from Europe or whatever it is. The Port of Long Beach had bought it. Dad was interested in trying to (tight tack?) out the *Angelena*, which was the Harbor Department boat. So, he could reserve it for going out and meeting the ship when it came in. So, I think he went down to the docks to talk to the skipper. When he was walking along the pier down there, he slipped, and he fell in the water. By the time they got him out, it was too late. So, that's how it happened.

MS: How did you find out what had happened?

LD: Well, at that time, I was working for Continental. I was on the regional staff. I was at one of our offices in Van Nuys. I got a call from my office in Santa Monica. They told me that I had an emergency. I better get home. But they didn't tell me, just, "You've got an emergency at home. They want you to go home." So, then when I was driving down the freeway to go home, I had the radio on the news. Of course they had broadcasted over the news. So, that's how I found out. So, by the time I got home, I knew what happened. Of course, my brother was there and my brother-in-law. The whole family was there. It was a sad day, I saw.

MS: Before, there was some kind of controversy with Mayor Yorty. Or what were the circumstances before that was going on that were connected to that?

LD: Oh, I don't really know what the circumstances were. I don't think he was in any controversy with Mayor Yorty. Those days, there was a lot of politics going on. When you get involved in that kind of service or business, you're always going to have disagreements or misunderstandings. Everybody says, you said, you said, he said, you know? So, I really don't know too much about it. All the time that he was active, he never expressed anything to me that would lead me to believe that that was a problem for him.

MS: When was the last time you saw him then?

LD: Well, I just had seen him the night before, I guess. Because we used to get together quite often.

MS: So, that was really a sad occasion for the family in many ways. By that time, you'd sold the bakery, right?

LD: Oh, yes.

MS: Why did you decide to sell the bakery?

LD: Well, we moved. We built this big plant and got it going. It was really going gung ho. Then we were approached by Continental. In fact, there were two or three other companies that were looking for expansion. So, we thought maybe, well, this might be the best opportunity to strike a deal. So, we struck a deal and sold it.

MS: Then what happened to it?

LD: Well, after we sold it, my dad stayed on for a couple years. Then he finally retired in – I think it was 1960. I stayed with the company. I managed the bakery for about nine years. Then they moved me up to a regional position where our region had jurisdiction over nine other bakeries in the area. Well, not really in the area, they were in Los Angeles and in Denver and Salt Lake City and Ogden and San Diego. So, I got a traveling job then [laughter]. I went to work in sales management for the company. I stayed in that regional position until I finally retired in 1985. I put in forty-nine years of service in the baking business. That was my life.

MS: What's the difference between working with Continental and working with a family business? Was there any difference?

LD: Oh, yes. There's quite a bit of a difference. [laughter] I couldn't get used to waiting for things to happen, you know? Like, if we wanted to buy a truck, we'd pick up the phone, and we'd order a truck, you know? Well, when you're in a bakery and you needed a truck, you had to call the regional office. The regional office had to call New York. New York had to call somebody else. By the time they delivered the truck, maybe you figured, well, you really didn't need that truck anymore. So, just kind of bureaucracy, I couldn't get used to that. It took a long time to get used to it. But then you learn to live with it, I guess. [laughter]

MS: The product had changed too, I guess. You were doing much more different varieties of product than you were doing before, or was it the same?

LD: No, the product was pretty much the same. They accepted our formulas. Then being an affiliated bakery with Continental, we used to produce their bread under their label at our bakery. Put their wrapper on it and use their formula because it was for more of a production thing. Then after we got the bakery going, we even added another division onto the bakery – another extension of the bakery to start making English buffets, which is something that, strangely, was all new to us anyhow. So, we started producing English muffins.

MS: Not much of an Italian tradition for English muffin.

LD: No, I don't think so. [laughter]

MS: Didn't the company go out of business after a while?

LD: Well, what happened is Continental bought us out. We were owned by Continental for about ten years. Then Continental merged with IT&T, International Telephone and Telegraph, became a part of the conglomerate. So, they were under their jurisdiction for about another ten years. Then IT&T finally spun them off to another company, to Ralston Purina, which actually,

Van Camp Tuna Canning also belonged to Ralston Purina. So, then we were under their jurisdiction until finally, Ralston Purina sold out to Interstate Brands. Well, Interstate Brands, at the time we were in business, was one of our biggest competitors and Wonder Bread's biggest competitors. They bought the bakery, and they acquired all of Continental's operations. They had about sixty bakeries across the United States. I guess the change in diet of people not eating much cake and as much white breads and things like that, which we were famous for making, volumes started to go down. People started going more towards diet food and don't eat bread and all that stuff. Well, finally, it got to the point where I guess they had to start merging some of their plants together. Our plant was packaged into a closure of about sixteen bakeries at one time with Interstate Brands. They took the production. We just moved it into other plants. They closed our operation down altogether. The property was just recently sold to Target stores. They're going to build a Target store down there now.

MS: 2004, the last loaf.

LD: Yes.

MS: Tell me the story of that. It must have been a pretty moving situation.

LD: Well, I knew they were going to close, but I didn't know when. So, it was kind of a surprise. My sons pulled a fasty on me. The day that the last loaf of bread was going to be baked there, they managed to get me down to the bakery. The superintendent down there, which I knew really well, my friend, he says, "Well, this is the last hurrah. We're closing down today." Then he says, "We're going to take your final walk through the bakery. When we get through, you're going to get the last loaf of bread coming off the line," which I did. They gave me the last loaf of bread that came off the line. But I managed to get a few extra ones too. So, that one was all over. We all went up to the Pacific Diner in San Pedro. We bought our own bread. He says, "Well, we're going to eat your breakfast, but you've got to toast our bread because this is the last hurrah." [laughter]

MS: Was that a moving experience for you, thinking all those years, all [inaudible]?

LD: Yes. Well, it was. Because when we built that plant, I'm proud to say that I laid the plant out. My dad gave me full rein. He says, "Okay. You lay the plant out the way you think it should be. That's how we're going to build it." So, it was really after my design. We had the flow set up so that the raw ingredients started at one end of the building and the other end of the building, the finished product finally came out. So, I made it kind of a streamline operation. It was sad because you hate to see something like that go down. The saddest part was that so many people were involved. We had a lot of people working down there. We had second and third generations of families still working there. Because when we had our own bakery, we had a lot of families working for us. It wasn't unusual to hire a family that had three or four sons, and they were all looking for work. So, we all used to hire them. The Continental called that nepotism. They wouldn't let us do that anymore. I said, "Well, some of these guys have been here for 30, 40 years. What's so bad about that? You get guys you don't even know who maybe stay six months or a year, and they're gone. These guys really like to work. They appreciate the job. They were good workers. So," I said, "I think we were okay. We have been okay. They helped

us grow. So, that's what it's all about."

MS: Not everybody gets the opportunity to grow up in a bakery surrounded by the smells. We've talked to other people who remember waiting for buses outside your bakery and smelling that bread and all that. Can you give me some feeling about what it's like to grow up in a bakery aside from the atmosphere of it? It's an unusual kind of experience. What's it like to grow up in a bakery?

LD: Well, I don't know. It's kind of hard to explain. Well, I can't really explain what's so different about it. People always enjoyed coming to the bakery. We used to have a lot of open houses where we'd take people through on tours and show them how bread was made. Then I recall that when we had our plant down in San Pedro on 9th Street, 9th and Pacific, the Mary Star of the Sea Church was located on 9th and Center Street. On Sunday, they used to have a mass every hour, 6:00 a.m. until 1:00 p.m., every hour. At the end of every mass, the people would head for the bakery to buy bread to bring home for their Sunday meal. So, we had things really clocked out over there. We figured out, "Well, they're going to be here any minute now." So, we'd run out back into the bakery and get all the hot French bread rolls out, stack it up on the counter, get rid of that first wave, and then we wait for the next wave every hour to come through. So, it was really nice to see people come in and enjoy the finished product, you know.

MS: Did you bake communion wafers?

LD: No, no, no.

[laughter]

Out of our jurisdiction.

[laughter]

MS: Another sort of hard question to answer, but from your point of view – it's such a memorable thing for so many people – what did DiCarlo Bakery mean to San Pedro, the community? What was its contribution to San Pedro and its history?

LD: Well, I think we contributed a lot to the community. We were able to offer employment to a lot of people in San Pedro, a lot of families. We always treated our employees very fairly. In fact, our plant was always union. We didn't need the union to really govern our business and tell them what to do and what not to do. We always got along with the union, and they always got along with us. We treated our people like they were family. We also did a lot of things. Like, I remember when we had our little bakery down on 11th Street, it used to be hard times, like you mentioned the Depression. Well, there were hard times in those days. My grandfather and my father decided, "Well, we've got to take care of these people and make sure that they at least have bread to take home even if they didn't have any money." So, what we did is he got these brown, little notebooks, and they were all lined. A lady would come in and family would come in and buy a loaf of bread or two loaves of bread for 10 cents, 15 cents. They didn't have the money. We used to write it in the book. So, all we said to them was, "Well, at the end of the month

when you bring your book in, we'll tell you how much you owe us." Well, by that time, if they owed us \$2 or \$3, whatever it was – because things were cheap in those days, used to buy loaf of day-old bread for 5 cents. Even at that, [laughter] if they couldn't pay, he goes, "How much can you pay?" Well, if they owed \$3, he says, "Well, I can pay you \$1." He says, "Okay. Give us a dollar, and you got \$2 riding the next time." So, we just kept carrying them until finally, they got to the point where they could pay. These were people that were mostly fishermen. Their husbands were out and their sons were out fishing. There were good times or bad times. So, if it was good times, we'd collect the money. If it's bad times, well, we didn't collect the money. You have to wait. A lot of times, we didn't collect anything. But we made sure that at least they had bread on the table, you know.

MS: You stuck with bread. You never got into pastries. Or did you ever – partnership with another bakery or anything like that?

LD: No.

MS: So, why did you stick with bread? Why didn't you get into other kinds of baking?

LD: Because when you go into pastries and cakes, it's a completely different type of operation. It requires different equipment. It's just simply like salt and pepper. It's just different.

MS: How did the tastes of your clients change from your grandfather's day to the time the bakery closed? How did the product change? How did the taste change of the people in San Pedro for bread?

LD: Well, our main forte was when grandpa first started to make bread, it was European style bread, hard-crust bread. As years went by, people were looking more for a softer-type loaf of bread, not quite as hard, and not more thoroughly baked. Then they started leaning more towards what we call the American style bread, like the sliced bread and stuff like that and the buns and the hamburger buns and stuff like that. Then we got into making a lot of variety breads, like specialty breads. We made one loaf of bread. It was particularly popular. We used to call it avocado raisin nut. It was made with avocado oil, which was the oil from the avocados. Instead of using shortening, we used avocado oil. It had walnuts and cinnamon and raisins. Boy, that was about the closest thing to cake that you ever wanted to eat. It was very popular in those days. We used to sell a lot of that.

MS: What year was that?

LD: Oh, probably in the [19]40s and [19]50s.

MS: What was the most exotic? Did you make rye bread and that kind of breads too?

LD: Oh, yes. We made all kinds of bread. We made rye bread. We made pumpernickel. We made a loaf that was called – we used to call it (panocha?), which was a wheat bread that was made out of bran and rye flours and all different things. One thing that we baked particularly for the fishing community was hardtack. We used to call it galleta. What it was, was a round disc.

What we'd do is we'd let it poof up and then punch holes into it and stick it in the oven and bake it at very, very low temperature. In fact, we used to leave it in the oven, turn the ovens off until the bread got really dry like a cracker. We used to make a lot of that. Then the way we used to sell that, we'd take a clean flour sack and put 25 pounds of it in a bag and tie a rope around it. We used to store it in the bakery. When the fishing boats went out and if they needed – it was kind of like emergency in case you got stranded at sea. Well, you'd have something to eat, you know. But then they used to use it [laughter] to make cioppino out of it too. [laughter] Put it on the bottom, put the sauce on top, and it tastes pretty good. [laughter]

MS: Were there any memorable bakers that worked in your family, a few characters who were –

LD: Oh, yes. We had, well, one family in particular. It was the Trani family, Vince Trani family. They lived on 15th Street. Vince had four sons. The oldest son was Nick. He worked for us at the bakery until he had to finally quit because he developed the asthma. He was allergic to flour dust. Then when he quit, he went on to become the director at the San Pedro Boys Club. Then his brother, Tony, he worked for us for almost fifty-five years. He had another brother, Louis, who worked for us for about forty years. He had a younger brother, Jimmy, that only worked there a short period of time. He went to New York as an agent for an insurance company. But the father, Frank, he worked for us for over fifty years. So, that goes to show you how one family stuck with us.

MS: Any particularly eccentric characters that worked for you that had sort of odd habits or characteristics?

LD: Well, we had one guy. He seemed like he did his best work when he was half drunk. [laughter] But anyhow, [laughter] he was a great guy. We never had any problems with him. But we always used to kid him about it. He was a good old soul. [laughter]

MS: Well, how would you know that he was drinking? I mean, did he have a stash under the flour bag?

LD: No. He just was happy-go-lucky. He took the weekend off and didn't sober up in time to get to work. So, we had to go pick him up. [laughter]

MS: Was there somebody who was particularly a great baker that stands out as being a master baker that worked for you?

LD: Oh, we had probably two or three that really knew the trade. They could make all different kinds of variety breads by hand. They had the knack for how to do that. We had another fellow that worked for us. He was actually a pastry baker. He was a Frenchman. But he was a hell of a baker though. He could do anything. He was really a great baker.

MS: Now, with all the dough going on, did you ever get tempted to go into the pizza business?

LD: We used to make pizza for ourselves. We used to take dough, bake it, and put it in a pan. My mother would make the ingredients upstairs, come down, and we spread it over the dough

and stick it in the oven. Baked it for ourselves to take home. So, it was homemade pizza.
[laughter]

MS: But did you sell dough for pizza?

LD: We used to sell dough, raw dough. People would come in and buy raw dough to make pizza at home. But we never made pizza to sell it per se.

MS: Describe the big family house. I've seen a picture. It was a huge house.

LD: Yes.

MS: Describe what was it like inside.

LD: Well, it was a big house. We had –

MS: You have to say, "The family house was."

LD: It was a big house. We had about three or four bedrooms.

MS: Yes, you have to say, "The family house."

LD: The family house was a large house. We had two stories. It was three or four bedrooms upstairs. Then downstairs was a big kitchen. There was a big area, like an eating area. We also had another room, we called it the playroom, which was a recreational room where we used to sit around and play games and stuff like that. We had a large yard that raised – actually, we had a big yard with fruit trees and stuff like that. The house was first built there in 1923. There were no facilities there, no sewers or anything. We had to put in our own cesspools, septic tanks, stuff like that. In order to get power to the place, [laughter] I think my grandfather said that they had to put up a deposit with the water and power department, a big chunk of money just to make sure that they bring the power to them. They said, "We'll refund it to you. As soon as enough people up here move in, we'll give you your money back." So, [laughter] that's how he got started up there. So, we happened to have a big yard. We always had a couple of dogs, two or three dogs. One time, I had a Great Dane and two German Shepherds. They were running around the place. We never was at a loss for cats because we always had a few stray cats around.

MS: But having all those many generations of the family in the same house, was that a special kind of situation?

LD: Well, actually, what happened is when my grandparents lived there with us, and my dad and mother actually lived there too. But then in the days when we first started the bakery down on 11th Street, there was an apartment upstairs. Because of the fact that my dad used to get up at 1:00 a.m. or 2:00 a.m., he'd go down and go to work, check out the loads and stuff like that, well, he used to actually live on top of the old bakery with my mother. But they were always up in the house for dinner and stuff like that. But sometimes, they didn't sleep at home. They would sleep down there. So, we actually had two houses going.

MS: Well, I think we've run out of time. Are there any other stories that I didn't ask you about you wanted to tell me?

LD: No, not really. I think we covered everything pretty well. I think when I look back, it's just a lot of memories. We were very fortunate and very blessed that we were able to do as well as we did. We're very thankful to have the opportunity to live in San Pedro. San Pedro's a very, very unique place. Even people that come visit us once in a while, they've never been here before. They say, "Boy, you guys really don't know what you have here." I say, "Are you kidding? That's why I've been here for eighty-two years." [laughter] But my parents and my grandparents were very wonderful people. Even my wife, her family were very, very nice people. In fact, he was in the fish business. He had a retail fish market. Because my children were not to succeed in the bakery business, they all went to work for their grandfather after school at his fish market. They learned how to become fish peddlers, [laughter] you might say. [laughter] Of course, only one of them stayed in the fish business. The other ones went on to different things in life. One became a doctor. One is involved with the Los Angeles Police Department in some kind of consulting basis. Paul has his own fish business in Wilmington. John's an associate partner in a CPA firm in Long Beach. Our youngest son, Richard, is a police officer in Phoenix. We are able to have eight wonderful grandchildren. We've got four boys and four girls. Thank God they're all healthy, and they're all doing their thing. I've had a great wife, sixty years, couldn't ask for better. So, I don't know what else I could ever want.

MS: [laughter] You had good bread too.

LD: We had good bread too.

[laughter]

MS: Could you move your chair a couple feet to the right? I'm going to take a still –

[end of transcript]