

Port of Los Angeles Centennial Oral History Project  
Patricia Leckner Oral History  
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Interviewer: MS – Unknown  
Transcriber: NCC

Male Speaker: The first question is, could you please say your name and spell it?

Patricia Leckner: I'm Patricia Leckner, P-A-T-R-I-C-I-A, L-E-C-K-N-E-R.

MS: Patricia, may I ask you what year you were born and where you were born?

PL: Yes. I was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, June 23rd, 1932. I'm 75 years old. I was just turned over the weekend.

MS: You don't look it, I'll tell you.

PL: Yes. Somebody else told me that today [laughter].

MS: Yes, today, you have that kind of energy and enthusiasm and sparkle.

PL: Yes.

MS: We're here to talk about mainly your connections to Ports O' Call, but did you have any connections to San Pedro before you were involved with Ports O' Call?

PL: Yes. My children's father was in the service before they were born. He was sent to Fort MacArthur, San Pedro, California after his basic training. He was a second lieutenant, and that's what brought us here to San Pedro.

MS: But tell me, what was it like when you came here for the first time? Describe what you saw and what was going on here.

PL: Well, I was kind of impressed. We lived at Fort MacArthur – on the base – for quite a while, and then my husband liked it very, very much. Before I knew it, he told me he found a house he wants to buy, and we bought the house. During his time in the service, when we got to San Pedro in Fort MacArthur, I was modeling. I got a modeling job in Long Beach because I wanted something to do. Then I was hoping he'd stay in the service because then we would go to Europe and other places. He said, no, that he could get out after a certain time. He was a civil engineer. He eventually got a job for the State of California as a civil engineer in this whole area. He just traveled around and –

MS: What was the port like in those early days? What year was that when you first came here?

PL: Oh, let's see. I have to think. My daughter was born in 1957 – about 1955.

MS: So, what was the port like in 1955?

PL: It seemed very active.

MS: Here's an example. You have to say, the Port of Los Angeles –

PL: The Port of Los Angeles was kind of active. It wasn't all the big buildings that there are now, but I thought it was a very clean area. I liked living here. I was impressed with the schools, and it was nice.

MS: So, how did you get involved with – well, tell us, first of all, what is the history of Ports O' Call? How did it begin? Who began it, and why?

PL: Well, David Tallichet built it.

MS: No. You have to say, Ports O' Call, so start again.

PL: Okay. Mr. David Tallichet built Ports O' Call Village. He's the president of Specialty Restaurants Corporation. He built Ports O' Call Restaurant and the Yankee Whaler at the time. It was still there. He has restaurants all over the United States now.

MS: So, tell me, what year did Ports O' Call begin, and what is it like? What was the idea? Here, I can give you the information. Here is –

PL: Well, the village was built in 1964, Ports O' Call Village.

MS: It was built in 1964?

PL: Yes.

MS: Well, here's some information here. 1959 was the Reef Restaurant?

PL: Yes.

MS: Then why don't you tell me about that?

PL: Well, that was one of his first –

MS: One of the first restaurants in 1959 was?

PL: The Reef.

MS: No. You have to say that as a sentence.

PL: Oh, one of the first restaurants was built in 1959. It was called the Reef.

MS: Tell me more about that. What was that?

PL: Well, that's over in Long Beach.

MS: Oh, it wasn't here?

PL: No.

MS: So, in 1961 – December of 1961, Whaler's Wharf Restaurant and Ports O' Call were built?

PL: Yes.

MS: So, tell me that back again.

PL: Ports O' Call Restaurant and the Yankee Whaler Restaurant were built in 1961, right on the waterfront.

MS: What was the Tallichet's idea? What was he trying to do building Ports O' Call?

PL: Just a specialty center.

MS: Mr. Tallichet wanted to build?

PL: He wanted to build a specialty –

MS: Mr. Tallichet so we know who you're talking about.

PL: Mr. Tallichet wanted to build a specialty center, like his restaurants were. Ports O' Call was the beginning of it. Then he built Jack London Village in Oakland, California, and Boatyard Village in Clearwater, Florida. I was with him at the time when he decided to build Boatyard Village. I had it all leased before it was finished being built. So, that was fun.

MS: So, what was the concept of Ports O' Call? What was this supposed to be and look like?

PL: A nautical –

MS: No. You have to – Ports O' Call –

PL: Ports O' Call Village was kind of designed like a nautical seaport village.

MS: How long did it take before it was finished? How many years did it take to finish, or did it come together real quickly?

PL: No. He built the waterfront. Mr. Tallichet built the waterfront area for a while. Then later on, he built the Asian Village.

MS: Tell me more about that. What was the Asian Village?

PL: Well, it's still there. The Asian Village is still there. It's open, the shops are. It's very successful. Yes.

MS: So, who were some of the first tenants in Ports O' Call?

PL: Violet Parkhurst, Parkhurst –

MS: Some of the first tenant.

PL: – Gallery was the first tenant.

MS: The first tenant in Ports O' Call was?

PL: The first tenant in Ports O' Call Village was Violet Parkhurst, the artist. It was called Parkhurst Gallery.

MS: What about Mr. Wing, was he there too?

PL: Wing's Oriental Store came right after that. Yes.

MS: Who were some of the other tenants?

PL: Foster's Indian Store was one of the first ones. There was a pearl shop. Mexilatin is another gift store. I didn't look at it. There was a boat. I think it was Harbor Village Boathouse. I'm not sure, but I'd have to kind of glance at some of those.

MS: So, tell me about some of the early tenants.

PL: (Artiano's?) Italian Restaurant was somewhat – oh, and Ann's Village Bakery, that was a very popular place. The jewelry store was called Anthony Kane's Jewelry. They were one of the first jewelry stores there.

MS: So, when people came, was it a success right from the beginning?

PL: Yes, it was.

MS: Can you say Ports O' Call was a –

PL: It was a success.

MS: Can you say Ports O' Call?

PL: Ports O' Call was a success. Then after I came, I did a lot of promotions there and started getting to know location managers. We had a lot of movies made there and TV shows. I got to know some of the TV stars and would entertain them at Ports O' Call Restaurant. So, people got to say – they used to tell me, "We're going to go to Ports O' Call Restaurant today. Are there going to be any movie stars there?" I had the pleasure of meeting – gosh, I can't think of this – older man who look out for me. I'm sorry.

MS: So, what were some of the movies and television shows that were shot there?

PL: I don't remember all the titles.

MS: So, what would you do to promote? Did you have promotions? What were the kind of promotions you would do?

PL: Well, one Christmas, I used to help the Marine Corps to give Christmas toys to Marine children. Then someone told me that the Indian children needed help. So, I had met John Voigt, and he said he'd help me put together with Iron Eyes Cody for giving toys to Indian children. We did that for a couple of years in December. That brought a lot of movie stars and gifts, like bicycles and skateboards. It was just tremendous how we did that in December. Buddy Ebsen was my main attraction at one of my Christmas parades. He was the Grand Marshal, Mr. Ebsen.

MS: So, you did Christmas parades. Tell me about that. What were those like?

PL: Well, it was really nice. Some of the merchants got involved. We had small floats and things. It brought people to the village at Christmastime.

MS: Why do you think Ports O' Call was a big success? I mean, what attracted people to come here?

PL: The scenery.

MS: What attracted people was –

PL: What attracted people was the scenery and the big freighters sailing by and the cruise ships. When the cruise ship would go by Ports O' Call Restaurant, either the restaurant manager or myself would talk to them on a loudspeaker. They would recognize the restaurant, and all the people on board and on the patio of the restaurant would wave at each other. That was a good promotion. People liked seeing the cruise ships.

MS: What were some of the more popular places for people to go in those days?

PL: In San Pedro or Ports O' Call?

MS: Ports O' Call.

PL: Well, the restaurants.

MS: Some of the most popular?

PL: Yes. The Mexican restaurant right at the beginning. Well, all the restaurants as you come into the entrance were very popular, and excellent food. They really do. They're still operating today. Casa d'Italia was very popular, very authentic Italian food. They were always busy. Naturally, Ports O' Call Restaurant. But it was an active, fun place.

MS: So, what would people do? Would they just go to the restaurants and – were there tours or boat trips?

PL: Tour buses would come. I made contacts with different tour bus companies. I'd always entertain the tour bus driver for breakfast, lunch, or dinner. That got to be a sightseeing. They'd advertise – the tour companies – the days they would be coming to Ports O' Call Village.

MS: Now, to go back to the beginning, how did you get involved with Ports O' Call? What were you doing before, and how did you get involved with it?

PL: Well, a very good friend of mine was working at Ports O' Call Restaurant, and I had a restaurant and catering business here in the area. I worked seven years in a row without any time off. I met my husband, Police Officer (Gerald Leckner?). My parents kept saying, "If you're going to marry this man, you're going to have to get out of the restaurant business." So, I sold my restaurant and my catering business. My friend who was hostess at Ports O' Call Restaurant said, "I've told my boss about you." I thought I'd like to run the catering business at Ports O' Call Restaurant, because I had so many clients that stayed with me for seven years. I was the caterer for the Lions Club and all the main things. I was involved in everything. I was on the board of directors of the Chamber of Commerce and involved with the Women's Club and the Assistance League. So, I thought I could bring all these customers to Ports O' Call Restaurant. Well, when I met the representative of Specialty Restaurants, and I told him the job I wanted to have, and we talked and talked, and he said, "I need a manager in the village." He said, "Will you take the job as manager for the village because you're so active in the community. Mr. Tallichet, he's on a world trip. He'll be gone for the rest of the month, and then you can meet him." So, I said, "Well, okay." So, I took the job as village manager. Then Mr. Tallichet called me up one day. He was back in the States and asked me to meet him at Ports O' Call Restaurant, and I did. I had all the information on what's going on in the village, what I had put together. When I showed it to him, he was just so impressed at what I had. He didn't know some of the things that I had presented to him. I said, "Now, can we talk about me working for the restaurant?" I even mentioned to him – because I used to have my own restaurant – I'd be a manager too and still with the banquets. He said, "No, no." He said, "You'll stay in the village for a while." I stayed there for twenty-two years.

MS: What is the job of a manager of Ports O' Call Village?

PL: Running a first class –

MS: The job of –

PL: The manager of a shopping center is, to me, one thing was very important, keeping it clean, keeping it leased with quality stores, and making sure that your help that back you up in the office are qualified and –

MS: So, during your years as manager, were there any particular incidents that stick out in your mind or crises or problems or funny things that happened?

PL: Oh, golly. The Port of Los Angeles had to approve of all my leases. So, I came here to the directors of the port to get those leases approved. They were quite impressed with that. When my boss gave up the village – Mr. Tallichet gave up the village, the Port of L.A. asked me three times to stay on my job and work for them [laughter].

MS: Well, now, first of all, tell us a little bit more about Mr. Tallichet. Tell me about him. What kind of man is he? Give me a sense of – describe his personality.

PL: Well, his –

MS: Mr. Tallichet.

PL: Mr. Tallichet is a gentleman who I don't think I'll ever forget. I've enjoyed working with him and for him over all these years. He knows how to build buildings. He specializes in location. Even his restaurants are either way up high with views of mountains or oceans. He's very particular where he builds his places.

MS: Is he an easy-going guy? Is he hard-driving? Is he funny? Is he serious? What kind of person is he?

PL: He's very serious, very successful, hard-driving, very honest man. I think he brings out the best of his employees.

MS: Did he ever tell you why he thought about bringing Ports O' Call here to San Pedro? Did he ever just tell what he –

PL: Well, when he discussed the beginning of it, he liked the area very much on the waterfront. He thought it would be a good place for a shopping center, and it was.

MS: Why did he give it up?

PL: Well, his lease was up. I think he still has the end of his lease at the Asian Village. I think that's still going on. But the port wanted to make some changes and –

MS: Do you know specifically what they were and what –

PL: Before I left, and I was negotiating with the port, I felt that they were going to take some of the buildings down, which they did. They're going to build a promenade, I believe, and make some changes.

MS: When did you leave Ports O' Call?

PL: I think I left in 2002.

MS: What was happening at Ports O' Call when you left? Was it still very prosperous and successful, or had it begun to change?



PL: It had begun to change.

MS: So, when I left – you have to say, when I left.

PL: When I left, it began to change. Some of the tenants started leaving and –

MS: What caused that?

PL: Well, I don't think – can I say it?

MS: Please. I mean, this is for history.

PL: Well, I think the port wasn't interested in it as a shopping center.

MS: Did it provide competition with the shops on 6th Street and 5th Street in the town?

PL: Oh, yes.

MS: Was that part of the problem too or –

PL: Yes. About a year or two later, yes, when they rebuilt 6th Street.

MS: So, who were the surviving tenants from the beginning? Any of them or –

PL: Oh, yes. There's quite a few.

MS: There are quite a few surviving tenants?

PL: Yes. Mexilatin.

MS: You have to say, there are very few.

PL: Well, there's a few.

MS: Quite a few literally.

PL: Yes. There's quite a few that are still there. Parkhurst Gallery is still there. Mexilatin is still there. The African Boutique Store is still there. The harbor cruises are still there. The helicopter is still there, and the others.

MS: So, then how has it changed? You're saying that some of the same tenants are there.

PL: No.

MS: How has it changed?

PL: There just aren't as many tenants as there were before. At one time, I had fifty tenants there. There aren't that many now.

MS: So, is it basically empty on the weekends or what were –

PL: It's not doing the business that it was doing before.

MS: So, why did you decide to leave?

PL: I wanted to retire, do some traveling, and –

MS: So, what do you think the future of Ports O' Call is going to be?

PL: I have no idea. I know it needs promotion.

MS: Have you seen what's going on in Long Beach now?

PL: Yes.

MS: They're doing the same kind of thing going on down there. They seem to be pretty successful at it. Is that what you think? Maybe the future is here too or is it –

PL: Well, if the City of San Pedro wants to get involved, or the port wants to get involved. I think the Port of L.A. has other interests.

MS: So, is there any particular day or event that you remember in your time at Ports O' Call most fondly? Something that happened there that you'll always remember?

PL: Well, Christmastime, we always had Santa Claus, and I publicized him a lot. We had other activities. I think around Halloween time, some of the merchants would dress up in costumes, and we'd play up to that.

MS: Do you think one of the problems is – you started telling me you left the office at 5:00 p.m. Tell me that again.

PL: Well, when I'd leave my office at 5:00 p.m., quite a few nights of the week, I would go to other shopping centers looking for specialty stores. I had a map of all the shopping centers all over Los Angeles down to San Diego. I visited them lots of times. Sometimes, I even got job offers [laughter]. I'd introduce myself at the places and got to know some of the tenants and got some of them to open a second store at Ports O' Call.

MS: Going back to the reason why it is not successful, what are some of the reasons why it's not successful as it was before?

PL: Because there aren't any unique –

MS: You said Ports O' Call is no longer successful.

PL: I think one of the reasons Ports O' Call is no longer successful is because it doesn't have the unique stores like it used to have. The Merchants Association isn't as large as it was when I was there. When I was there with the Merchants Association, I helped them publicize it and put on events. I don't think they have that cooperation now.

MS: Also, we forgot to say that Ports O' Call, when it started, was the only place of its kind.

PL: Yes.

MS: Tell me that.

PL: Ports O' Call – when it was built in the early 1967 and into the [19]70s – was the only specialty center of its kind. People enjoyed it and come down. One of the main attractions was the boat rides. You could go out for a boat ride and even have dinner cruises or get married on the ship, and that was unique. That was the first one in the whole area that had facilities like that.

MS: But now, there's more competing kinds of places so – and also, for many people in Los Angeles, it's a long drive to get here. So, you have to really be pretty special to get people to come here.

PL: Make the scenery special.

MS: Tell me more about that. What do you mean by that?

PL: Well, it's watching the cruise ships go by and the tankers. The helicopter rides are most enjoyable, especially at whale watching time. I enjoyed taking the helicopter rides with people I wanted to lease to. So, one thing that impressed the future tenants was looking out the windows from the helicopter and seeing the parking lot full of cars. That was a big event. That's what made them decide to lease the store there. But another thing was seeing the whales. Whale watching season was very popular back then and we publicized it. Seeing the whales was something else.

MS: We've been here in the weekend, and the parking lot is jammed. So, is the same number of people coming or is it –

PL: I don't think it's as busy as it was when I was there because I just drove through there again today because I wanted to see who's still there and who isn't. I always get kind of disappointed because that isn't the way I left it.

MS: What is your fondest memory of your years at Ports O' Call?

PL: One of the events, we had seals coming on the decks. I started feeding the seals. When

people would come with their children, they loved to watch the seals. A couple of seals got to be tamed. For a while, they were like pets, and it used to attract attention to it. In those days, it was the *San Pedro Pilot* – it was the newspaper. Every once in a while, they did articles on what's going on at Ports O' Call. I'd call them up and tell them, "Send your photographer down here and take a picture of nature."

MS: Did the seals get names after a while?

PL: I don't remember, but I think some of the children gave them names. Yes.

MS: You spent a long time of your life at Ports O' Call. What does Ports O' Call – what does it mean to you? The experience you had there, what does that mean to you?

PL: A lot of happy times.

MS: What Ports O' Call mean to me is?

PL: Ports O' Call meant to me – I loved my job. I might have worked long hours in seven days a week lots of times, but I loved it. Like Mr. Tallichet would tell you, I ran it like it was my own business, and I enjoyed it very much.

MS: When you came in on a typical morning, what kind of crises, or was it easy? I mean, what would be your typical day? Would you sort of sit back and watch the boats go by? What would it be like?

PL: No, I would –

MS: On a typical day?

PL: Typical day, go over the security report from the evening before with the security guard and see what had happened, and then have a meeting with my employees. Once a week, I would have a meeting with my porters who kept the village clean and everything. I wasn't easy to work for. Sometimes, I felt I was a little bit too hard on them, so I'd take them to lunch once a month. Then I'd want them to tell me, "What don't you like about me this past month? What are you complaining about with me? Let's have it out," and we would discuss everything. We'd all leave the luncheon as friends.

MS: Now, did you change in response to that, or did you go back to doing what they were complaining about [laughter]?

PL: No. We'd make some changes. We made some changes. I had some great employees, very nice employees.

MS: If there was a crisis, what would be a crisis? What would happen?

PL: Well, if some tenant wouldn't pay their rent, or their rent would start piling up, I'd have to

take them to small claims court or give them notice.

MS: Were there any accidents or anything that happened in Ports O' Call while you were there?

PL: One woman claimed she slipped and fell, but we worked it out. It was wet pavement or something. I remember something like that, but she didn't really hurt herself that bad.

MS: So, in the end, if you had to sum it up, what does Ports O' Call mean to you? What does it mean to you?

PL: It means –

MS: You have to say, Ports O' Call.

PL: Ports O' Call means it fulfilled my life. My husband passed away while I was working there. All the tenants and – we worked together. It was a good communication. Some great people had stores there, and still do. I always tried to help them. I'm going to say something now. The tenants – after I left – called me once in a while and told me their heartaches. Two tenants called me a few years ago and said, "I think we're going to have to move. Do you have any ideas where we could go, you know?" I said, "Well, I'll help you. Why do you want to leave?" She says, "We're not doing any business." I said, "Well, did you contact –" I forget the name of the head of the Harbor Department at the time. Beginning with an L – I forget his name.

MS: Larry Keller?

PL: Larry Keller. I said, "Call Mr. Keller." She said, "We did." She said, "His attitude was, if you're not making any money, leave." Then this one lady started to cry on the phone. I said, "Well, let me check it and I'll get back with you," but they eventually left. I didn't think that was the right attitude.

MS: But in your heart, did you love your job?

PL: Yes.

MS: Tell me about it. Why did you love it?

PL: Well, because I liked the promoting I was doing and the tenants. I had one gentleman who was an Indian. He dressed as an Indian all the time and walked around the village. I'd have music in the village on weekends, bands, and the petting zoo. I had a petting zoo there a lot in the parking lot. That was very entertaining. It was fun for me to see people having a good time and still shopping.

MS: That's a good ending. Anything else you wanted to tell us?

PL: Nothing I can think of now, but I miss it. I miss it.

MS: Why do you miss it?

PL: I miss all the activity that I was going – I was a workaholic [laughter] down there, but I miss the meetings, the Merchants Association meetings. I wanted them all to make money and still put out a good product. The restaurants were very good. Everybody seemed to get along good.

MS: You said you had a tenant dressed like an Indian. Any other tenants that sort of stood out in your mind or unusual?

PL: No. I think the Foster's Indian Store, and we had one Indian there. He was called Little Bird. He's since just moved to San Diego. I don't know if he's still alive. Big Bear, he was in a lot of movies. He'd come down and walk around in the village. The children would be able to have their picture taken with them. I had clowns in the village where the children would be able to have their picture taken with them too. There's a lot of activity. I was always coming up with some ideas to let people be entertained.

MS: What was the wildest idea that came up when you're thinking?

PL: Oh, I wish my boss was here. He'd probably tell you [laughter]. I don't remember. But we had something going almost every weekend that other centers didn't have.

MS: Good. Well, I think we've got it.

PL: Okay.

[end of transcript]