

Port of Los Angeles Centennial Oral History Project  
Matthew Match Oral History  
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Interviewer: MS – Male Speaker  
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Male Speaker: So, the first question is the hard one. Please say your name and spell it.

Matthew Matich: Matt Matich, M-A-T-T, M-A-T-I-C-H.

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

MM: 1932 in San Pedro, California.

MS: Great. Can you tell me a little bit about your family's history, your father and maybe your grandfather? When did the family first come to San Pedro?

MM: My father was born 1898. Came to the United States when he was fifteen years old, all by himself. He met up with an uncle and just started working in the mines in West Virginia, then worked his way to Seattle, fishing. Then 1920, he came to San Pedro. My mother's side came from St. Louis. Prior to that, they came from Yugoslavia, Croatia. But they settled in St. Louis and then moved to Seattle and came down to San Pedro in 1920 also.

MS: Now, why did your father come down to San Pedro? What was attractive about San Pedro?

MM: When my father came to San Pedro in 1920, fishing was in its infancy and fishing was his background. People from the same town in Croatia that he was from were coming down. They all got together and bought their fishing boats and worked together and developed an industry.

MS: But why San Pedro? Is it because there are many people from Croatia here?

MM: San Pedro had a lot of similarities to Croatia, the hometown where he came from. Plus, being with his own people here made it nice and easy for him.

MS: Did he ever share any stories with you about coming here and what it was like, or any things that happened to him when he was here?

MM: Well, I can't think of anything. Let me think again on that question.

MS: Okay. So, talk about your earliest memories of San Pedro. What are the first things you remembered growing up here?

MM: My earliest thoughts of San Pedro, well, I lived across the street from a fire station at 16th Street, and I always thought, "Boy, what a job. I'd love to have that job someday." I lived there until 1939, and then we built the house a block away. Then I can't think of anything else right now.

MS: It's okay. I forgot to ask you about your father. The canning business here, your father was involved with it. Give us a sense, what's the history of the cannery business here and your father's relationship?

MM: My father's relationship with the fishing industry was, he was a fisherman and he worked

for other captains. Then in 1935, he and four other people bought their own boat. From then on, he had his own boat until he sold it and retired and then went back working for others at his own convenience.

MS: Now, so, who was involved with Martin Bogdanovich?

MM: My uncle.

MS: Okay. Tell me about your uncle and how he knows about the early days of –

MM: My uncle, Nicholas Vilicich and Martin Bogdanovich paired up in 1917 and built the French Sardine Company. My mother's side of the family lived across the street from the Bogdanovich family. My oldest aunt, Mary Zupan, worked in the cannery where she had met Nick Vilicich. Later, they got married and became my godfather and my godmother.

MS: You talked about the two families having lots of sisters. Tell me that story and how that affected things.

MM: The Bogdanovich family had six daughters and one son. The Zupan family had five daughters and one son. They had very similar ages. So, they went to school together. So, they were very close in the early days.

MS: Tell me about Martin Bogdanovich. Who was he and what kind of man was he?

MM: Martin Bogdanovich is a hero in San Pedro. He had a kind heart. He always helped his people, helped his relatives. When anyone needed help, he'd help them. His son followed in his footsteps. He helped a lot of people. He helped me. Had a temper. Most of the Bogdanovich family had good tempers, but they cooled off and they forgot their problems. They were good people.

MS: Tell us about the company that he started and when it started and what did they do and why were they so successful?

MM: StarKist was successful probably – let me see. How am I going to say it?

MS: It wasn't StarKist at first.

MM: No.

MS: It had a different name. Take me to the beginning.

MM: Okay. French Sardine was successful because they worked with people. The fishermen, if they couldn't afford to pay the fishermen for their fish when they brought it in, fishermen would wait for the money until they sold the fish, they'd pay them. If they needed money to buy supplies for their boats, they'd loan them money. If they wanted to buy a boat, if Mr. Bogdanovich thought that they were good fishermen, he'd lend them money to buy a boat. They

didn't always make money. They didn't always have money, but they worked together.

MS: What were the operations? What kind of fish were they canning and how big was the operation in the early days?

MM: Fish in the early days, to my knowledge, were mostly sardines. Sardines were a big industry. Slowly, the tuna industry became bigger. During World War II especially, it grew. Servicemen learned how to eat tuna, got to like it. It was two seasons. Tuna was all year round and sardine was from October until March or May, around there. So, it was a seasonal product for sardine.

MS: How did Bogdanovich's first company turn into StarKist? When did that happen?

MM: Oh, the name of French Sardine changed to StarKist, I believe it was in the middle [19]50s. The name was appealing. One of the daughters, Geraldine Bogdanovich, was a movie actress. I think she had something to do with the name. Someone else was using it somewhere else, and I think they paid someone to use that name. But Geraldine also comes up with Charlie, the Tuna. She's famous for that.

MS: So, StarKist because she was a movie star?

MM: Geraldine was a movie actress in bit parts. She was instrumental in helping change the name.

MS: Also, for those who don't remember Charlie Tuna, tell me again about her and naming that and why that became a mascot of it.

MM: Well, Charlie Tuna became very, very popular. It was on television, and we had a costume. We had several costumes, and I would have to supply someone to wear the costume for parties. We'd have a big crate. We'd ship it around the country to be used for whenever anyone wanted to promote StarKist. It was a big item for a while.

MS: Why did it change? Because the kind of fish they were using was changed or what?

MM: I think it costs money to advertise. So, they just stopped advertising. I think that's where they cut the advertising budget.

MS: No, I'm talking about the change from French Sardine to StarKist. Why did they make that change?

MM: StarKist name is, I think, more appealing than French Sardine. People don't eat sardines, but [laughter] they eat tuna. Americans don't eat too many sardines. I don't think so.

MS: Now, there was a split, and Franco American – was it called Franco-American Sardine?

MM: Franco-Italian?

MS: Franco-Italian. Right. Tell me about that. When did that happen and what happened there?

MM: I'm not familiar with Franco-Italian. I know that the founder of Franco-Italian was also one of the founders of StarKist. Why the split took place, I don't know. I don't know.

MS: What about Chicken of the Sea? Is that –

MM: That's the Van Camp company. That was entirely separate. I think they began before StarKist. They were older. The oldest one in the tuna business was Halfhill. StarKist later bought Halfhill as part of the StarKist Company.

MS: Van Camp was the company that was known for Chicken of the Sea.

MM: Chicken of the Sea, yes. Van Camp was Chicken of the Sea. That's correct.

MS: What do you know about Van Camp as a company? When did they start?

MM: I never worked for them. I don't know. I don't know much about them.

MS: Right. But you did work for StarKist?

MM: I worked for French Sardine and StarKist. Right.

MS: So, tell me about how you got involved with working with French Sardine and then into StarKist.

MM: 1945, my cousin had been working for StarKist. He was about three years older than myself. I was thirteen, and he was telling me all the work he was doing, all the money he was making. During the war, there was a lot of work. So, during the summer, I went over to French Sardine, and I waited in a mob of men like everybody else. The boss would come and say, "You, you, you," no resumes, no applications. Just pick you out. I went home for the first week. Every day, I'd go home. My uncle used to walk through every day, saw that I was coming there every day trying to get a job. So, after a week, he told the boss to give me a job. So, from then on, I had a job. They always saved something for me.

MS: Did you ever get a chance to know Mr. Bogdanovich well?

MM: Very, very well. Mr. Joseph Bogdanovich, I knew very well.

MS: Son?

MM: I worked with him – the son, yes.

MS: Now, what about senior?

MM: He died before I started. He died 1944. I started working in 1945. My folks knew him very well.

MS: Aside from the fact of him being a nice guy, you started to describe him as a person. What did they tell you about him as a person? I mean, what kind of man was he? Was he talkative? Was he quiet? What kind of man was Martin?

MM: Mr. Bogdanovich was an organizer. He formed the Yugoslav American Club in San Pedro. He got several of the Yugoslav people in San Pedro and formed a club. They all supported him. He put up most of the money, but they stuck with him, whatever he wanted to do. He was the president for years.

MS: What kind of man was Joe Bogdanovich?

MM: Joe Bogdanovich, I would say is a dynamic man. If he walked into a room of a hundred people, everybody would just surround him. I've been to a lot of parties with him, and he just captivates a crowd. He's smart. Asks you millions of questions. Before you can answer one, he just bombards you with questions. He can speak many languages. Been all over the world. He's a great guy. Athletic, loved tennis, golf. I went to many parties. I worked at many parties at his house, and he'd never eat alone. Always invite people to his house, and you never know the subject. The subject could be anything. Could be sports, politics, religion – just was interesting.

MS: Why was the company so successful, do you think?

MM: He surrounded himself with good people. Mr. Bogdanovich surrounded himself with great people. He brought people that he went to school with. If you were his competitor, he'd hire you if you were good. If you were good, he'd hire you. Yes. Got the best tax people, best lawyers. He was very worldly.

MS: When you started, what was your first job you were doing in the company?

MM: My first job in a warehouse in 1945 was a job they called pearl diving. Retort baskets with the cans of tuna that had already been packed, cooked, and cooled off. We would have to start at the top. You put these cans, four at a time, in a little track and go into the labeling machine. Then the man at the other end of the labeling machine would be casing them by hand. One man making the box and one man casing them. Pushed them down, and then they'd glue the cases with a bucket of glue and a paintbrush. Then when they get to the bottom, you're just going down deeper all the time. It's very grueling. Very hard.

MS: So, you're reaching into this pot –

MM: Reaching down.

MS: Explain that again. Pearl diving. What was pearl diving?

MM: The first job at French Sardine was a job called pearl diving. It was in the warehouse. The pearl divers would get the cans of tuna, put them in a track. Incline track, they'd roll down through a labeling machine. Label would be put on. The man at the end of the machine, he was called a tailor. Tailing machine, he would tail and put them into the cases. Cases were being made by a man on the other side of him. Then it'd be pushed onto a roller. Either go onto a pallet or into a box car, these cases.

MS: Why was it called pearl diving? Why was your job called pearl diving?

MM: It came before me. I just –

MS: Describe what you're doing, you're like a pro. You're reaching down into this water.

MM: Reaching down and going down.

MS: Start again. Explain to me, what are you doing literally?

MM: There were maybe three or four of us on each retort basket, pearl diving for these cans and putting into the labeling machine.

MS: But you have to go into the water to pick them up, right?

MM: No, no, they're in this basket. It's a retort basket.

MS: Okay. I'm sorry.

MS: Okay. Explain that then.

MM: After the cans are packed, sealed, they go into this retort basket. Retort baskets go into a retort. They're cooked. They're pasteurized. Then they're put into a cooling room because they're very hot when they come out of this retort. They're cooled overnight. The next day, they bring them into the warehouse ready for labeling. That's when the pearl divers go into these retort baskets all day long, put these cans into the tracks to go through the labeling machine and be put into cases to be cased.

MS: So, was that a thrilling job for you, or you were just happy to have a job?

MM: Happy to have a job. It was not a thrilling job. I was very happy to have a job. I was making money like married men with families. I made the same pay scale. This was in June of 1945, and just before 4th of July, the next week, they said that there was a lot of work in the packing room. So, I went to the packing room to work because they were making longer hours. I worked eleven hours a day there. There, they gave me two buckets. I went between the ladies that were packing tuna. They took the best pieces, put those in the solid pack cans. I'd go with the buckets, take the piles of smaller pieces. They put those in chunk and flake machine. I'd have to carry those buckets down to another area. So, just to keep up, when they went on coffee break, I would finish up cleaning up. I just couldn't keep up with them. Eleven hours a day of

carrying these buckets, it was pretty hard for a thirteen-year-old.

MS: So, did you consider that a promotion or – [laughter]

MM: It was [laughter] not a promotion. It was a pay raise to do that. So, I made a lot of money there. For a young thirteen-year-old, I made a lot of money.

MS: Let's go back before thirteen. What were your experiences in San Pedro and as a young boy growing up here? What was the town like? What are the things you did as a young boy?

MM: Well, some of the treats I had when I was a young boy was being able to go out with my father on the fishing boat when I was free. We'd go out either at nights fishing for sardines. Or if he was coming back from Mexico, I'd go on the boat when he came back, went to the cannery to help unload. I'd be washing these dividing boards in the hole of the vessel. This was my treat, being with my father when he came back because he was gone most all the time. Not a lot of play time in my days. I worked a lot.

MS: What kind of man was your father? Was he quiet [inaudible]? Was he the captain of the ship when you were on board?

MM: My father was a very quiet man. He was one of the tops, as far as the mastman, the man scouting for fish up in the crow's nest. He'd spent all day and all night up there just looking for fish. So, that was his expertise.

MS: So, if you didn't see him, you didn't get him. So, he was an important guy.

MM: Yes. He was one of the top boats during his early years until they started building bigger boats. Helicopters came and did away with his job. He was outsourced.

[laughter]

MS: Around technophile. Right. Talk about your grandfather and his restaurant.

MM: There was another treat I had. My grandfather, every weekend, would pick me up. My grandfather bought ten acres in Compton. When the Japanese were resettled out of Terminal Island, he bought one of those big homes, moved it to his ten-acre little farm in Compton. I got to go to Compton on weekends and we'd come down to the restaurant where I'd get my scoop of ice cream. But I got to ride a tractor, drive a tractor, and do my plowing and disking with him. So, this was before I started at StarKist, or French Sardine at the time. But that was my treat with my grandfather; go out to lunch with him and help around the farm.

MS: Now, when you say farm in Compton today, those things don't connect. What was Compton like in those days?

MM: The ten acres was right on Alondra across the street from Compton Airport. Compton Airport was there at that time. It's still there. I drive by every once in a while. Now, there's a



school on that property and homes. It's different. The city's different. There was nothing there.

MS: What about Terminal Island? Did you ever visit Terminal Island?

MM: Yes. I visited Terminal Island on occasion with my uncle or with my father. Not a lot because my father fished for a cannery in Long Beach. So, we didn't bring our fish to Terminal Island. We brought it over to Long Beach. I think the cannery was West Coast Cannery.

MS: Despite the fact that your uncle was working for French Sardine, [laughter] what was going on there? A little competition?

MM: Well, I can't explain why my father, being in the same family as my uncle with the cannery, why we fished at a different cannery. I can't explain why. It was no problem. We all got along. But for some reason, and I don't know what it was, the boat went to Long Beach.

MS: I understand sort of culturally, you say that there were Japanese fishermen, Croatian fishermen, Italian fishermen. Did they have particular associations with particular canneries by their nationality or was it all mixed up?

MM: No. I don't think that the nationality – the boats all had their nationality. There were Italian fishermen, Yugoslav, Croatian fishermen, and Portuguese fishermen. Not only were they by nationality, they were by the same town. Most all of them were from the same town of [inaudible] and over there. There was another group that bought their own boat there from Dugi otok, which means Long Island in Croatia. So, they were by towns beside nationality. It all became internationalized in time.

MS: But did they have a special relationship with this particular cannery by nationality?

MM: I wouldn't say so. Some of the canneries would help pay for the boats, help them finance the fishing boats and then they'd pay them back when they could. So, I don't think that there was any nationality that went to a certain cannery. Van Camp was not Slavic or Italian and they got plenty of business. So, I think StarKist and Van Camp were probably equal in size. I know at the end, they were probably each about forty percent of the business. Now, I think Bumble Bee's overtaken both of them.

MS: This is something I've been asking a number of people about. There are a number of different ways of fishing. There are the purse seiners. There are the gill netters. There's the –

MM: Pole.

MS: – pole fishing. Explain those different ways of fishing, why you would choose one over the other, and whether those were associated with particular nationalities or just, it was across the board.

MM: Pole fishing was done – mostly, San Diego fishermen were Portuguese and they did the pole fishing. It's much more difficult. If you didn't have bait, you couldn't catch bait, you didn't

catch fish. The most efficient method is purse seining. Some of the San Pedro fishermen went down to San Diego and taught the Portuguese fishermen how to purse seine and they all converted. They don't find very many bait boats anymore.

MS: What about the gillnet then?

MM: Gillnet, that's entirely different. That's a different species of fish that they catch; swordfish and others – not tuna or sardines with gillnet.

MS: So, you continued to work in the cannery and you made the big jump from starting out, and now, you're cleaning up the leftover tuna meat. Now, you're headed to the top. What's next?  
[laughter]

MM: Well, I worked at this cannery all my school years, from 1945. I graduated from high school in 1950. Then when I graduated, I went to Harbor College, which is close by. I continued to work weekends and whatever I could. Then the Korean War broke out. So, I figured, well, I'm going to be drafted. So, I just continued working full-time at the cannery. I had joined a union when I was sixteen years old. So, I had seniority. I could come and go when I wanted, pretty much and they took care of me. Then I joined the Navy Reserve. Shortly after that, I was drafted. Then I got a deferment for one year. One year later, I got drafted again. So, I activated myself into the Navy. I went into the Navy in 1953 for two years. When I came back in 1955, I took a test for the fire department, sheriff's department. I was working at the same time at StarKist and waiting for something to happen. Then the sheriff's called me. So, I went into the sheriff's department. After I'm in the sheriff's academy, the fire department called me. So, I go tell them, "I can't quit now. I don't want to quit when I'm in the academy." So, I stayed in the sheriff's department for one year. The third time I got called for the fire department, I accepted.

MS: That was your dream from a little boy then?

MM: From my dream.

MS: Tell me that.

MM: So, I left the sheriff's department. I was working up near Magic Mountain, the sheriffs on our farm. Went on to the fire department April of 1957. After I graduated from the fire academy, I was enjoying myself working my days at the fire station, going to the beach on my days off and playing volleyball. Pretty soon, I went back to the cannery. I told them, "Hey, anything comes up, let me know. I'm ready to do some part-time work." So, I started working with the shipping and receiving department and advertising department. Little by little, I got more and more into the office. They asked me if I'd take over the record retention center. So, I did that. Pretty soon, I'm arranging parties at the Bogdanovich family home and company parties and arranging parties with caterers. The job kept growing. Then when I finished my fire years, I had twenty-five years on and I had an accident. I couldn't go back. So, I stayed at StarKist and they made me an office manager there. I finished out my next ten years as an office manager.

MS: To go back to the war years, and you were here in San Pedro, what were the war years like in San Pedro? What was going on here? This place must have been pretty jumping then, huh?

MM: Yes. There was military all over San Pedro. I remember when the lumber schooner was torpedoed off Point Fermin out there. I think it was first part of the war, [19]42 or something like that. We went out to the beach and watched it come in, limping in. Military was all over. I remember searching lights at nighttime when they had air raids, blackouts, barrage balloons. Yes, all those things. When I'd be down at the fishing boat with my father, military would be down around the dock sometimes and get to talk to the servicemen. It was nice, young boys.

MS: Now, don't let me forget about the parties at the Bogdanovich's because I want to continue where we were.

MM: Yes.

MS: So, we're talking about during World War II, and what was going on there.

MM: Yes. During World War II, I recall them closing off Pacific Avenue down around 21st Street around there, and then down before the beach on Pacific. Keeping the lower and middle reservation all intact in one parcel so that no one can go through the base. It was pretty restricted around there. As far as Terminal Island, you couldn't go on Terminal Island without a Navy pass.

MS: Now, what about the Radio Cafe? What is the Radio Cafe?

MM: Radio Cafe was at Wharf Street and Seaside on the west side of the street. Down from there used to be the Bethlehem Shipyard. General Petroleum was behind it. Southern Cal Cannery was on the east side right across the street from the Radio Cafe. My grandmother was a cook working in the Radio Cafe. It was owned by the Dalton family. They wanted to get out of the business, so my grandfather bought it. Then he had his wife continue to cook. His daughters were the waitresses. They had excellent business. A lot of the cannery workers, shipyard workers, made a lot of movies on the island over there at that time. So, they did very well.

MS: What kind of menu?

MM: I asked that question of what kind of a menu it was, and my aunt, who's still in a restaurant, told me they cooked everything. They cooked some Slavic dishes, and there were just general meals. When long shoremen strike, they made a lot of money. There were a lot of policemen coming in there to eat. Plus, all the regular routine people.

MS: What years were they? When was it open?

MM: They bought it in about 1925. My grandfather passed away in 1944. So, then StarKist moved their offices. StarKist offices were in the main plant. They only had maybe twenty people working in the office. They moved down the street to 582 Tuna Street. They got a Navy building and converted it to a StarKist office. My two aunts went there. They opened up a

cafeteria before StarKist within the office building. So, that's where they worked.

MS: Why the name Radio Cafe?

MM: I don't know why the name Radio Cafe, how it began. I don't know. It came with the building when they bought it.

MS: Let's talk about your experiences in the fire department. 1940, there was a big fire on – I think it was 1940 on the –

MM: Marquee?

MS: Well, I don't know. Was it the Marquee? I think that was [19]46, I think.

MM: Marquee it was, yes.

MS: Were you involved with that?

MM: No, I was too young. I was too young.

MS: About the Matson fire?

MM: At the Matson fire, I was working at –

MS: Give me a date for that.

MM: Matson fire, I remember –

MS: 1960.

MM: The Matson fire was 1960, March 17th, I believe. We moved up to Florence, at Fire Station 33 to cover their area because they went into the fire. After being there about a half hour, they called us to go into the fire down in Wilmington. It was very heavy smoke and impossible to penetrate the dock. They called companies from LA with special equipment to saw through the jack hammers, through the wharf to try to cut it off. It was so well built. Cross members, large timbers, going all different directions, you couldn't penetrate the fire from above. From that time on, the scuba diving concept came to be. Plus, they changed the construction methods of building wharfs.

MS: Well, what was that fire? What was burning? How did it get started?

MM: I believe it was started with welders in the area. That's all I could recall as far as the way it started. It was impossible to put out. Fireboats were pouring water, but it just couldn't penetrate the –

MS: What was the fuel? What was burning?

MM: Timbers, creosote, that's right there. Once it gets heated, couldn't stop it.

MS: So, were you in the midst of the smoke of all that?

MM: Oh, yes. Yes, I was there.

MS: How was it fighting that fire?

MM: It was hard. It was a very difficult fire. We were there all night long and then go back until the next day. That was just in the beginning of when they were coming out with breathing apparatus. So, we didn't have all the proper equipment at the time either.

MS: So, another big fire was the StarKist Cannery fire, which was ten years later. Tell me about that fire.

MM: The StarKist fire, yes, I remember I was working in Barton Hill, and we were the second company there. As we went over the Vincent Thomas Bridge, we could see the glow and the fire. It was early in the morning, maybe 6:00 a.m., 5:30 to 6:00 a.m. So, as we got there, we were told to protect – there were some one-ton chlorine tanks. So, we stayed with those chlorine tanks and kept them cool so they wouldn't blow up. So, I had never imagined that a two-story building, the size of a football field could go that fast. We just couldn't get enough water on it. Started with a fish mill plant and a spontaneous combustion.

MS: How did that work on fish mill? How did it start then? What physically would happen?

MM: Fish mill creates its own fire. It just bursts into flame. It's happened on ships before too. I've been on fish mill fires on board a ship. It's worse on a ship. They were in paper bags, and if you wet the paper bags, it just falls apart and it doesn't need an ignition point. It starts by itself.

MS: So, you're sitting there protecting these chlorine tanks, which if in fact, they get too hot, are going to explode.

MM: Yes.

MS: So, you're doing a good job, I would expect.

MM: Oh, yes. We stayed there for hours. They stayed cool.

[laughter]

MS: So, did you though save –

MM: Oh, yes. Yes. We were okay.

MS: Tell me more about that fire. I'd heard a little bit about it. That the fish oil was also

burning and there were two buildings that were involved in that fire.

MM: Well, it's a two-story building. StarKist plant number one, your wet fish was packed upstairs and your tuna was packed downstairs. Then at the time of this fire, they were packing pet food. There was a bridge going between the two buildings over Terminal Way or Cannery Street – over Cannery Street. That had to be protected so it didn't get into the other building across the street. So, it was a wooden bridge about two hundred feet long, wooden bridge. But I don't think it went into another building. Well, adjoining building to StarKist was Van Camp. Then there was Tuna Street was on one side, and Van Camp was on the other side. I think it was confined to StarKist.

MS: A number of people have told us about the Sansinena fire. What about that?

MM: Yes, I remember. I think that was December 17th. Oh, [laughter] we were at the fire station in Barton Hill, and we heard the explosion. We knew we were going to go somewhere, and then we got the alarm. They gave us the berth number to go to. We get down there and we couldn't figure out what it was. There was fire everywhere. My partner next to me says, "I hope we live to talk about this." We didn't know what we had. There were just rivets everywhere. Just buildings moved. I don't know where they belonged, but they were just moved.

MS: So, what happened? You arrived and what did you do next?

MM: Well, we started pouring water. Then my station had a rig that produced foam – foam rig. So, one of the chiefs said maybe foam will be better to start pouring on this. So, we went back to our fire station, brought our other foam rig, and started pouring that on. But the fire was so hot that I don't know that it helped. It just kept burning.

MS: What could you see? Could you see the ship in pieces, or what did you see?

MM: Couldn't figure out what it was. It was dark at that time. You saw part of a ship, and you saw part of it look on land. So, I couldn't figure out until I saw the next day in the pictures what it was. We just didn't know. I never seen so many ambulances. The police, when we went back to get to our station, police were out at every intersection. They did a great job. Every window was blown out of San Pedro on the downtown. Every store window was blown out. Glass everywhere.

MS: So, when the morning came and you saw what had happened, what had happened?

MM: We were just happy we lived through it. It was still burning because fuel lines were coming from a navy fuel depot. They were backing down. Some of that fuel was coming back down.

MS: So, if you can take us there. What did it sound like, smell like, look like? I mean, what was –

MM: The sound, well, I don't know how to describe a loud explosion. But when we were

several miles away and people thirty, forty miles away, I understand, heard it too. So, it was loud. Glass business was great for a while.

MS: What about the fire itself when you got there? Was it roaring?

MM: No, it wasn't roaring. Just burning. It had a lot of open air. It wasn't roaring because it was an empty ship. It was just the vapors that blew. It wasn't a roaring fire.

MS: Did you see any of the victims on the piers or docks?

MM: No. The fire boats were pulling them out of the water.

MS: So, you saw that?

MM: No, we didn't see that. They all got letters of commendations and they got awards because they did a good job. They got them right on the ambulances and took them to the hospitals.

MS: All right. Surprisingly, a few people got killed.

MM: Yes.

MS: Although, I guess one guard shack –

MM: Yes, we saw the guard shack.

MS: Tell me about that.

MM: As we pulled in, we saw the guard shack had been toppled over. Then other little buildings, not knowing what they were, we didn't know what we saw. We just saw a lot of fire, and the ship looked like it was on dock.

MS: But I understand the center of the ship came up and landed right on top of a building. Did you see a part of the ship on the dock?

MM: Yes, we saw part of the ship on the dock. We saw that. But it was just an unbelievable site.

MS: Was that the worst fire you ever fought?

MM: No, I don't think so.

MS: What was the worst fire? I mean, Harbor Fire, what was the –

MM: Oh, Harbor Fire. Yes, between that and the StarKist fires, they were probably the two biggest fires in the harbor that I've been to.

MS: Talk about the parties, the Bogdanovich parties, who would go there and tell us about your escorting adventures.

MM: Oh, okay. Joe Bogdanovich would never eat alone. He would always have company at his house, whether it'd be some of his tennis players or businesspeople. We've had people from the Orient, Africa, Europe, movie stars. He always had politicians. He knew them all. He knew every president. In fact, I was taking him to the airport one Sunday and he says, "Matt, why don't you take my wife down to Nixon's house to a party? I can't make it." So, I went home, changed my clothes, and went and picked her up and went down to San Clemente to the party. It was an anniversary of astronauts landing on the moon, I think. Movie stars, Cesar Romero, and the mayor of Hollywood. I forget what's the name of the mayor of Holly –

MS: Johnny Grant.

MM: Johnny Grant, and Elliot Ness. He was there, and all the astronauts. I didn't feel right. So, I just walked around and acted like I was a secret service [laughter]. I didn't want to talk with anyone. So, I just mingled with the crowd.

MS: You didn't go up and introduce yourself to the president?

MM: No, no. Jimmy Roosevelt was there. No, I didn't go introduce myself to the president. Now, I figured, who's this guy? So, I just got away with it.

MS: Tell me about some of the other people who came to the parties at the Bogdanovich's.

MM: The politicians that I recall was Senator Cranston, John Tunney. William Rogers was the attorney general, I think.

MS: So, were the Bogdanovich's the supporters of the Republican Party, Democratic Party, or both sides?

MM: Both sides. Yes, they'd support both sides. More Republican, but he wanted his picture taken with every president. He has a picture with everybody. He was in that – what do they call it? The Eagle Club or something. You give so much money and you get to go to the White House dinners. So, yes, he knew them all.

MS: So, what happened to the canning business and the fishing business in San Pedro?

MM: What happened to the canning business? Well, first of all, we moved to Samoa because labor was cheaper there. We got some incentives down there. Then we moved to Puerto Rico. Had a big cannery in Puerto Rico – four thousand people employed. That was a good operation. Little by little, foreigners learned how to pack tuna, Thailand, Philippines. See, there was no or very low tariff on tuna packed in water. There was a high tariff on tuna packed in oil. So, they all started packing tuna in water and could bring it into the States. Very low tariff. We had a small cannery in Ghana. We bought one in France, Ecuador. It was a very international company. I used to deal with people from all over the world just to go take them, entertain them



on weekends, show them around LA, show them around Hollywood.

MS: So, basically, piece by piece by piece, the San Pedro Harbor fishing and canning business just went away.

MM: Yes.

MS: It was strictly costs or are there other reasons? Was there competition that was – some people told me that it was fished out. There weren't any fish nearby.

MM: They brought the fish in. Tuna is what they call a pelagic fish. It just goes anywhere. It's not local. It's worldwide. So, if there's fish in South America, and the canneries here, if they want to bring it in, they can bring it in. So, it's cheaper to take it to Samoa or Ecuador.

MS: So, that tradition of fishing, which your father was involved with, and you were involved with, just went away. I mean, what did you feel about that?

MM: Well, that's part of evolution. Things change. Nothing stays the same. We used to have horse and buggies. People made buggy whips. Where's that business? So, fishing is the same way.

MS: But you don't feel nostalgic about it?

MM: Yes. I'm glad I was part of it. I made a living at it and did well for me and my family.

MS: All the years you've lived in San Pedro, how would you describe this place to somebody who's never heard of it and what you feel about having grown up here?

MM: I'm very happy to have lived in San Pedro. I still know people from my childhood. We've all stayed here. Most of us stayed here. No one wanted to leave. You leave for a while, and they're sorry that they've ever left, the people that have gone. I don't think there's anywhere better between the climate and the people we associate with. It's getting a little too big, but I think it's a great place.

MS: I have a feeling when Martin Bogdanovich and your uncle came here in 1912, they sort of thought maybe it was getting a little too big too, right? [laughter]

MM: Well, I think I read were three, four thousand people lived in San Pedro then. There was a lot of space.

MS: [laughter]

MM: A lot of space. So, there's no space anymore. People fighting for ball fields now. Before, you could play ball anywhere. There was never a problem finding a place to play ball. Now, there is.

MS: Of all your years here, what's your fondest memory of growing up and living and working here? What's the memory you remember the best and longest?

MM: My fondest memory probably, I'm looking back now and when I came out of the service, I went back to work at StarKist. One of my friends at StarKist says, "Let's go on a double date. I have a girl to take out for you." So, I married her and we're still married.

MS: Now, working in a cannery, did you carry with you a certain perfume on dates or did you have to clean up [laughter] on a regular basis?

MM: Working in a cannery, you had to make sure you washed yourself very well and take an extra shower or extra length of time. Well, I didn't have a car, and we'd have to take the bus home. If it was during the daytime, people would get on the bus and start booing the cannery workers. It was embarrassing sometimes coming home on a bus, but we did it.

MS: Your wife when she first met you, I mean, did –

MM: She worked in StarKist.

MS: She worked in StarKist.

MM: She was a secretary.

MS: So, she knew what you were doing then, huh?

MM: She knew it, and I had just come out of service, and I told her it was only temporary [laughter]. No, I had mentioned that I took a couple tests for other jobs. But we didn't know we were going to get married. I didn't have to tell her anything.

[laughter]

MS: How many years married?

MM: I think forty-seven.

MS: That's enough.

MM: Yes.

MS: Anything else you want to share with us? Any stories or information you think we should have to put in the posterity bin for the future? Anything that's particularly memorable or important that you can recall?

MM: I can't think of anything. I'd hate to take up all your time.

MS: No, we got plenty of time. Tell me if anything comes to mind.

MM: No, I can't think of it.

MS: Anything while you were growing up as a kid that struck you that you remember. You were working hard, but something that was particularly fun or something that was particularly memorable that happened to you when you were young?

MM: It caught me a flat footed. I can't think of anything.

[laughter]

MS: All right. Great. Thank you.

MM: Well, I hope it all works out.

MS: It will. If you could slide your chair over about – well, a great length talking, about the 34th strike.

MM: Yes. Right, right.

MS: Torrance Parker, who was a deep-sea diver from (*Sansinena?*).

MM: Yes, I met him at the museum. He's one of the board of directors, I think, down there.

MS: Yes. Yes.

[end of transcript]