Port of Los Angeles Centennial Oral History Project
Stephanie Mardesich Oral History
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Interviewer: MS – Unknown
Transcriber: NCC

Male Speaker: Okay. Hard question first, please say your name and spell it.

Stephanie Mardesich: Stephanie, S-T-E-P-H-A-N-I-E, Milda, M-I-L-D-A, Mardesich, M-A-R-D-E-S-I-C-H.

MS: Stephanie, what year were you born, and where were you born?

SM: Do I have to say the year?

MS: Everyone's done it.

SM: I'd usually decline to state.

MS: Okay. Where were you born?

SM: San Pedro, California.

MS: San Pedro. You're the first person who said San Pedro too. That's good.

SM: In my family, we always say San Pedro. The analogy is when you were saying, La, J-O-L-L-A, La Jolla, San, J-O-S-E, San Jose, a little boy named P-E-D-R-O, Pedro.

MS: Your family goes way back in the history of San Pedro. Talk about the roots of your family. Your grandfather, where did they come from, and why did they come here, and what did they do? Starting on your father side.

SM: My grandfather, Joseph Michael Mardesich, Sr. came to America from Crotia, which was probably the Austro-Hungarian Empire at the time in 1903, as a young man, a boy literally, 14 years old. He'd completed his eight-grade education. His family was from the Isle of Vis, the biggest island of the Adriatic Coast, which was known in the days World War II, because Marshal Tito was hidden there. He, like so many immigrants at that time, was seeking a better more prosperous life. Although I do know on record that his family was well-healed as the expression goes.

MS: Talk about where you came from and why you came here.

SM: Joseph Mardesich came at the age of 14 after completing his eight-grade education to America via Ellis Island. His father sent him, I think because an aunt lived here in Cupertino, California. They were seeking a better life and greater prosperity, but they came from a good, strong family. They did do well in their fishing business in Vis in Komiza. Vis is the island off the Adriatic Coast that is the largest island. I personally, like in applying here, think it is such an amazing thing to consider that a 14-year-old boy with about $2.50 in his pocket, granted, but it probably made a lot more than, have the tenacity to leave home. He never went back to the old country because he took on this new world with gusto. He went to the Valley Cupertino area, which is near San Jose, worked with the family. As a matter of fact, we're related to the Mariani's, the dried fruit people. He continued his education in San Francisco at night school.

He worked in various laboring jobs. He did very well in school and was intending to go to Berkeley at that time. By the way, in between, he became a citizen in 1912, which I reckon if he was born in 1989 made him about 22, 23.

MS: Born 1889.

SM: 1889. Thank you.

MS: Start again.

SM: He was born in 1889 and became a citizen in 1912. So, I reckon he was about 22, 23. He was continuing to go to school and working and met his wife to be somewhere around that time. But an opportunity was presented to him to investigate what was going on in the San Pedro area, on Terminal Island in the fishing industry, which was inherit to him in his cultural background. So, he came to this area, somehow linked up with Martin Bogdanovich and a couple of other partners, and they founded the French Sardine Company.

MS: Let's go back. Who is Martin Bogdanovich? First of all, what was San Pedro like when he came here?

SM: From what I've read and seen in photographs, it was very much about shipping lumber –

MS: San Pedro was – go ahead.

SM: San Pedro at that time, around 1917, from what I have read, and when you look at the historical pictures and you see what the waterfront was like, it was the random lakes as they call it, shipping lumber. Mr. Huntington, I believe, had connected the train − I don't know if it's the southern pacific or which one – to the downtown and to Santa Monica. The Port of Los Angeles was created somewhere around that time. I have to get my facts straight. But I know San Pedro was incorporated as a city 10 years before the city of LA. It was later around 1929 that we joined up with them. Terminal Island was rather a man-made island, and Fish Harbor which is nestled there just seemed to be a natural place for the boats to come. The fishing industry is bourgeoning. At one point when things were thriving here up through World War II in the [19]50s, there were twenty-one to twenty-three owner operated working canneries. In 1917, and it's something I'd like to even research further. Because when you think what was going in Europe and the Russian revolution and so forth, it was very interesting that on the west coast of the United States, this huge industry was building. Wilbur Wood is a name you'll hear about, Van Camp, of course. But the (itzies?) or the Italian names, and I used to say to be a (wasp?) in San Pedro you had to be an Italian or a Slav. That's changed a lot over the decades.

MS: Let's go back. I think we're getting −

SM: Okay.

MS: Who was Martin Bogdanovich? What was his role in all this in relation to you?

SM: Martin Bogdanovich to my knowledge also hailed from the island of Vis. He was older than my grandfather, Joseph Mardesich. I don't know if they knew each other in the old country, but they became acquainted here. I've been told that if it weren't for my grandfather, there would not have been the French Sardine Company. He was a very tenacious and smart young man. In the incorporation papers, which I'm still trying to find at my late father's home, I have seen them this onion skin Sphinx headlined paper. Grandfather was called the secretary of the company, at that point. I believe Martin was the president. I've heard the name Markovich brought up. But I know that he was a fundamental partner. However, about two years after starting this company, he had the opportunity to go off on his own completely and be a sole proprietor. So, he sold out his interest in French Sardine to Mr. Bogdanovich and started the Franco Italian Packing Company. The Franco Italian name comes from the fact that the French and the Italians were very big customers of this particular sardine pack that they were known for. These are not the sardines that we think of as King Oscar, Norwegian, little skinny things. These were big filets that you find in Spain and you find in the Mediterranean. They were absolutely delicious and nutritious. My great grandfather apparently used to send something similar that was packed in Croatia over to my grandfather, kind of like little package from home as they would say. Those were packed in oil. Later on in the [19]50s, we'd packed them in a barbecue sauce that was very popular. Sardines were huge here and all the way up the coast to Monterey.

MS: So, talk about the company that he founded. How did it work? Did they have their own boats? How did they relate to the fishermen? What was the process that the company did to get the product out?

SM: The Franco Italian Packing Company like many canneries relied on the local fishermen who were mostly owner operators of their boats. We owned anywhere from three to six boats at one point, including one that was called the *Sea Boy*, which was our company logo that sank off the coast of Mexico in the early [19]50s on Christmas day. It was big news that day. By the way, StarKist came about in about 1953. StarKist was the French Sardine Company until then. They had a few boats. I can't really speak that well about that, nor Van Camp, nor Pan Pacific and some of the other companies. But the way it worked is they would buy the fish, you go through the canning process, which is the cleaning, gutting, baking it, cooking it first before it goes into the can. This is about albacore, for instance. Then it is packed in the can, goes into these huge buggies that hold hundreds of cans. It has to go through the retorting process, which kills any of the bacteria, so you don't end up with botulism and a recall off the grocery store shelves. What my father always said when he'd give these speeches and lectures, is that he was really good at the procurement. He knew how to get the best fish for the best price. He is a vice president of our company. Because dad, when my grandfather died in 1950, became the president of Franco Italian. The vice president was very good at the promotion and working with the brokers. Although, my father was integrally involved. He would go to canneries conventions in Chicago and New York several times a year. But procurement was really important. For example, Franco Italian was known as a private label packer mostly. Although we had our logo, the Sea Boy and we packed under it, we mostly packed for S.S. Pierce, A&P markets on the East Coast, and probably the Creme de la Cream was S&W Fine Foods. When you can pack for S&W, you don't go any higher in terms of a standard. You can also look at a can of tuna or any canned product and see the code. If you know how to read the code, you'll know who packed it. You might get a Del Monte can, for instance, for green beans, and you

could get the store brand and see it was packed by the same packer. Therefore, you could be prudent if you're an efficient economical shopper. There can be an edge though, if you get a can of S&W tuna and you'd be at Safeway market – which was then taken over by the Vons Company – you could see that it was the same kind of tuna perhaps. But S&W is still going to have that edge and be the finer quality. Dad told a story of how he was procuring tuna at one point. He knew there was a load coming in. He knew he could get a premium price from S&W, so he could therefore offer that greater margin to the boat captains. This is not to say that there wasn't loyalty among certain captains and boats to canneries. I was just speaking to a gentleman the other day, who fished mostly for StarKist, or someone we say mostly for Van Camp. Or my dad had a favorite skipper, (Mike Trauma?) who helped the astronaut. Those relationships and the rapport was important. But when it's a fisherman who's got to feed his family, of course, he wants the best price. But you are going to go to the person who's been the best to you first. That's where the loyalty comes about. Then you're going into the other aspect of marketing and sales, and it's the shelf space. Do you buy into the shelf space at Ralph's market or at S.S. Pierce? Or are they giving you a better space because you're giving them a better price? So, it's very fascinating and subtly sophisticated business that goes into marketing and sales.

MS: Let's go back to your grandfather. I want to learn more about him. Tell me as much as you know about him. What kind of man was he? How did he run the company? What were his skills? Then, how did your father get involved?

SM: My grandfather was a very dynamic man from everything I have heard about him. When you look at the photographs of this man, Joseph Mardesich, in his high school graduation class from San Francisco night school, he is in the middle of this group of very well-groomed young men and women, holding his diploma like a scepter. To me, it's indicative of how he was going out. He might not have matriculated further, but he became a captain of industry. He was truly a pioneer of our California fishing industry. He was also a great patriot. He believed in America and the United States and what it stood for. He was very loyal. He loved the country he came from. He was a founder of what was called the Yugoslav-American Club around 1926, that about a decade ago when all the tension and war erupted in that part of the world, changed its name to the Dalmatian American Club. He sold war bonds in the war in World War II. He educated his children in public schools and private school and totally supported education. He was very loyal and proud member of the Masonic Lodge Fraternal Order of the Masons, a founding member of our local Kiwanis Club here in San Pedro. He did something extraordinary in 1937 in terms of what could be called public art and had what's known as the victory arch at the San Pedro High School field put up. He found these two eagles that were being taken down from an old federal building. He decided he wanted to put up a monument that would inspire the students that would be a testimony to the American patriotism, and encourage athletic prowess, academic prowess. He had this beautiful arch constructed on the field that has the school motto wisdom, integrity, self-respect inscribed on it. Dad, in 1937, even worked with the stonemason after school putting in some of the mortar in. It stands to this day out there on the field. It's very beautiful. The graduates walked through it to get their diplomas. The football team runs through it before they go on the field. So, personally, what was instilled in me even though I never got to know my grandfather – I was a baby when he died – was this great sense of patriotism, tremendous tenacity, eagerness to make a contribution to the world of business, to the community. He would do things like go to the Special Food Fair in Chicago, and dad who was

in a boarding school, bought the biggest sausage on record in the world, and send it to the school, for instance. When dad was at Stanford, he'd drive up there with the cook from one of the boats. He'd feed the whole fraternity house. He had a lot of bravura and panache. He was very handsome. He married the woman he truly loved. You can see from the photographs of these two people, Joseph and Milda. I'm very proud to be named after my grandmother, my middle name, that they were absolutely in love.

MS: Let's go back. What did he contribute to the industry? What were his contributions? What was the contribution of the company that he founded?

SM: Well, to my knowledge, the contributions my grandfather made to the industry were shipping tuna in iced-box cars. Not only would we buy tuna and fish from our local captains from the boats, but tuna was vitally important to people in this country in their daily diet. It can be equated to a can of tuna to a pound of hamburger. Chunk Light might be you're not so high grade of ground meat. Albacore is going to be your ground sirloin. So, you need more product. If the tuna isn't coming in here, you buy from East Coast. Bluefin comes off the coast of Maine and Connecticut. So, he had it shipped here on iced-box cars. I have read about this. There are historical references in newspapers that are available. So, that was one innovation. I know that he sold like many canneries to the army in the military services during World War II. They gave them the best price break because, again, they were very patriotic. We needed to be feeding our soldiers and our seamen who are out on the front. My father, who was very scientific and had been an electrical engineering major at Stanford and really was going into another field but was brought into work in the company in the late [19]40s, was very innovative and had chemists working on developing fish male Flowers. We took all the residual, dark meat and skin and things like that. Dad created the Pet Tuna brand, which might still be out there today. I'd try it out on our basset hound. In actuality, a human being could live on this. I don't think it would be that appealing because it's kind of heavy, but it was something really tremendous. There wasn't any other particular tuna or byproduct being used for pet food at that time.

MS: Talk about your father. How did you get involved in the business and what was his accomplishment in the business?

SM: My father, Joseph Mardesich, Jr. – and in the tradition of the Europeans and many cultures, by the way, the first son is named after the grandfather, the father. That tradition came by way of my grandfather, Joseph Michael, and then his son, Joseph Michael, and my brother, Joseph Michael, III. My dad was groomed. He was the scion. He was born in 1921, just before grandfather has started the Franco Italian. He was down there from the time he could walk after he'd taken his swim across the channel. His nickname was Boy Sea, which is the reverse of our company logo, Sea Boy. He would work in the cannery on school holidays and the weekends. Dividing his time between going to San Francisco to my maternal great grandparents, gutting the fish, going out with the boat sometimes. He made a trip to the archipelago, I know in his youth. So, you learn the business from the nets up, so to speak. That's the tradition also in this community of San Pedro. Our friends at Anchor Liquors, the Papadakis', all the kids would work in the family business. The Di Carlos, they'd work in the bakery. This was a community that was founded on a lot of family-oriented businesses, that all fed each other one way or another. Then there was the shipping business, which is another story. So, dad learned it all the

way through. But my grandfather also was forward thinking. My father, who was only 17 and a half years old when he completed his high school education, and he, in all modesty was an extremely outstanding student, a great athlete. He has many medals. We couldn't even count them. He is a very affable, nice guy. Everybody liked him. He was exceptionally good looking. Grandfather had a lot of contacts on the east coast from going to conventions and through various business efforts. They suggested it would be a good thing for my father to go to an Eastern prep school to polish off his education, and because he was so young to go off to college or university. So, he was sent to the Lawrenceville School near Princeton, New Jersey, which is very unusual in its time. You had to take a five-day train trip, I think. He did a whole East Coast tour of schools with my grandmother preceding this. He chose Lawrenceville because they'd take him mid-year. It did indeed enhance his life on every level. He made lifetime friendships, people he saw over the decades in business. He came back to the west. He wanted to go to the Harvard of the West Stanford and he did. Then World War II came along, interrupting his education for a while he was in the officer candidate school. He went into the 90-day wonder, to Cal Tech, then to Norfolk and then to Annapolis. He had an extraordinary experience. I don't think could happen today where he actually went to Stanford and got his degree later there but became an ensign in 1944. Had a commission to the South Pacific, although we could have stayed in Washington for a desk job and married the woman he loved. He went to the South Pacific on the USS Cabot, Lieutenant J.G., came back after completing his degree at Stanford. He wanted to work in his chosen field, which is the electrical engineering and he was at Bendix and – their names are escaping me.

MS: It's okay. We want to get back to the Harvard.

SM: The way dad told it, around that time, 1948, [19]49, Franco, like any independent company, sometimes had their own financial issues to deal with. To avoid miniature receivership, creditors came to him and said, "Would you consider coming in working with your dad at the business? He needs some help." My grandfather, Joseph, Sr. was barely 60 then. He actually died in 1951 or around [19]63, I believe. So, dad, who of course, knew the business and as he just told me last December – which was just a few weeks before he passed away – they were grooming him. He could not refuse that offer. He loved his father. He loved the business. He was a natural. He went to work in a managerial position. But he was still in the offices. The offices were above the plant at that point right there at Fish Harbor, and just work side by side with his dad. There was the younger brother of my grandfather, Andrew Mardesich, who was a plant manager at the time. We have this expression of stubborn Slavs. Again, we can't really say Slavs these days, we have to say Croatian. My grandfather would fire his younger brother who he had brought over here and sponsor because he got annoyed with him. My dad would turn around and hire him back and say, "Dad, Uncle Andrew has got a wife and two kids to feed. Relax. He's okay. I'll talk to him. We'll straighten him out." So, there was a real propinquity in that sense. My grandmother Milda, by the way, worked with my grandfather at the accounting for the company. Dad also said he used to go to Ralph's markets to do tuna days tastings. Just like we see today, with the little ladies out there giving coupons and tasting a product. There was Milda Mardesich out there with her cute little boy sampling tuna so that they would buy our pack instead of the competition.

MS: Let's talk about your personal experiences growing up in a fish packing business. What are

your earliest memories as a girl?

SM: Growing up in San Pedro, one of our fondest memories – and there's a mixed emotion about it. Because as my father always said, "The smell of tuna in the air was the smell of money." The little ladies, known as the nurses, in their little white uniforms would be on the bus coming back from the island during the days, you'd have to kind of hold your nose. I didn't mind it that much. My little sister, Debbie, couldn't stand it. To this day, she can't eat a tuna sandwich and it put her through private school, shall we say. But I kind of loved it. We would go with dad on the islander on weekends, for instance. We take the ferry boat over, which was really a treat being out on the water. You drove your car up the ramp and we'd get out and we'd go out in the front and look at the seagulls. I've always adored the harbor landscape. I have said time and again, I have to be near water. When I went away to school, it was Boston, a river. I was in love with New Orleans, near a river. I've lived in England, the Thames. I know there's a way out and it's by swimming or by boat. So, that's very important to me personally. I know it comes from this culture that we have here in Southern California and here at the Port of Los Angeles, San Pedro by the sea. Dad would say to Debbie, "Honey, it's perfume." She'll say, "Well, it's not my favorite brand." But we keep going. We play secretary while he was taking care of some extra business on a Saturday. I'm always fond of the typewriters, gathering paper clips. I had the privilege of going once a semester, around second and third grade, to work with his secretary. So, I always say my father invented Take Your Daughter to Work Day. I would dress up in my Sunday school look. Not the birthday party look, but a little more prim and proper. I go to work with Joyce. Joyce Baker was his secretary. This beautiful blonde, who named her daughter Stephanie after me. She'd give me a steno pad. She'd take dictation, and I would take dictation. At lunchtime, the switchboard operator would get a break, and we'd go down and take over. I plug in all the phones, and I kind of got that. We'd have lunch in the special little kitchen area. Then dad would take me afterwards, after he came back from lunch, down to the plant. We would walk through the line. All the workers adored him because he was just so pleasant and, again, so handsome. There he was with his little daughter in her cute little dress. He's grabbing a piece of that fish loin as it's just come off being baked and giving me a taste. I have to admit, that's why Chicken of the Sea chose the right name, because it was like chicken. Then we'd go down by the boats. We'd greet the captains. They'd invite us aboard and give us more to eat. It's a very food-oriented society around here as well. All the smells and all the tastes are so fundamental to growing up in this community, particularly the Croatian and Italian tastes. Of course, we have the Greeks and the Portuguese and the Japanese. But that really did dominate our culture in the [19]50s, [19]60s, [19]70s. We had the Fisherman's Fiesta, which was a fabulous event. Around the time the albacore season started in the early fall, the boats would gather. They put up all the flags and decorate. We had a fiesta queen. It was even televised. Dad was chairman one year. There would be a parade of boats. Then there would be the stands. We you could get more food or play games. It was really festive and fun. That has never been recreated quite the same way. By the way, the Fisherman's Fiesta was a religious ceremony too. It was the blessing of the fleet so that they would make a good catch. When you see our beautiful church, Mary Star of the Sea, and at the top of the spire, there is Mary, the golden icon, out looking to the southeast out to sea, embracing the harbor, always blessing them. It still gives me goosebumps even though my grandfather left the Catholic Church and became a Presbyterian curiously enough. I wasn't raised a Catholic, were very ecumenical though.

MS: You were here when Ports O' Call was created. Tell me about that.

SM: We loved going to Ports O' Call when it was first built, around 1959. It started as a single restaurant with a Polynesian theme, which was very popular in those days with trader Vic's and Don the Beachcombers and that kind of exotic quality. There was literally a crow's nest in the middle of the restaurant. We would often go there with our parents on a late afternoon and have Virgin Mai Tais and maybe even sit there doing some homework, which none of my friends were doing, by the way. But we are a sophisticated family. The idea of Ports O' Call as I've said started with the restaurant. But someone said, "Let's add on shops. Let's build a little village around it. Let's make an interesting tourist attraction." Indeed, it was with very remarkable exceptional shops. There was Hudson Bay Company with beautiful glass and gift items, Hickory Farms, just an exclusive candle shop, a needlepoint shop, a winery, I think it was San Antonio winery, ice cream parlor. The Sierra Madre Ferry was brought down from Seattle or that area, it used to be between the islands. There was an arcade for the kids to enjoy. Up at the top, the fish and chips stand, and they serve burgers too, and the ice cream parlor was such a treat. Other late spring and summer evening, we would often go there and get the fish and chips and throw French fries to the seagulls who'd catch them midair. It was really fun and very special, and a draw for all of Southern California. Time and again, you still hear people remembering coming to this area as an afternoon or evening treat to get away from the inland areas. It appealed to all age groups, all socioeconomic groups. Of course, we had Marineland on the coast. There were tour buses that came here. Those stops that they would make would be Ports O' Call and Marineland. I just had the enjoyable experience recently of speaking to one of the early harbor commissioners, Lloyd Menveg, who I believe is a part of this wonderful history. Mr. Menveg was a crony of my dad's. They were masons and shriners. Dad was very involved in the community and would often go to lunch with him on the harbor sea plane over in Catalina, because they had to make some kind of inspection. Lloyd Menveg was saying how he remembered when he would travel around the world, people would say, "Where are you from?" He'd say, "Well, Wilmington – he was an old Wilmington family – in San Pedro. I'm a harbor Commissioner." They'd say, "San Pedro. Oh, my God, you have been to Ports O' Call? Do you know Ports O' Call?" He said, "It was so wonderful." He said, "Do you know what was there before? It was just fishing nets. There was [inaudible]. It was nothing." So, it was the two first harbor tourist development that, of course, we hope is going to be here in perpetuity, along with our beautiful promenade that's been in construction in the last couple of years. We do have this beautiful, natural seaside urban landscape that is so interesting. It's like a motion picture unto itself just to be down there. I often go to the end of the harbor, the end of the channel by warehouse number one, just past the fish markets at 22nd Street and all the existing oil drums, whatever they are. Get a cup of coffee and a homemade donut from (Kenny's?), take the paper. 7:00 a.m., I can be out there with the seagulls watching little boats coming in. It's exactly across from where the coast guard station is. I love that scene. I never get tired of it. It's probably the most meditative moment I have had in my fairly busy life.

MS: Talk about Beacon Street. What do you remember about that? How that relate to your family?

SM: Beacon Street in the downtown was notorious in its own way. A kind of Barbary Coast image comes to mind. Although as a little girl, to me, it was rather cozy, because my

grandfather, my mother's father, Louis Shear, had his barber shop on Beacon Street. He had several shops. He prospered when he came here from Lithuania, which is to say Russia, but now that that's all changed. That's where he actually was from. He was a landowner, but he loved being a barber. He just had a natural talent for it. He was very good with people. So, we would go and visit him. I remember sitting in the chair. I can still get that sensation wen I walk into a beauty salon or even a barber shop, that olfactory thing kicks in. The smell of the lanolin or something, the shampoo, hair products. That spiral, the red and white thing, whatever they call it, the barber's sign which was universal. Nearby was the Coney Island Hotdog Place [inaudible]. It was (Mr. Pappas or Mr. Panosas?). It's usually Chris or Pete. The Coney Island dogs were fantastic. It was a delicious hot dog smothered in onions and chili. My mother particularly likes those. It was a real treat for us because we weren't living in a fast-food society in those days and didn't mind it. I mean, we had great food, as I've already said. I remember also around the corner from my grandfather, Tony's Cafe. Tony is, of course, the renowned and esteemed Ante, the late Ante Perkov. That little cafe was a lunchroom kind of thing with maybe eight to twelve stools at a counter with a steam table. Tony was bigger than life. We only really knew him as Tony then even though Ante is the translation. As a little girl looking up, I still remember this giant man all dressed in white and this carnation is there and seeing everyone from the bumps on the street – yes, there were some bumps – to the judges and the lawyers sitting there all together. It was a very egalitarian kind of setting. If someone couldn't afford to eat, he fed them. Next door to him was (Egos?). That was Tony, a different Tony, who had chickens roasting in the window. It had a very wonderful authentic feel that we missed to this day because Beacon Street, of course, was basically torn down. What we have left of the old town is now in 6th and 7th Street. On the corner of Harbor and 6th Street, Harbor was Front Street originally, was (Hirschman's?) drugstore. That was our family drugstore. There weren't the chains in those days. You went to Coover's, another sole proprietor, or you went to Seaside Pharmacy, you went to (Hirschman's?). Again, you would see everybody traipsing in and out of there from the men in suits to the fellows looking for a handout, or the sailors who are off the ships coming in and being a little scruffy and smelling like the sea. But we embrace that, and it was fun. We would just play and beg our mother for candy. He even sold records at Hirschman's drug store. It's kind of unusual. There were places that I wasn't allowed, of course to go into because I was a child, but Slim Harrison's Bank Cafe, Shanghai Red's, colorful bar. The stories of Shanghai reds are legendary. They've been preserved, thankfully, by people writing about it or a painter like Tom Phillips, who did a wonderful series of paintings that became lithographs that preserved the old Beacon Street with what I have dubbed his retro realism feel.

MS: Let's talk about Shanghai Red. Who was Shanghai Red? What was the place?

SM: Red Eisenberg who owns Shanghai Red's, I don't know that much about personally. His daughter, Charlene, worked at the drugstore, the Hirschman's drugstore. That was the place where we always went for our pharmaceutical and other needs. The stories about Shanghai Red are things like he would take the wallet of the sailors who would come in, and he'd tucked it away safely. It ensured he get his bill paid, if they had a little too much to drink. It also was a safety factor for them, so no one could roll them as the expression goes. There's a famous photo that you see at the doorway of Shanghai Red's where he's in the background, and there's like a body at the front. It's ambiguous whether the person's dead or alive, whether he was being carted

out because they had too much to drink. These stories get embellished over the years, but I've asked Charlene about it. Her father was a very generous and caring man. Where the Shanghai part came in, I honestly can't speak to it.

MS: They actually had a bar in Shanghai. So, let's go back to your own personal memories of Beacon Street and the places on Beacon Street and other places. Talk about some of the other places, whether it's Beacon Street or 6th or whatever, what were your favorite places in the sea when you're growing up?

SM: The downtown in San Pedro had lovely shops, men's haberdashery, ladies clothes stores, particularly in 6th Street. 6th Street factored very importantly, because it was 6th Street heading east and west that took you to the ferry to get to the island. The island provided jobs, whether it was the canneries, the stores that were there, the gas stations, the post office. There were 10,000 people probably at least that worked there. So, it was a vital thoroughfare and it looked really good. There was Lillian's. There was Hazel Taylor. There was the town shop. The town shop was owned by the parents of the famous screenwriter Robert Towne, who wrote Chinatown, who indeed called his own production company San Pedro Productions. The arcade building where is located is this gorgeous setting with a fountain in the middle of it that had shops in the front, doctor's offices on the second floor, and a penthouse at the top. The Warner Grand Theater was at the top of 6th Street near Pacific Avenue. The Warner Grand Theater was one of the three only Warner Brothers Theaters built in all of the Metropolitan Los Angeles area. There was Huntington Park, Beverly Hills, and San Pedro. It was dedicated by Jack Warner in 1931, who said to the people standing by, "You will be entering the palace of your dreams." Indeed, it was and still is because it's thankfully been preserved. The City of Los Angeles bought it and it is a historical monument. There's a foundation that supports it and it is beautiful. You can go there for concerts. You can go there for films. We hold the annual LA Harbor International Film Festival there.

MS: Growing up, where were your hangouts in town? Where did you like to go to when you were a little older and on your own? What were the hangouts for a young girl like yourself?

SM: When I was growing up, one of my earliest memories was going downtown with my grandmother, my mother's mother, Anne Shear, who was very well-known in town because she was a very respected lady of the community, worked for good causes. There was always a bake sale or a pancake breakfast or something, raising money to help kids, and she was selling tickets. We nicknamed her the streetwalker of sorts, selling tickets to everybody in town. We go on the bus, and we would call in at some of her tenants at one of her apartment building properties. I was dressed up again and that Sunday best because we'd be going to lunch. We'd stop into Lillian's. We'd stop in the Bank of America. We'd walk. You could actually walk this town very well once you got downtown. We go shopping a little bit. Later, with my girlfriends, there was a bowling alley in town. It was the former DiCarlo's Bakery. Sometimes we would go there and play. We would go to the Warner Theater, although we were forbidden by my mother at least to ever go downstairs into the restrooms. She was concerned for our safety. We didn't have a chaperone per se when you're in your early teens. We had five movie theaters by the way, at least, The Strand, The Globe, The Warner's, The Barton Hill, fifth one escapes me. But I still remember going to The Strand, which was a little further to the south on Pacific near Ramona

Bakery, and seeing A Hard Day's Night, probably five times. We just kept going back to see it because we're all in love with the Beatles.

MS: Let's talk about some of the families. You mentioned Perkov, Ante Perkov, Trani's, can you tell me anything about them?

SM: There were many notable families when I was growing up, and I'm proud to say that we were among them. We were what are known as the pillars of the community. Our dad, very esteemed in business and on the session of the Presbyterian Church, helped build the church on the YMCA Board of Managers. You would find names like Mardesich, like Trani, like Philando. Ante Perkov was very involved with the Lions Club. If you needed food donated for a cause, he was always there for the boys. It was just the boys club then. Now, it's the boys and girls club. We knew these people socially, we knew them from church or philanthropically. My mother was also in another echelon. I don't mean to sound lofty, but she was the wife of the president of a company. He was in Rotary. At that time, Rotary was only men and there could only be one representative from any segment of the business community. So, he was the only fish canner at that point. There was only going to be one lawyer and one doctor. It's now expanded. As a Rotarian, when he would travel country around the world, he would always go to any meeting he could and represent the harbor community. So, that was something very significant. There was Rotary Aunts, at that point, my mother was in, and the Assistance League and we were very much involved with that. I was a charter member of the Assist teams. Speaking to that, that's where I and my friends learned what service meant and giving back to the community. We appreciated being raised with a very privileged background and coming from more humble beginnings. My grandparents were immigrants, but they worked hard. They accomplished a lot. They saved their money. They invested. They gave us a lot. I have that instilled in me and I keep trying to give back in my own humble way.

MS: What about the Elks Club?

SM: The Elks Club originally was in the downtown. I believe it was on 7th Street near where Anchor Liquors was, and the original Trani's Majestic Cafe. Around the time Beacon Street was going through its change and the buildings were scuttled. Some of that I believe has to do with the earthquakes concerns in the area and subsequently, retrofitting came in, maybe they could have been saved. The Elk's bought a piece of property in upper South Shores, which was primarily a residential area. Upper South Shores was developed in the early [19]60s. It was just field. This whole peninsula was about 72,000 acres of cattle fields that goes back to the Sepulveda and the Dominguez and the original Spanish land grants. They are growing cattle from five points from the Bixby Ranch. San Pedro stopped essentially at Dodson Avenue where it hits Western at this point. But as happens, the population increases, people who are in the real estate field build homes and develop property. How the Elks got that piece of property – which I'm sure people try to buy to this day – is amazing. Because it has what's probably the most spectacular view of the harbor in the whole basin you can imagine. The Elks are a fraternal organization. They're different than the Masons. They have their ritual and their order, but they are exclusive on a different level. They have a bar. They took these stained-glass windows from the original Elk's, which are very beautiful and installed them in the new bar, which overlooks the harbor. They allow many community groups and individuals to host functions there. So, you

can use their Elk's Hall, which is huge and accommodates several hundred people for private events, be it a wedding, christening, unfortunately, too many wakes, we go to there, class reunions. They have excellent pricing. The members really benefit from that and love it. There's a huge swimming pool.

MS: If you had to name the five most important institutions in San Pedro, what are the five most important institutions at San Pedro?

SM: The most important institutions in San Pedro from my knowledge or observation are the YMCA. The YMCA started around 1911 on Beacon Street. The building's still there. It's used for another purpose now. Many people who lived there came and went because you could get a very affordable room. Of course, it was always the young men, whether it was in war time. One of our educators, (Lenny Nelms?) lived there while he went to school. He was telling me that story not long ago. My father learned to swim there, officially. All the boys would go to camps. They still are very prominent and important in the community. I would say, also the many churches, Mary Star, Holy Trinity, the First Presbyterian Church, there's also a synagogue. We are the League of Nations in this town, if not the United Nations. We serve everyone in that sense. The Assistance League, I believe, is vitally important. It has medical clinic that helps children, medical and dental clinic. The Homer Toberman Settlement House serves many disadvantaged people.

MS: Dalmatian American Club.

SM: Yes. The Dalmatian American Club, the Croatian Club, the Italian American Club, but those are more esoteric. Their facilities are available for others, but they are more ethnically oriented. The community can use their buildings, but they have different agendas. The LA Maritime Museum, which is now at least 25 years old that took over the old ferry building, I think, is our most important museum in the community. Recently, in the year 2006, they opened a permanent and vitally important exhibition called Caught, Canned, and Eaten, the story of San Pedro's fishing and canning industry that is telling the story and will continue to tell it in perpetuity, and it will build and it will grow. We have to commend the director and curator, Marifrances Trivelli, for making that happen. Because my father and I met with the former director 15 years ago about this project trying to spur it on, and it took her coming here from Mystic Connecticut to do it.

MS: As a final kind of comment on San Pedro, what makes this place special for you personally? Why should people know about this place, care about this place? What should they appreciate about this place?

SM: San Pedro or San Pedro Bay Area – as I sometimes call it, and we all know the concept of the small town represented by Andy Griffith and that great show he did in Mayberry – where people knew each other. They know their name. When you go to the post office, they recognize you, when you go to the grocery store. We still have that kind of small town feel here, which is what appeals to people and why new people want to come and live here. If we don't open up or embrace a new generation, we can't grow and prosper. We need to have a sustainable growing business community. We have lost the fishing industry. We have lost the shipping industry.

Our industry now is container shipping. It's hugely important. I recognize that. I have to say, I wonder if it's going to explode one of these days, how big can we keep getting, and will it implode, and is there a greed factor working? I don't know. We all need to make a living. We need to help each other and support each other. That to me is what San Pedro represents. It's still happening and it has been happening since before I was born. I hope will continue long after. We also must retain our sense of history if we are going to keep saying we have a historic downtown. We have a historic waterfront. We have to preserve buildings. We have to perpetuate them, just like we have Mount Vernon, the home of our first President George Washington. We can't keep tearing things down.

MS: Good. Terrific.

SM: That's my platitude.

[end of transcript]