

Port of Los Angeles Centennial Oral History Project  
Joe Marino Oral History  
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Male Speaker: Okay. Hard question first, please say your name and spell it.

Joe Marino: My name is Joseph Nick Marino. They all call me Joe Marino. My last name is spelled M-A-R-I-N-O.

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

JM: I was born in 1927, October the 25th, in Rockford, Illinois. That was my hometown.

MS: So, Rockford's a long way from San Pedro. Tell us the story of when and how and why you first came to San Pedro.

JM: Well, I had no intention. I don't think my family had any intention of moving to San Pedro, California. It just so happened that there was a gentleman that was here in San Pedro by the name of John LaPenta. John was a boyhood friend of my dad's back in Rockford. Therefore, they had gone ahead and come together while John LaPenta was visiting his sister. She began to relate to him, there's someone here that grew up with you as a young boy in Sicily, Italy. I'd like to have you meet him because it would be a great reunion. So, John LaPenta came over and met my dad. They hugged. They were so happy. All of a sudden, John LaPenta says, "I'm here visiting my sister, but I want to present something to you." He says, "Why don't you move out to San Pedro, California?" My dad had not heard anything at all about San Pedro, California. So, they began to chat. This was in June of that particular year of 1941. In August, we pulled stakes and the whole family came out to San Pedro. That was all due to the fact that John LaPenta, his boyhood friend, talked him into coming out this way. I think that's the best decision my dad ever made.

MS: Tell us about your dad and your family. Where did they come from? Who were they and what – some background about that.

JM: Yes. My dad was named (Baldessari?) Marino. He was born and raised in a place called Mazara del Vallo, which is a little small fishing port town in Sicily. My mother was from a much smaller place, which was called Petrosino, and her last name was Putaggio. This was my father's second marriage. From that first marriage, they had two sons. From the second marriage, he also had two sons. My brother, Tony, is two years older than I am. At the same time, my dad came over in 1922 with my mom. From then on, they were in Rockford until 1941.

MS: What were they doing? What was he doing in Rockford?

JM: Dad was a laborer. My father was illiterate. He never had a day of education. He was just what they call a pick and shovel man that just went in and just did a lot of hard work and worked like a bull. Very, very strong personality and a very strong individual physically, even though he was about my size, about 5 feet tall, 5-foot-1. Dad never had many opportunities to get an education. The most important thing, of course, was providing for a family, which he then had. So, he worked hard at what he did. There were things about him that he brought with him as far as his own determination, his own commitment to family. He was 45 years old when he had me. So, there was not that strong of a father-son relationship. Once in a while, he'd take me to a

softball game or something like that, but very, very seldom. Most of the time, we had to do for ourselves, my brother and I. But dad was that way. Mom was a homemaker, strictly a homemaker. That's what my dad wanted. Raise the children. That's more important than going out and working. Oh, she tried her stint at the canneries here on Terminal Island when she first came out here to see if she would go ahead and have him allow her to do so. So, she went over there and worked for about a week. Then she just kind of gave up. Because he just didn't appreciate the fact of her going off and not tending to the home and the kids. So, that was it really.

MS: Now, what, if anything, did your father or you know of this place, San Pedro, when you were in Illinois? Did you know anything about it?

JM: Well, we didn't know anything about it except that Mr. LaPenta kept telling my dad, "It's similar to the place where we came from, where we were as young boys." Mazara del Vallo is a fishing town. He says, "The people in San Pedro are fishermen." So, he said, "It's just going to be like moving from Mazara to Mazara if you want to come out this way." So, my dad was kind of excited about it. Mom was, I don't know, sort of lukewarm on the whole idea. She didn't like leaving friends behind in Rockford. But being that we had no relatives in the United States and just basically friends, she consented and said – well, I don't say she consented. I think she wasn't given a choice. My dad made the decision. He said, "We're going." So, we hopped into a 1936 Ford and all of us came out to San Pedro. We took whatever belongings we could take. We had to leave so much behind. That was what my mother was feeling a lot of pain about. Because she left a lot of her treasures in a China cabinet and other things as far as pieces of furniture. She just hated to just give it all away. But it was one of the decisions that had to be made. It was a hard decision. At the same time, it was a quick one. I mean, you talk about somebody coming out and visit you in June, and all of a sudden, you're off and running in August. So, that's the way it was.

MS: Must have been an adventure driving across the country. What do you remember about that trip?

JM: Very hot, yes, driving across the country in a 1936 Ford. We took Route 66. Everyone instructed my dad – although he couldn't read or anything. They more or less instructed my brother, Tony, who at the time was 15 years old and gave Tony all the instructions on how to proceed on Route 66. So, we went through. It was a very hot summer as usual. July and August are usually very hot months. So, we went through Oklahoma and Texas and Arizona. Had a slight accident in Arizona where my dad had not been driving very long. He just quickly got a license and quickly learned how to drive. By golly, we were a little bit uneasy as we were traveling across that desert, I should say, the arid area. At the same time, we were thrilled when we came into San Bernardino County because my mother and dad had talked to me about, "You're going to see a lot of oranges." All of us were looking forward to seeing oranges. We never had seen an orange tree back in Rockford. So, when we saw this orange tree and all the groves that were there, we were just amazed. It was really something. Then we pulled into San Pedro. We were given directions to go up to Sepulveda. We went up Sepulveda off of Gaffey. We went up about five, six blocks, and there was the LaPenta house. We were excited when we had a chance to see the entire family, a husband and a wife, John and Rosa LaPenta, along with

seven children. It was an amazing, amazing family. If it wasn't for them, I mean, we really would not have been able to go ahead and be here in this particular community.

MS: Now, when you arrived, was it like the old country? When you first came to San Pedro, what were your first impressions of the place as a 9-year-old kid coming into town?

JM: I was not so much impressed with the size of San Pedro. I was more impressed because we had heard so much about an ocean, and we had never seen an ocean. My brother Tony and I were just so excited. Because we saw the river, Rock River in Rockford, Illinois. We knew the river. But we had all heard about, oh, an ocean. My goodness, I said, "This will be the first experience for us." When we got here and we saw that ocean, I was just in awe. My brother, Tony, said, "Look, Joe, you just can't believe it. Look, it's an ocean." Then we saw some fishing boats going out there, facing toward Catalina Island and everything. So, it was just an amazing sight for us. The hills, of course, also was another part of the San Pedro Hills that caught our attention. Because the LaPentas lived right near the foothills of the hills of Palos Verdes. So, that was another impressive sight for us. But the neighborhoods were just neighborhoods, similar to what we were experiencing in Rockford. So, that itself was not that much different. Yes.

MS: What about the port, though, to see all those ships coming in and all that? That must have been interesting.

JM: Well, yes. At that time, of course, there weren't as many ships as we know them to be, containers and things like that. Because there was no such thing at that time. But there were lumber schooners, a lot of lumber schooners. Then, of course, an immense fishing fleet. We're talking somewhere in the neighborhood of about three hundred fishing boats. But the lumber schooners were frequenting the area quite a bit, coming back and forth. So, to see those big ships, it was really a sight for sore eyes for us to see big ships.

MS: Describe them. What was the lumber schooner?

JM: The lumber schooners were quite long. They carried all that lumber on deck, a lot of it in the hull itself. It was impressive to see those lumber schooners coming in and out of town. Then at the same time, we did see quite a few ships too, freighters and things of that type. So, it was a new experience for us. The ferry boat was another one. The little, small ferry boats, the H-10 water taxi, taking people from San Pedro over to Terminal Island. Later on, they built, of course, the *Islander*, which was a ferry boat that carried automobiles as well as people. That was going from San Pedro to Terminal Island. So, that was all impressive to us. Now, you see, we were here basically about four months before the war broke out. Then when the war broke out, all things happened as far as growth was concerned.

MS: Now, what do you remember of Pearl Harbor? Do you remember the announcement of it?

JM: I remember the announcement. I was down by Front Street. I was shining shoes and selling papers. We heard about the war breaking out like that. People started shouting in the streets and saying, "There's been an attack on Pearl Harbor." Of course, I didn't even know

where Pearl Harbor was. I started asking questions, "Where's Pearl Harbor?" They began to explain to me where it was. It just seems like there was a lot of anxieties going on. People were just amazed that something like this would happen. So, at that time, I was quizzical. I said, "Gee, tell me more. Tell me more." So, people began to relate to it. But most of the people I talked to on the streets, they didn't know about Pearl Harbor. They were in awe about the whole experience itself.

MS: There had been a kind of a military Pacific fleet was now here and all that. Did you see any signs of the military ships and things at the port?

JM: Oh, yes, we did see some ships. There were always some ships in the port because San Pedro was a Navy town. It was a Navy town as well as an Army town with Fort MacArthur. But the Navy part was a very strong exposure to San Pedro. Also, the Coast Guard base that was over on Terminal Island was certainly available for us to view and to experience the ships in port. So, it was all one kind of a situation that alarmed us in a sense, and at the same time, caused us to question as to why. Also caused us to find out, where is this place that they're talking about that was attacked by the Japanese? So, it was quite a time for us all. At that time, I was 14 years old. So, it was something new to me and to my brother as well.

MS: Now, once you got here and your family settled in, what kind of work did your father do? Where did he work and what did he do?

JM: Well, the first thing my dad did, of course, when he first settled in San Pedro, when we got here in August, I was able to show him where there was a foundry. Because I used to ride the red car to Long Beach to shine shoes and sell papers in Long Beach. Because there were a lot of sailors in Long Beach, more so than there were in San Pedro. This was before Pearl Harbor. So, I said to my dad – because he had worked in a foundry back in Rockford. I said, "Dad, there's a foundry." My dad said, "Where is it?" I said, "It's on the way to Long Beach." So, we went ahead and got on the red car. We went along, heading toward Long Beach. Just before we got to Long Beach, there was a sign up there. It said, Long Beach Foundry. So, my dad's first job was working in a foundry, which he knew quite well what to do. Then when the war broke out, and then we began to go ahead and have these shipyards move into action to build Liberty Ships. Then my dad started working over at Cal Ship, which was, I believe at that time, the largest shipyard that we had on the island. So, he worked at Cal Ship for quite a while.

MS: Tell me more about Cal Ship. What was it? What did it look like? What kind of place was it?

JM: Cal Ship was a very huge shipyard. I just was amazed by the different ways that they had, where they would go ahead and construct a ship. When someone tells me that they launched a Liberty ship – every single day, they launched one. That's hard to fathom. I just couldn't think of it. I said, "My goodness, one a day?" They said, "Yes. That's what they were doing." Now, we had several shipyards in San Pedro and also on the island. On the island, we had Bethlehem. We had Cal Ship. Then over here on the mainland, we had Consolidated. We had Western Pipe and Steel. We also had Standard Ship Building. So, all of them were in action. They all came into action shortly after the war broke out in the early part of 1942. So, there was a lot of activity

going on.

MS: Well, describe that. I mean, they were working day and night, weren't they, on these boats?

JM: Oh, yes. Absolutely. In fact, I was able to obtain a job when I was 16. I worked at one of the shipyards which was down near Channel Street, which was called, at that time, Los Angeles Ship Building. It later became Todd Shipyard. So, I worked there for a whole summer working in the, shall we say, the crew that would put ballast at the bottom of these new ships that were being constructed. It was a dirty job. It was a difficult job. But there were small little holes at the bottom of the ships where they needed some small people to crawl into those holes and then to pass the ballast over to one another. So, there were about five of us that worked as a crew. We would be passing – and we're all short. We're all about 5 feet tall, 5'5" maybe. We could slick ourselves right into that little hole and then back in there and just keep passing the ballast. That's the way they used to load the ballast onto the ships. It was quite interesting.

MS: For people who don't know, what is a ballast? What were you loading?

JM: A ballast is a piece of steel that's been molded into a long – I would say probably, it was about 20 inches long, probably about 6 inches thick on each side. It would stack into the bottom of the ship. Then we'd stack them, one on top of another, to load this ballast. That's what it was. They were iron ingots.

MS: Let's go back again. You arrive here in August. You're a young kid. You start exploring your new hometown. Describe what you were seeing and doing. Did you have to get a job? What was those first weeks, months that you were in San Pedro?

JM: Well, the first thing I did when I came into town was the fact that I had to assist the family. It was important for my brother and I to do something. We were both newsboys back in Rockford. So, that's one thing we knew how to do. We knew how to sell papers. So, we quickly obtained a person that would be able to help us and sign us up. So, we did go ahead and start selling the paper on the street corners. That was very important to us. We never did have a newspaper route, but we did sell newspapers on the street corner. That was kind of fun because we always enjoyed getting together with people, talking to the different individuals that walked by the street. We would yell, "Extra." Or we would yell, "Get your newspaper here." In fact, we used to go into the bars along Beacon Street, which was a very prominent place where you'd find a lot of people there that would look for the paper, whether it was a morning paper or an afternoon paper. So, we spent a lot of time selling newspapers. Then of course, my brother, Tony, got himself a job as a dishwasher. So, he left me to sell papers. But I wasn't making enough selling papers. I saw a couple of boys shining shoes. I said, "Hey, I'm going to do that." So, I built myself a shine box. I got my polishes. I got my brushes and the whole bit, and I started shining shoes. Where was the best place to shine shoes? Downtown in Beacon Street. There's where all the sailors were. Or out to Long Beach at the Long Beach Pike. That's where all the sailors were. I made money, and I was proud to make the money that I made as far as tips and things like that were concerned. It kind of hurt me a little bit deep down in my heart because of the fact that there were days when I brought more money home than my dad did. He felt uncomfortable with it. But at the same time, he gladly accepted whatever I brought home.

MS: What were you bringing home? How much money were you making as a shoe shiner?

JM: Oh, I would say in the shoe shining, I was probably making somewhere close to about \$10 a day, shining shoes, selling papers, doing a combination of both. I'm speaking of summertime mostly. I'm also speaking a little bit about weekends, working all day long on doing something like that. Shining shoes, we asked for like 10 cents, 15 cents. Sailors would give me 50 cents sometimes. So, at the end of a day, it was 8 to \$10 that we could earn. So, we brought it home, all of it. Then mom would dole out 10 cents to go to the show or something like that or another nickel to buy a candy bar or whatever the case may be. So, that was our early workdays. We worked since the time we were young kids anyway. Because I started helping my brother, who was 9, and I was 7, and we'd go to work on our paper route back in Rockford. So, it's been a work life for us all the way up until the present time.

MS: You mentioned Beacon Street.

JM: Yes.

MS: It's a famous place.

JM: Oh, yes.

MS: For people who don't know what it is, what was Beacon Street? What was it like to be there?

JM: Beacon Street was a fascinating place. Fascinating because people would really brag about Beacon Street. They would tell tales about Beacon Street. They would talk about the arguments and the fights that occurred on Beacon Street. They would talk about the presence of police quite often. But it was never anything like gang warfare or anything. It was just a couple of guys who had too much to drink. They would go ahead and argue with each other for some reason or maybe arguing over a woman that both of them were trying to capture. So, a fight would break out. We'd stand aside. We'd watch it go on and everything else. Then in a few minutes, someone would come out and stop the fight, and it would be over with. So, it was a busy street for sailors or busy street for just ordinary persons that wanted to imbibe in alcohol. It was one of those interesting places because we had music going on all the time, so many bars jammed next to each other. [laughter] I can recall being taken by the juvenile officer three times. His name was Earl Johansen. He was the head of the Juvenile Department. He'd walk the streets. Because city hall here in San Pedro was on Beacon Street. It was just a stone's throw down to the bar area, which was only a block. So, I used to shine shoes and make more of my money inside the bar. So, I'd go in there and meet the sailors and talk to them, a little kid, barely 5 feet tall, with tears in his eyes, "Would you help me, sailor," kind of thing. All of a sudden, Earl Johansen comes in and grabs me by the shirt and takes me out. "Come with me." Then once I introduced myself to him and everything, he took me up to city hall, took my shine box away. Yes. Then I went home, made another shine box and came back down, started doing the same thing. After the third shine box, he took hold of myself and took me up to my parents' house. He wanted to talk to my dad and my mom. He said, "This kid has got to stay out of the

bars. We don't want him down there." So, finally, I kind of got the word from my dad, "Don't go down into those bars anymore." So, everything was done on the streets. But if you really wanted to make money, you go inside. Because that's where they're sitting at a table or at the bar, and you set your sign box down, you start shining shoes. So, it was an exciting time of my life to be able to go ahead and make as much money as I did, more so than I did in Rockford.

MS: Now, did you go at night as well, or this is during the daytime?

JM: Oh, no, this was all the time because daytime, we went to school; nighttime, we'd go down and go to work. So, it was nightlife down there, the neon lights all over the bars. You had Slim Harrison's, Lighthouse Cafe. You had Shanghai Red, which was a world-famous gathering place. You had Manny's Gateway. You had Tommy's Goodfellows. You had the Lidl Cafe. You had the Log Cabin, my goodness, the Bamboo Hut, all of them. There was so many bars down there. Sylvia's and all those other places, there was just so many.

MS: Tell me about Shanghai Reds. That's a famous place. What was that?

JM: I loved it. Red Eisenberg was the proprietor. Most people say owner. I like to say proprietor. A very colorful figure. There are some pictures around town that you would see, sometimes a photo of him grabbing some guy and moving him out of the place and putting him out on the street corner. But everything I saw about him was that he was so colorful. He would stand behind the bar. I was just amused by the man. At the same time, I kind of feared him. Because I knew that he was the kind of a person that, hey, if you didn't conduct yourself the way you should conduct yourself in my place of business, you're out of here buddy, and that was it. So, it would've been the same thing with me. So, he never asked me to leave. None of the bartenders or bar owners asked me to leave. But only Johansen would come by and ask me to leave.

MS: Well, tell me more about Shanghai Red. What did he look like, and what was the inside of the place like?

JM: Shanghai Reds was just a typical bar. It was the best-known bar, along with Tommy Goodfellows. Tommy Goodfellows was owned by Tommy Minas, M-I-N-A-S. Red Eisenberg was a rather robust person, sort of a reddish face, not too tall, but rather husky looking and everything. But he was very colorful. Occasionally, when you would meet somebody somewhere, and they would say something to the effect, "Where are you from?" I'd say, "From San Pedro." "Oh, I remember. I was in the Navy. I was down in San Pedro. I remember Shanghai Red." That comes up on everybody's lips all the time. Because Shanghai Red's place was known around the world. Because the sailors would pass the word to other sailors. When you get into San Pedro, go to Beacon Street, go to Shanghai Reds. But the bars themselves were well operated. They were considerate of their customers. Sometimes, they were brusque when they had to be brusque with somebody. At the same time, people enjoyed going into the bars of San Pedro. It wasn't just visitors coming into town. It wasn't just the sailors coming into town. But many times, it was some of the locals that would go there. So, it was a very festive area, believe me. Then you had a lot of women walking up and down, walking up and down, waving from the upstairs windows, and all these other things, drawing the sailor's attention and things



like that. So, for a young kid being down there, it was interesting. But at the same time, I must say, I wasn't the only kid down there. We had a lot of newsboys in San Pedro. We used to sometimes fight with one another as to who's going to stand on the corner of Sixth and Beacon. Who's going to stand on the corner of Fifth and Beacon? I mean, it was a little bit competitive to try to make money.

MS: So, if I walked into Shanghai Reds on a Friday night, describe it. Would be everyone sitting sedately at their tables?

JM: No. There was a great deal of conversation, a considerable amount of laughter, people glad-handing each other. It was a real busy place. The bartenders were really at work without a stop. They would just constantly be mixing drinks and everything. But then there was a lot of boisterous laughter. Then there would be arguments. Then you would hear some of those unkind words and sometimes a few words that were not as colorful as you'd want to hear. But at the same time, that was the kind of talk that was going on. It was not only the men in there, but there were some women as well. There's no question about it. You go into a bar, and there were occasionally a few women in there as well. But at the same time, it was mostly the men that kicked up a lot of fuss. After they've had a few too much to drink, then of course you'd see them walking out and staggering and that kind of thing. But I must say that from my perspective, the behavior of the people who frequented the bars was good. Occasionally, you'd have the fight as I mentioned earlier, but the behavior was good. People respected one another. We never had any fear of walking down Beacon Street. It was nothing we feared at all. In fact, the citizens of San Pedro, the adult citizens, had no fear of coming down Sixth Street. Now, it's a different story. People are just rather leery of going out on the streets and going down Sixth Street. But that's all going to come to pass, I'm sure. But it was just a good time in my life to note that I had such experiences I did have down on Beacon Street.

MS: Any particular experience stands out, aside from being arrested by Mr. Johansen? Anything you saw?

JM: Well, I wouldn't say arrested by Mr. Johansen, but it was fun. I mean, he never fingerprinted me or anything like that. He just reprimanded me. He was a good old soul. He really was. I came to appreciate what he did more so later in my life.

MS: But was there any incident that you witnessed or you saw that you remember beyond that? Anything that stands out in your mind?

JM: Well, not really. I really can't say that there was. I used to enjoy frequenting a place that was called the Club Del Rio. The Club Del Rio was on Sixth Street. They had a lot of entertainment there. They brought in people from Hollywood and all the other places to come down for a gig. Maybe it was a weekender. Or sometimes it was for the whole week. Big crowd in there. I used to enjoy the music and listening to the music and some very, very good celebrities. Now, if I recall correctly, and I'm not sure, but I thought Nat King Cole also played down there at the Club Del Rio. So, that was, to me, a wonderful place to go. Or at least, I shouldn't say go inside because they had a little bit of a fee that you paid. But I went ahead, and I stood outside and listened to the music. But there were other places that had a little bit of

entertainment going on as well. No, I can't recall anything that was startling or anything like that. I really can't.

MS: Now, on the other side of the equation, during the daytime, you're going to school. What's this other non-Shanghai Red life you're going through? Where are you going to school? What was that like going to school and growing up in –

JM: Yes. I came from a parochial school initially in – I went to St. Anthony's in Rockford. When I came here, the first thing that the LaPentas say is that their kids go to Dana in San Pedro High School. So, they talked my parents into not going to a parochial school but going to Dana Middle School, which is called today. It was called Dana Junior High School then. I started in the ninth grade. I enjoyed my time there, even though I had a couple of fights with some of the individuals there for whatever reasons I don't care to discuss right now. But at the same time, a couple of fights, and I was quick in my own neighborhood. We always had occasional fights with one another. Then we got over it very quickly, which was the same thing that happened at Dana.

MS: Well, these are fights between –

JM: Between us students, yes.

MS: Yes. But between Italian kids and –

JM: Oh, no, no, no. Nothing like that. It was just strictly two guys got into an argument, whatever the case would be, and we got into a fight or something of that nature. Then when I spent the one year at Dana, I went up to San Pedro High School. The one thing that I was so pleased about at Dana, I never received any awards for citizenship or academic achievement or anything like that. But when I received an award for having perfect attendance for one semester, that was the first certificate I ever received in my early education. I treasured that particular certificate that was given to me. Never missed a day of school for that one particular semester. So, it was pretty good.

MS: With all you were doing, that was hard to do.

[laughter]

JM: You're right. You're right.

MS: But your parents, of course, your father didn't have any education. What did they think about this education you were doing? What were their attitudes for education?

JM: My parents always felt very strongly about education. They emphasized the fact that I should do well in studies and everything. So, they realized that. My mother, of course, had had about three years of education when she was in Sicily as a young girl. But my dad, of course, as I said earlier, didn't have any. So, they impressed upon us the need to get educated. Unfortunately, my brother did not. My brother went only so far. He went to the ninth grade at

St. Thomas High School in Rockford. When he came here, he didn't go to school. So, his education stopped in the ninth grade. He became a very prominent real estate person in this community, a highly respected real estate person. So, he did quite well for himself with the limited education that he had. So, then from then on, I went to San Pedro High School, and I did my three years there.

MS: What was it like at San Pedro High School? What kind of school was it? It was the war years then, right?

JM: Well, San Pedro High School, it was a wonderful experience for me. I especially enjoyed the curriculum that I had. I especially enjoyed the fact that I was majoring in the printing mode, doing printing for the local school paper. Then at the same time, learning all about the Linotype and the different types of presses that we had. The school population was just fantastic. We had such a diversity. I never met people who were Slavic in Rockford. I did experience the Black people. We had very limited Black families in San Pedro at the time, became very well acquainted with many of them. Then, of course, Japanese, in my situation, never experienced Japanese back in Rockford either. So, we had a nice strong student body comprised of mostly Japanese, Italian, Slavic, and of course, Scandinavian, a lot of Norwegians and Swedish people as well. So, it was a good blend. So, you became acquainted with a lot of good people that you really would not have had an experience sometimes living in perhaps an all Whites community. So, this was a good blend for me. I became friends with so many of those individuals. I treasure their friendships even today, the same people that I was acquainted with at that time.

MS: Now, did you have time for the activities, the dances?

JM: Oh, yes. Not so much dances, because I just never did enjoy dancing. But I did play football on the junior varsity team. At that time, it was known as the B team. I weighed a good strong 118 pounds, and I was a lineman. Well, first year I was there, I was a water boy. I served the team as a water boy, going out and bringing the water during timeouts and things like that. But then as long as I got acquainted with the coach, I said, "Hey, look, coach, I'd like to go ahead and go out for football." So, in my eleventh and twelfth year, I played football. I was on the first string in my twelfth year. So, I had a great time and enjoyed that experience very much. Other sports, I never engaged in. So, it was just strictly football. That was it for me. Yes.

MS: Let's go back. We talked a bit about the island being Terminal Island. What was going on Terminal Island at this time? What were the activities going on? There were shipbuilding, but there was also canneries and fishing. Describe the activities.

JM: Yes. There were a lot of canneries. In fact, my dad, when he worked in the shipyards, and then the war was over and work slowed down quite a bit, he then went to work in a cannery. He worked in the cannery until about – oh, I'd say he worked there about three or four years. I had gone into the service after I finished high school and went into the Navy. I can recall when I came back home, I said, "Where's dad?" After I hugged my mom, I said, "Where's papa?" She said, "Well, he's over at work on the island." I say, "Where?" She said, "Well, he's at Southern California Fish Cannery." So, I decided I would surprise him. So, I still had my uniform on and everything else. So, I went over on the island on a ferry and surprised my dad in the cannery.

I'll never forget that day. It was such a memorable day. All the people started applauding at the cannery line and everything else when my dad and I hugged each other. So, that was a very treasured moment for me in my life. But there were canneries. Of course, there was StarKist, which was then French Sardine, it was called. Then it became StarKist later. There was Van Camp. There was the one I mentioned, which was – well, there was a Franco Italian. But then there was the one my dad worked in, and Southern California Fish Cannery. So, I used to enjoy it over there. I mean, I'd watch them unload fish and all that, had that experience. Then once in a while, get a small tuna, and give it to me and take it home kind of thing. I got well acquainted with a lot of the people in the fishing industry through the years. They were a generous bunch of people, very generous, hardworking, very committed to family. There was no one that worked any harder than a fisherman, as well as the longshoremen in the community. Later on, I did go ahead and do a little stint at fishing when I came out of the service. That was my first experience, is going –

MS: This is terrific. Joe, you started to tell us about your illustrious career, or almost career, as a fisherman. Talk about that.

JM: [laughter] Yes. When I came out of the Navy, I was – I served in the Navy as a lithographer, working at the Navy Department on those big, huge presses doing the lithography work. So, I came home. I told my dad, "You know, pop, I'm going to go ahead and see if I can get a job in the printing business." So, he said, "Well, go ahead and try." So, when I started hanging around the pool halls in town for about a month before I decided what I was really going to do, one of the guys were talking. They were fishermen and everything else. "We made this much money, made that much money. Boy, there's nothing like fishing. It's really a good industry. It's a lot of hard work, but you can make a lot of money." So, I came home. I told my dad, I said, "I think I changed my mind. I think I'd like to be a fisherman." My dad said, "You really want to be a fisherman." I said, "I would like to try it." So, he knew one of the fishing boat skippers of a small lampara boat, which was just a crew of maybe four people. So, he went over and talked to Mr. Vito Pizzo. He said, "Mr. Pizzo, my son wants to go fishing. Can you help him out?" This and that. Well, he thought about it. He said, "I don't know if I could do it right away." But he says, "Maybe I can make room for him." So, about a couple of months went by and he finally called my dad. He says, "Bring your son over. I'm going to go ahead and give him a job." So, I worked on lampara fishing. Now, that wasn't so bad because all we did was work around the harbor area, just out maybe just a mile or so. The current wasn't that great. It wasn't a real problem for me. So, therefore, I worked with the lampara fishing. Then all of a sudden, I said, "Hey, there's more money to be made on the purse seiners," to get onto the bigger boats, this and that. Even though you worked for half a share to start with, later on, you worked on a full share basis. So, I got onto one of those boats. It wasn't too big of a purse seiner, but it was pretty good size. So, I went out there, and I was deathly sick every single night. Every single night. In fact, I used to walk down Ninth Street. On Ninth and Center was Mary Star of the Sea Church. The old church was there. I used to make the sign of the cross. I said, "Dear Lord, let it rain. Let it rain, Lord." I didn't want to go fishing. I was hoping that the captain would say, "We're not going to go out. The wind is too great. You guys go home." But that didn't happen. Sometimes, we had to go out and fish. But I would get deathly sick. But still, I did what I had to do as far as work was concerned. I listened to the old-time Italian fishermen saying, "Joe, you don't belong here. You're not a fisherman type. You need to go back to school

or go to college or do something with your life." So, I said, "Well, no, I like to work here. I want to stay with it." So, the first year went by and a year and a half. Finally, I got on a boat that was called the (*Two Nancy's*?). I said, "Maybe changing of boats is going to help me." Believe it or not, I worked for one whole year on that boat. At the end of the year, I made no money. I owed the owner \$200. Not a single cent did I make. So, finally, this fellow, (Felici?), says to me, [foreign language]. It means go to school. "You don't belong on a boat. You're not a fisherman. Go, get away from here." So, I was convinced. That was around July of 1949. Harbor College opened up in 1949. So, I decided to enroll as a student there under the Vet program and everything. So, I had the GI Bill. So, I was able to go ahead and get into Harbor College. So, I went through Harbor College. I became the student body president. I was first student body vice president on the first year. Then I became student body president. I loved my time there. I was determined to go ahead and get a career in printing. So, I went to Dean McMasters. I said, "Hey, when's the print shop going to be built? When are you going to have the print shop?" He said, "Well, it's been delayed. It's going to be another year." I said, "Well, it's not helping me in my career because I wanted to go into lithography." He said, "Well, I can give you a transfer to Compton College. They have a print shop there. They've been going for quite a number of years." I say, "Well, yes, that might be an option for me." He said, "But listen, let me tell you." He said, "Look, you're the student body president of the school and this and that. Now that you've established yourself here, have you ever thought about going into education?" I said, "No, I never did." He says, "Well, what about going into something like teaching?" I said, "That sounds interesting." At the time, I was working for the YMCA. I was working with young children, young boys, and I kind of liked working with them. He says, "Well, you're a natural. Get into teaching." So, then I went around and made that decision, decided when I graduated from Harbor College to go to Cal State Long Beach, which I did. So, I got my teaching credential at Cal State Long Beach. I was a certified teacher at that time. So, it was nice.

MS: What were you teaching?

JM: Where did I teach?

MS: What were you teaching?

JM: I was teaching elementary school. My first job was at Leland Street School here in San Pedro. I was fortunate enough to get an assignment there. I served there for five years. From then I went on to another school in San Pedro which was called Crestwood. It had been a relatively new school at the time, up on Western Avenue. Then from there, after I spent a couple of years, I went to White Point Elementary, which was an interesting experience for me. Interesting because while I was going to Cal State Long Beach, I needed a job in the summer. I didn't feel like I was making enough money. A GI Bill wasn't giving me very much as far as anything other than tuition for school. So, I did Long Shore sometime in the summer. But then there was a construction job opened up. A friend of mine said, "Hey, they're constructing a new school in San Pedro. It's called White Point. Why don't you go out and talk to the person over there?" I went over there and talked to the foreman. It was called Crown Construction Company that built the school. He said, "Are you looking for a job for the summer?" I said, "Yes, I am." He said, "Why don't you come and work with us?" I said, "I'd like that." So, I helped to put the

concrete down for the classrooms. We did all the cement work and everything. I worked like a (shackle?), which is like a donkey. I mean, I worked just like my dad worked, with all your muscles and everything else, working on all cylinders. So, I stood back as I saw the school being constructed, not finished, but under construction. Because I had to go back to school. I said, "Someday, I hope I can teach here." Lo and behold, after I left Crestwood, I got a job at White Point Elementary School, the school that I helped to construct. I taught there in the elementary grades. It was a fascinating time. From then on, I moved on.

MS: What did you enjoy about teaching? Why was teaching so attractive?

JM: Teaching to me has been the most exciting, most satisfying experience that I've ever had in my lifetime. It was just wonderful for me to go ahead and work with the minds of children and to get them excited about learning, to motivate them so that they would go ahead and be good students and be focused on the curriculum and what was provided for them. To me, it was just fun. Fun, and I was getting paid for it. So, when I left White Point, I became assistant principal and then went on to Wilmington. Then from then on, I enjoyed a career of twenty-five years as a principal of an elementary school. So, I enjoyed that very much.

MS: In 1988, you became the head of the San Pedro Centennial. Why did you want to do that? What was that, and what attracted you to that job?

JM: Well, I retired from the city school district in 1987, after thirty-five years. I was approached by an individual, Bonnie Christensen, and also a couple of other people that came to me and said, "We've known you in education, and we feel like you're the kind of person that has such a devotion for San Pedro. We're running the Centennial Program, which we hope to run. We would like you to go ahead and be a part of it. In fact, we'd like you to play a very important role." I said, "Well, I'd be glad to assist in any way I can. What would you like me to do?" "Well, would you come to the chamber meeting? We have a Chamber of Commerce. Would you come and just sit down? We'd like to go ahead and interview you and talk to you and see whether or not you might be interested?" So, they laid out their plans of what they'd like to have done. They liked to celebrate the Centennial of San Pedro California. So, I kind of said, "Yes, that sounds good. I'm retired. I need something to do." It was a non-paying kind of a position, but I didn't mind that. I said, "It sounds great. I'd like to do it for my town because I have such a great appreciation for San Pedro." So, therefore, they appointed me as the chairman or the president, as far as the title was concerned, of the Centennial Committee. So, we went through one year of planning for the centennial celebration. Then we went through one year of activities and then one year of wrapping everything up, all the forms and papers that we had to do. It's amazing because in our book that we have, the parade book, for example, it shows well over one-hundred, maybe two hundred volunteers. My office was located in the local *News Pilot*, which was the newspaper office here in San Pedro at the time. They gave me a desk, and I recruited two ladies to be my secretaries. Then we began to form the committees. Surprisingly, this thing turned out to be bigger than we ever thought it would. We never dreamed that we would have such a fantastic centennial celebration. We planned forty-five different activities for the centennial year. We had the Air Force supporting us on it. We had the Navy supporting us. We had the Army supporting us. We had all the community groups in San Pedro together in harmony, working toward this whole centennial celebration. We recruited all the young people

of San Pedro to be a part of it. We branched out everywhere, to each segment of the community, including the cultural societies, including the people that were involved in the churches. They all came together. The thing that amazed me the most was when somebody came up and said, "Joe, can you imagine that the parade that you had for the centennial was the second largest parade in the state of California next to the Rose Bowl?" I think we had 135 units in the parade that marched through San Pedro at that particular day. It was awesome. I mean, just awesome. If you were to see the films – anyone who sees the films would say, "Gee, look at that." I mean, look at it. I mean, it was just amazing. Everybody was involved, the Italian Club, the Croatian Club, the Spanish groups, mariachis, and all the others. It just seemed like everybody just came together. It was just harmoniously done and at the same time, exciting to envision all the hard work that people had done.

MS: I mean, it comes through so clearly, you love San Pedro. What does this place mean to you?

JM: San Pedro means an awful lot to me. My heart and soul, and I mean that very sincerely, is in San Pedro. I married a San Pedro girl, Marian Trutanich, from the Croatian Circle. I, being Italian; she, being a Croatian. We fell in love, and together, we shared a wonderful life in the community. We're married for fifty-three years, going on fifty-four. We've locked ourselves into, I would say, almost every facet of the San Pedro area, the people, community agencies, community organizations. I've been a member of the Elks Club for forty years now. I've been a member of the Toastmasters Club for fifty years. My wife and I are busily engaged. She does volunteer work at the Cabrillo Marine Aquarium as a docent because she herself was a teacher. So, she's following in the footsteps of passing education on to the kids about marine life. She also volunteers at Kaiser on Mondays as a volunteer. We raised two children, Joseph, our son, and of course Nancy, our daughter. Then of course, we have three grandchildren, Joseph, Daniel, and of course, Brandon. My son, Joe, has got a wonderful wife named Lori, formerly a Martinovich. So, we got a little bit of a blend here and a little bit of a blend there. But as I look back, I consider myself a very lucky person, very lucky that the LaPenta family was encouraging us to come out here, very lucky that my dad made the decision to come out here, very lucky that I've had so many people that have counseled me about my career and changes in my career. All the things that I was able to do, going down the road, making a sharp turn to the right, switching to a road to the left, whatever the case was, it was the influence of various individuals who were interested in me and my life. So, I thank God. I thank all the people of community of San Pedro for all that I've been able to do. So, when I operated as president of the centennial, it was my giving back to the community.

MS: If someone who's never heard of or never been to San Pedro, and you wanted to give him a sense of this place, what is San Pedro?

JM: I think when I think of San Pedro, I think of people, not so much places, but people. The people who I believe at one time when I was teaching – I was looking through the records of the children and trying to determine where they're from. As I noticed it, I think I counted somewhere in the neighborhood of about forty-two nationalities in San Pedro. Now, it could be even more so now. It could be a lot more than forty-two. But at that time, I said, "What a beautiful blend of people. What a beautiful blend of people working harmoniously together."

So, it was all about people. I've never experienced anything that I considered true to – I've never experienced any type of serious dissension among any of the groups in the community. It was just something that, to me, was a beauty to behold when people can come together and work together and share it together and pray together for the benefits of the community itself. Oh, I'm not saying that we didn't have any particular, shall we say, conflict as far as certain decisions to be made, either politically or socially or things like that. Because most communities, you'll find that something like that once in a while will crop up. But at the same time, we also have to consider the beauty of the place, not only the beauty of the people, but the beauty of the location of San Pedro, a very busy industrious harbor offering work for people, a beautiful ocean to behold, the hills, the excitement of the, shall we say, organizations that are in San Pedro, working for San Pedro, wanting to improve the community. So, it's not just Joe Marino having his heart and soul in town. It's all the families pitching in and doing things. We have a crew right now that goes through San Pedro, believe it or not. It's called the Clean San Pedro Group. It's composed of, I would say about thirty people. Without any pay or anything, they volunteered their services. They have their own little trash trucks and trash barrels and brooms and shovels and what have you. They go through town noting what needs to be cleaned up. So, one day, they'll do Pacific Avenue. Another time, they'll go down Gaffey Street. Whenever they get the call that something else has to be cleaned up, they'll go out there, and they'll do that. These are hardworking people.

MS: I think we can stop. I think we've got it. This is terrific.

JM: Okay.

[end of transcript]