Port of Los Angeles Centennial Oral History Project
Martha McKinzie Oral History
Date of Interview: Unknown
Location: Los Angeles, California
Length of Interview: 00:54:33
Interviewer: MS – Unknown
Transcriber: NCC

Male Speaker: Okay. The first question is the hard one, please say your name and spell it.

Martha McKinzie: [laughter] My name is Martha Austin McKinzie. Martha, M-A-R-T-H-A. Austin, A-U-S-T-I-N. McKinzie, M-C-capital K-I-N-Z-I-E.

MS: Okay. What year were you born and where?

MM: I was born July 23rd, 1947. I was born at a hospital that is no longer there in Long Beach. Because my dad was a Navy man, so that was where the hospital was.

MS: I see from your notes here, some of the memories you have of early days in San Pedro. What's the story about Moaning Maggie? What's that?

MM: Some of the earliest memories that I have a San Pedro growing up as a girl was lying in bed in the morning and being woken up by Moaning Maggie. I always knew kind of what day it was because I'd hear her. "Ahaa." You've probably heard stories like this already. But I would know whether it was a foggy day or how it was.

MS: Pretend I don't know anything. So, don't say, "Oh, you already know that story."

MM: Oh, okay.

MS: Start from the beginning, "My earliest memories."

MM: My earliest memories of San Pedro are basically, when I was a young girl lying in bed, waking up in the morning, being woken up by Moaning Maggie. She was the foghorn in town. We always would know what kind of day it was because of her sound. I would probably know that it was a foggy day. I'd have to walk to school in the fog or that. But I always remember Moaning Maggie. Now you can get Moaning Maggie drinks down at 22nd Street Landing [laughter].

MS: So, tell me more, what was the sound like when you woke up?

MM: Oh, Moaning Maggie was a great sound. "Ahaa, Ahaa." Of course, I'd wake up to that in the morning and know what kind of day it was going to be. It was great. You always heard stories about Moaning Maggie.

MS: Aside from the fact that that's what it sounded like, any other basis for that nickname?

MM: Gee, good point. What's the basis for Moaning Maggie's nickname? I have no idea. If my parents ever told me, I don't remember [laughter].

MS: Let's talk about, you were growing up here, it still was a big fishing industry. Talk about the impact of the fishing industry and what, again, some of your memories of knowing the fishing industry was here.

MM: Growing up in San Pedro, the fishing industry was quite important. I was aware of its importance, again, by another central thing to your senses, I guess. Cut that out [laughter]. Okay. Some of my memories of San Pedro, early days, especially it being a fishing town, was the smell of fish. We never really learned to take it in the negative way. If you got out in the morning and you smelled fish, you knew that was good. That meant people were working, and people were making money. That was a good thing. I remember not really – my classmates and us walking to school. Even when we came home from school, and we take the bus downtown, we would smell the ladies coming back from the cannery. It was, "Oh, yes, she –" it's definitely there. The smell was definitely there. But it wasn't a negative connotation. We couldn't even understand – there was a department store in town called Dunlap's. A lot of us felt really bad for the cannery ladies when they would come home, and they would stop downtown and do a little shopping. We would hear the store lady say, "Oh, I'm sorry, you have to go. You can't stay in here. Your smell is too bad." We felt that really offensive because, I mean, they were only doing their job. Fish was the smell of the town. Nowadays, when kids smell even a can of tuna opening up, they go, "Eww." It's what I was brought up with; fish is good. It's money [laughter].

MS: Talk about, again, as a girl, the activities of the port and what you were seeing and what was intriguing and interesting to you living in a port town.

MM: Living in a port town and my family being very connected to the sea, it was always – my parents would always take an opportunity to educate. I don't think they were consciously educating me. But my dad would – we would take rides. He would take me down in the car. We'd go down and park right down here on the dock and sit. Some days, we'd have a sandwich or something. Or most of the days, we just sat there. As the ships came in and went out, he would explain them to me. He would go over bulkheads and things like that and what they were, why that ship was doing that and what the tugboats were doing. So, I sat really, literally, on the dock, in the car, and we had this great, complete touching with the dock, a real closeness.

MS: What did you think of that, what you were seeing? Was that intriguing to you?

MM: Oh, yes, it was very intriguing. It still intrigues me to this day. I loved seeing the ships coming in. One of my uncles was a Merchant Marine. It was great. Because when I was younger, I just knew that – in fact, my dad would come down. We'd see maybe the *Golden Bear* come in. That was the ship that my uncle was on, just coming from Kobe, Japan. It was always a great family thing. We'd go and meet the ship, get him off, and bring them home. Sure enough, within a week or two, he'd be taking me to Gardena to have Japanese food and experience what he had experienced in Japan, myself, and my cousins included. So, he was like the male counterpart of Auntie Mame. He was always bringing me those stories of faraway places. So, that was another great connectedness we had with the sea.

MS: What did your father do? Did he work right in the port? What was the job?

MM: Well, my father grew up in Point Fermin Lighthouse. He joined the Navy when he was 15 and went to sea. When he came back, he did work for the school that I went to. Eventually – he always wanted to be a tugboat captain – he worked for the Harbor Department as a gardener.

Because he loved flowers and that. He ended up working at the Harbor Department.

MS: Talk about the Fishermen's Fiesta. What is that?

MM: I'd have to say the Fishermen's Fiesta is the biggest memory because it transpired not only in my early years, but also into my preteen years. The Fishermen's Fiesta was a time of great community gathering. I had, of course, a lot of friends that were – their parents owned boats or fished on them or cooked on them. My good friend, Cristina DiScala, the DiScala family, they had the *St. Cristina*. But Mr. DiScala moved that up to Alaska to fish during the summers. So, I remember his brother-in-law, Aniello Iacono, he cooked on the *St. George*, I believe. Oh, fantastic. Fishermen's Fiesta, you got to go and ride on a boat, experience this celebration of the industry and the people that were involved in the industry. You were celebrating the outcomes of it. So, like any other event, you had great mostaccioli and Italian food. I just remember all that and just great times with decorated boats.

MS: Describe what it was. What was the Fishermen's Fiesta?

MM: The Fishermen's Fiesta, in fact, they just had it this last weekend again. It's a lot smaller. The Fishermen's Fiesta was an event in San Pedro. It's actually throughout different parts of the world where there's a fishing community, where the people that fish celebrate their season. In so doing though, they also connect with the church and have the blessing of the of the fleet. In the early days, there was not a real problem with that. Therefore, the priests would come down and bless the fleet. After that blessing, we would have a huge parade. Of course, this was a three-day event. This was the Sunday part of it, the finale, kind of. We would get on boats. Some boats would be decorated elaborately, like Jack in the boxes. Some would just have foil covered all over them, so they could be shiny, and lights. We'd have the fireboat lead us. We'd take off, and forty or fifty boats would follow. It was a great event. We would meet with food and frivolity on board. It was just a great time to celebrate that event. Even though my close family did not fish, I know that a lot of my friends, my neighbors, fished. So, we'd partake of it too.

MS: That sounds great. Talk about the Matson Line and the *Lurline*.

MM: Part of my family, again, just being raised here in San Pedro, had some cousins on the Matson Line that they got some summer work. They were going through college and that. So, the Matson Line became a little bit of an eventful thing in our family life. Because we would go down to visit people coming in or taking off or even if we didn't know anybody coming in or taking off. But we knew the people that worked aboard. My cousins worked as stewards. We would go down to the Matson dock over in Wilmington and do the tickertape thing and enjoy that, people going – and we did that apparently, even when I grew up. Because my mom and dad would say that they would take me aboard boats, ships, and they were saying goodbye to somebody. Then they'd give a – I believe it's a five- or ten-minute whistle to get off, disembark the ship. I would just be like, "Oh, no, we've got to go. We've got to go." I was always so afraid we were going to be taken off, which nowadays, I'd love to go to Hawaii [laughter]. But the Matson Line was a real nice event, the *Lurline* and the other ships that were involved going to Hawaii.

MS: Well, describe it. What happened? Explain, when a ship left, what's the gala kind of celebration?

MM: Well, when a ship was leaving, especially on a trip to Hawaii – which the *Lurline* did, of course, people were going on vacation – if you were not going on, you would still go down aboard the boat, the ship, and visit with the people that were going away. So, you would have drinks and food and celebrate kind of like a nice big cocktail party. Of course, I was a little girl. We would always say goodbye. You're wishing a bon voyage to the people that are going. Then you would be asked with a five- or ten-minute whistle to disembark. You would go off. Again, then the ticket taper people would throw ticker tape from the ship to the dock and lots of just tooting of horns and yelling and just a lot of celebration as the ship went away. It was just a fun time. It was just kind of like people took a lot of time to really experience the moment.

MS: Now you grew up in San Pedro. A girl maybe similar in your background and who grew up in Ames, Iowa versus someone who grew up in San Pedro, what is special about growing up in San Pedro, different than a girl growing up in Iowa or New York or Boston or Chicago? What's different about growing up in San Pedro?

MM: I think growing up in San Pedro, if I had to compare myself to a girl in the Midwest – actually, I married a man from the Midwest. So, we had little cultural differences, not be in the connectedness to the sea, whether it be in the fishing industry, whether it be in the longshoring industry, whether it be in any other aspect of the sea, enjoying the sea as the nature part of your life growing up and the diverse community that we live in. The sea brought in people from all over the world. Not to say that that doesn't happen in the Midwest, but the sea was our point of connectedness. I think that I was able to experience that growing up. I did.

MS: Did it give you a sense of a bigger world that maybe you might get in a town that's not a port?

MM: Yes, growing up in San Pedro definitely gave me a sense of a bigger world. I remember studying geography in fifth grade and just reading it from the page. But it came to life because I had relatives that were traveling there or had traveled there. It always was interesting to me then, even though I was just reading it from a page in the book. I remember once, had a young man come down. I was in about my 20s. He came down from Montana. Of course, especially at that time, we were still more of a suburb of Los Angeles. He was like, "Oh, look at these cars. Look at, you don't have any open spaces. I look out, and I see elks and that." So, I was out on the coast one day with him. I said, "Oh, look at there." I said, "Have you ever seen a gray whale?" So, he looked at me and went, "Touche." That was it. I mean, I think we've experienced that too. We experience our nature is a little bit further out and maybe a little harder to see, but it's still there.

MS: But I think the idea of ships from foreign lands coming and going, you see Japanese –

MM: Oh, definitely. You have all this diverse community from people coming from overseas. Again, my father, when I was younger, I'm thinking when I was about 10 or 12, he was not sailing anymore. He was out of the Navy. But he and my uncles, they always brought

somebody home. So, we always had a guest at our table. He could be from a place in England. He could be a place from China or Japan. We always had that openness to learn other languages. Because my family spoke some Spanish. But I would go down, and I'd go into my girlfriends' houses and hear Italian and Yugoslav. I'd have to teach my girlfriend's mother how to dance the polka, and she didn't even speak a word of English. So, I'd have to communicate with Spanish to Italian to Yugoslav, the openness that it gave. So, I definitely think that my being raised in San Pedro affected my openness to the world and to the community at large and all the communities of the world it encompasses. Compared to the Midwest, they just didn't experience a lot of that differences of people that we do here in San Pedro.

MS: That's good. Let's start now about the lighthouse. Can you give me a brief early history of the Point Fermin Lighthouse from when it was built, who it was named for, what did it do in the early days?

MM: Okay. The Point Fermin Lighthouse was built in 1874. It is in San Pedro at the Point Fermin, on the cliffs. It was named for Father Francisco Fermin de Lasuen. Father Francisco Fermin de Lasuen was the counterpart to Father Junipero Serra. A lot of people don't know that Father Serra really didn't completely find all the missions, that he died in the interim of it. Father Fermin – we call him -- he took over. There was another man involved, George Vancouver, who sailed up and down the coast naming places. George Vancouver was actually a friend of both priests, knew them. He respected them quite a lot. Thus, he is the one that gave the point its name, after Father Fermin de Lasuen. So, now, we have Point Fermin. Now, the lighthouse is there mainly because of a man named Phineas Banning. Phineas Banning came here as a young man from the East. He was an energetic and smart, intelligent man, knew a lot about commerce, and want to make it work. He knew that he had to bring the rails down from Los Angeles to the port. He also knew he had to make the port accommodating the ships that were coming in, and we needed a light. Burning bushes on the hill just did not do it. So, Phineas banning actually lobbied Congress for about twenty, twenty years to bring a lighthouse to the point to mark the entrance to what would be the harbor. He was finally successful. In 1973, the Congress finally –

MS: 1873.

MM: I'm sorry.

MS: Start over. Go ahead.

MM: Okay. In 1873, he was finally successful. The Congress allocated money to build the Point Fermin Lighthouse. Thus, in 1874, the lighthouse was completed. On December 15th, 1874, the light was put in commission by being lit for the first time.

MS: So, tell us about its service, what did it do, who manned it, and what kind of light it was and all that.

MM: Okay. The Point Fermin Lighthouse provided a great service by marking the entrance to the harbor, by marking the dangerous cliffs out at sea. It was serviced by, at that time, United

States Lighthouse Service. They were keepers, basically, the general public. Because lighthouses came into being on the West Coast, Alcatraz being the first probably, right around the Gold Rush. So, lighthouse, they were basically, the Lighthouse Service recruited regular people. They had to have some kind of qualification. They'd pass those. They recruited them as keepers of the lighthouses. Thus, they were appointed to serve in a lighthouse and take care of the light. At the Point Fermin Light, we have a fourth-order Fresnel lens, fourth order being the fourth from the largest size. It would shine out about 60 miles out to sea. The early days, it was a wick and then went into mantle's because it was kerosene. Then in 1888, it was turned to kerosene vapor. It stayed kerosene vapor until 1925, when the lighthouse was finally electrified, and we turned into electricity.

MS: Now, in 1874, when this lighthouse was first opened, the so-called Port of Los Angeles was not much [laughter]. Describe what it was –

MM: I need my husband here.

MS: – in 1874.

MM: Okay. In the 1874, when the lighthouse was built, the Port of Los Angeles was a little bit past Timm's Landing. Mudflats, it was still mudflats. Dead Man's Island was still there, Rattlesnake Island, all the other islands, Mormon Island. It was just entering the point of possibly being a connection to Los Angeles. Thus, the lighthouse, it being there, facilitated ships coming in. At that time, ships were coming in basically empty. They only had coal as your ballast or maybe bricks or tile. In fact, we have some of them in the lighthouse now that we have traced back to England and Scotland. But they would come in as ballast, and they would load hides. Because this was the Rancho Palos Verdes. Cattle ranching was still going on, the hide productions. So, hides went out in large quantities. Until then people started arriving, and we needed lumber. Then thus, lumber started coming in in the port. Then you had San Pedro being an independent city and then Los Angeles finally coercing her to come back into Los Angeles and the building of the port of course.

MS: This is terrific. Thank you. Who was Mary Smith? Talk about the beginnings of the lighthouse and its inhabitants.

MM: The Point Fermin Lighthouse, in 1874, when it was commissioned, was first manned by two lighthouse keepers, the main lighthouse keeper, the head lighthouse keeper, and the assistant. Many people always expect that it's going to be a gentleman. I love to tell them that it's not and that the first lighthouse keepers were actually two women, two sisters, Mary and Ella Smith. They came from the north, Washington, actually from Ediz Hook Lighthouse. The early stories always would tell of the girls coming down for ill-health, and they wanted to come to better climate. That they did. But it wasn't so much physical health, after researching them, finding out that they were having some little political problems up in Port Angeles and Port Townsend. There was a little fight for where the Customs House was going to be. Their brother, George Smith, who had been appointed by the understudy of Abraham Lincoln and Abraham Lincoln's cabinet, he was in charge of the customs up there. Being associated with the Smith family, they kind of had to leave town early, fast, quick. They arrived at Point Fermin in 1874,

two young ladies, and took keeper of the house. Of course, their father had passed away, up in Washington. So, they were ready for a change. They stayed eight years at Point Fermin. It was difficult for them. They did hire some men, three that we've seen in pictures, one actually being an African American man, as a paid person to help them with the heavy lifting and things like that. But they found it a bit isolated. I mean, if you can imagine, 1874, they had to take – to go shopping, they'd have to go to Wilmington. It would be a whole day's event, to buggy out there, shop, and come back. So, they were pretty, pretty isolated. So, after eight years, they hung it up and passed it on to somebody else.

MS: What do we know about their characters? What kind of women were they?

MM: We're researching the characters of Mary and Ella Smith. Just by coming to the lighthouse in 1874, I love to tell people that that was two years before the Battle of Little Bighorn. I mean, to me, the Battle of Little Bighorn is like the Wild West. These are two young women, probably in their late 20s, I would think, 1874, coming from Washington, down to Southern California. They had to be courageous individuals and adventurous. Because they were taking on a big, big piece, and they were also manning a light. They didn't have a lot of help around. There weren't very many homes in the area at that time. So, they were quite pioneers in the field. I'm so proud, when I go to like the Capitol in Sacramento, and there's celebrations of women in the pioneering of California. There she is, Mary Smith, one of the first keepers of a lighthouse as a woman.

MS: So, who came next?

MM: Next, we had two men, Captain Engels and Captain Shaw. Captain Engels stayed. He was a very industrious man. He made a few changes to the lighthouse as far as making cabinets, building cabinets, changing some rooms around. We were lucky that he did note it in many of his logs. So, again, we're researching, putting all this together. Discovering that we have cabinets that are in front of doors that were closed, it's really great to find out all these things. Captain Shaw was actually quite an interesting man. George Shaw was a real captain. He served in the Civil War. He was wounded in the Civil War. He went back into the Civil War. His second job was becoming a keeper of the Point Fermin Lighthouse. He stayed for twenty-two years. He married a woman in San Francisco. They moved to Point Fermin. He had one girl, Verna Shaw. She was born there and raised there and had her marriage there, which he also noted in a log. In fact, he must have been quite a gregarious man. He had gone through a lot in his life. He was not a shy person. He invited people. Lighthouse people were encouraged to do this. It was a public entity. Therefore, they were encouraged to invite people. But there was a registry at the lighthouse where visitors that came had to sign in, oh, in the turn of the century, in the late 1800s and that. I happen to get that register. It was passed on to me by my family. When we came to Captain Shaw's days, he wrote in big letters about the marriage of his daughter and what a great day it was. He finally retired and went to the Veterans Administration Home in South Hill and passed away there. He's buried in South Hill. We just found that out. So, he was quite an interesting man. We had a couple of other people after that.

MS: Tell me about them. Who were the next interesting people, and what year were they?

MM: After Captain Shaw, we had short interims of lighthouse keepers. There seemed to be a

little time of transition there. The next people that really came aboard was the Austin family, which is my family, in 1917. Will and Martha Austin were my grandparents, and they were lighthouse keepers. They came from Point Conception. Before Point Conception, they were in Point Arena. You can always tell where the child is in their lineup of family by what lighthouse they were born at. So, my Aunt Juanita was born at Point Arena, being older. My dad was born at Point Conception, being younger. The Austin family had come across the Lighthouse Service as a way to support a family. My grandfather was educated and was tired of being a ranch hand and a cowboy and saw the children starting to come and found this service. So, they joined the Lighthouse Service, Point Arena, Point Conception. In 1917, he had already a number of children. They were always seeking a place for education. At Point Conception, Lompoc was the nearest town, which today, it takes 45 minutes to get from, from Point Conception to Lompoc, in a car. My grandmother had to buggy the kids into Lompoc. So, sometimes, they would stay maybe a week for school. Then they also tried bringing the teacher out to Point Conception to take care of – there were two other families there and the Austins, didn't work very well. He kept requesting a change, requesting a change, and finally, in 1917, he got a change to Point Fermin. Thus, the Austin family arrived at Point Fermin.

MS: So, what are some of the family stories of those years at the lighthouse? Any particular adventures or instances where maybe the lighthouse served its purpose, a ship was grounded or something like that?

MM: Yes. I have one before that. We'd tell this in our tour of the lighthouse, because there's some connecting today, with years ago, and the lighthouse. The lighthouse did serve its purpose, but always, maybe not exactly understood by the people who were manning the ships. In 1888, the *Respiradero*, it grounded. It was a schooner. It grounded right out of Point Fermin. Apparently – I've read the accounts – the captain and the crew just basically said, "Let insurance pay for it. We're out of here." They walked off the ship. Of course, the people came to ride the ship. They had to take the ballast out, which was coal. So, they dumped the coal over the side of the ship at Point Fermin and righted the ship and off they went. Well, now, today, in 2007, after storm, we can go actually down to the rocks at Point Fermin and pick up coal. It's 1888 coal. It is so cool. I mean, it's wonderful to make that connection. We have a photograph of the ship as it was tilted aboard, on the rocks of Point Fermin. So, it just heed the sign of the light. But my family, in 1917, when they came to Point Fermin, they felt like they'd come to heaven. I mean, at that time, the park was Peck's Park. The Sepulvedas had turned over the land to the federal government. The Sepulvedas gave the land, but of course, the government paid them $35, which they still have the check in Washington, D.C. So, depends on who you're talking to, whether it was purchased or whether it was given. But the Sepulvedas wanted to give the land to the lighthouse and to the federal government. It is still federal government land today, the point, the actual point where the lighthouse is. My family came there. Well, they were excited, first of all, that they had indoor plumbing. That was a great plus. My aunts would always talk about that. But the family had lots of stories. I mean, they were Spanish. My grandmother was of the Californianos. She was an Avila. They spoke Spanish and English, the whole family did. If you were older, of course, you spoke more Spanish than the younger children. But I always tell the story that they came from Point Concepcion. So, they had to make sure they did that right. So, they had their tenth child at Point Fermin. They made sure that they did it the right way. Paul Fermin was born as the last child of the Austin family in 1919 in Point Fermin Lighthouse. Let

me rest for a minute. I've got to think of stories.

MS: Tell us stories you remember.

MM: Okay. I actually don't remember any of these stories since my grandparents actually ended up dying at Point Fermin. But I have lots of stories. Being a lighthouse family and so many children, I heard lots of stories. One was curious about my Uncle Bill. He was a Will then then he turned to a Bill when he became an adult. But he was basically the one in charge of dumping the garbage. Of course, they would tie a line around him and hoist him over the side of the cliffs. He would dump the garbage. Then they would hoist him back. Of course, Will, being as humorous as he is and trickster, one day, would take the line off of him, tied it to the bush, pulled it to like, bring me back up. Of course, he went around the cliffs and went up another side. So, when they finally yanked the bush up and saw that it was only a bush, everybody was quite scared and wondering. Then he came around to the side, laughing and that. Of course, as the story ends, he got whipped for it. Because that was my grandfather [laughter].

MS: Something from the bush, and he was [inaudible].

MM: Yes [laughter]. They got the bush and whipped him.

MS: Let's go ahead to World War Two. What happened to the port and to the lighthouse in World War Two?

MM: Point Fermin Lighthouse, in World War Two, 1941, December 8th, the day after Pearl Harbor, of course, the coast was darkened, and lights were put out. Thus, the Point Fermin Lighthouse was taken over by the federal government military. The light was taken down. The Fresnel lens, everything was dismantled and taken and actually put in the basemen, eventually, from the basement to a backyard in Terminal Island at the Coast Guard. Because now the Coast Guard was running the show. I have to have a drink of water.

MS: Okay. Sure.

MM: I'm going to cough. In fact, I wonder if I should tell a story about my aunt sneaking out. Should I?

MS: Yes, sure.

MM: All right. I'll do that first.

MS: Do that first.

MM: Yes.

MS: Okay. Hold on a second. Go ahead.

MM: Being from a lighthouse family, we have lots of stories. My aunts, Aunt Juanita and Aunt

Thelma, were older in the family and the only two girls that actually made it to adulthood. The rest were boys. When they came to Point Fermin in 1917, my Aunt Thelma was 16; my Aunt Juana was 13, young teenage girls. The only man that they had ever seen were their father, their brothers, and maybe a few other lighthouse keepers, not very exposed to men.

MS: Start it all over again. Okay.

MM: Coming from a lighthouse family, I have lots and lots of lighthouse stories. I've got to start again [laughter]. I lost my train of thought. Okay. Ready?

MS: Yes.

MM: Coming from a lighthouse family, I've lots and lots of lighthouse stories. My aunts, my Aunt Juanita and my Aunt Thelma, being the older of the family, the rest were boys. They came to Point Fermin in 1917. Well, Juanita was 13; Thelma was 16; teenage girls. The only boys, men that they had ever seen were their father, brothers, other lighthouse keepers. They enter the San Pedro area, the port, in 1917, when something is happening in the world that's very big. It's bringing shiploads of men in and out of the harbor. Well, they were just typical teenage girls. My aunt Thelma had a camera. She took lots of pictures. I have a picture of Thelma and Juanita rowing out to meet the schooners. They were actually the aloha girls. They would go out. I have pictures of them meeting and greeting Navy men aboard – on the decks of the ships. They would have a Navy guy on either side of them. They greeted the guys. We have one little room in the lighthouse, where they – on many tours that my aunts took me through, we would talk through the lighthouse as I was growing up – they had a three-quarter bed that was theirs. They shared it. But it's right near the balcony of the lighthouse. Well, Mr. Peck was promoting the development of San Pedro at the time. Thus, he built Peck's Pavilion at the end of Point Fermin Park. They had wrestling matches there on Tuesdays or boxing and dances on Friday or Saturday night. Well, unbeknownst to my grandfather, who was probably topside taking care of the light, his two little girls would put up the window, crawl across the roof to the balcony, down the stairs, and off to the dance. They would do this and come back and get in. I don't know if they were ever caught, or Pa just turned his head and didn't pay any attention to them. But it's always a cute story to tell people. They actually told me that when they were a very safe age about 70 years old [laughter]. So, they knew they weren't going to get in trouble [laughter].

MS: So, this event in 1918 and nineteen, that's World War One.

MM: World War One. This all happened in World War One, in 1917, when we were very involved.

MS: That's why sailors were coming in.

MM: That's why soldiers and – yes.

MS: So, talk about World War Two. What happened to the lighthouse?

MM: Point Fermin Lighthouse continued to serve a very prominent presence in our history,

especially of the port, in World War Two. On December 8th, 1941, the West Coast of the United States had to be darkened. That meant that people who lived here. If they did turn the light on at night, they had to make sure they had dark curtains or blankets up on their window so that the light would not go out. They had to make sure that if they did drive their car, they drove them without headlights on. In other words, we had to keep a dark presence because the United States was in fear of another invasion or bombing as what happened in Pearl Harbor. Thus, the coast was darkened. That also took place in the lighthouses along the coast. So, the Point Fermin light was taken down. The Fresnel lens was taken down, and the military took over the lighthouse and used the lighthouse in another aspect to help the war effort in World War Two. They took the Fresnel lens down. It went to the basement and eventually went over to Terminal Island. They put up what we describe as an early radar system. So, they took the lantern gallery of the lighthouse and put early radar detection and two sailors up there to watch the coast, 24/7. Because there were submarines, enemy submarines that were sighted off our coast many a time. They built this box around this thing that they put up. It was a very, very crude building. Everybody in town, especially Point Fermin, we looked up at it, and they just nicknamed it the chicken coop. Because at that time, everybody had victory gardens, growing fruit and vegetables in their backyard and chickens for eggs and meat et cetera. This looked just like a chicken coop. So, for many years, in fact, even when I was young, my father would take me by the lighthouse, and I'd look at it and go, "It's really a lighthouse? I mean, that doesn't look like a lighthouse." Because it still had the chicken coop on it until 1973 when Bill Olesen and John Olguin took it over.

MS: Let's talk about that. How was it reborn? It was dying and about to be torn down. Give a brief summary of what happened that brought it back to what it is today.

MM: The Point Fermin Lighthouse was always in a little bit of jeopardy of being torn down, even in the early days, even before my grandparents came there. We have 1911 accounts in the newspaper of some people looking – or the federal government, I don't remember who it was – looking to tear the lighthouse down. You have to remember Angels Gate was built in 1911, 1910, 1911, and Point Vicente came in 1925. So, now we had two other lights in the same area. Maybe Point Fermin wasn't serving the purpose it was set out to be. But of course, with World War Two, it ended up serving a great purpose by being that early radar system. But it was seen bad times. The U.S. government had already made arrangements in the [19]30s, with the City of Los Angeles, that the City of Los Angeles could use the house if they maintained it. The Coast Guard had a side entrance to the light to maintain the light. Basically, if you were a supervisor for the Department of Parks and Rec, you could live in the house. Thus, we had families that lived in the house for long times. That was actually a benefit to the lighthouse, especially to the preservation of the lighthouse. Because the families always respected the lighthouse, the inside of the lighthouse. They didn't tamper with it much as other lighthouses with the Coast Guard living in them. They just dismembered the lighthouse. But our lighthouse was very good. People come now – and we've only been open three years – and say, "Oh, my God, this is a beautiful place. None of your lath and plaster has been hurt." Because when they made additions to the house, like electricity, they did it on the outside of the walls rather than on the inside. Or they added plumbing. They added plumbing up in the tower for these two Navy guys during World War Two that had to man the chicken coop. They put the plumbing on the outside. We had terrible pipes going up and down the tower, but they still did not hurt the integrity of the

building. So, that was really very good.

MS: But a day came when they were going to bulldoze it, right?

MM: There were days that came when it was going to bulldoze it. John Olguin happened to overhear it. He happens to overhear a lot of things. He was infuriated and started right then, went down to Bill Olesen, talked to Bill Olesen, who was basically our founder of the Maritime Museum. Bill, being shipbuilder himself, remembered – Bill Olesen was the only man who remembered my family. He remembers coming down with his father onboard the ship. Because they made constant trips between San Francisco and Los Angeles. He remembers going by the Point Fermin Lighthouse and always loving it in the early teens. He remembers going out and visiting my family and getting to know my grandmother and my grandfather and some of the kids. But when he and John got together, and they knew that this could not happen, they became a team, a committee of two. They put on board Glenn Anderson at the time and a lot of other people to start this effort to save Point Fermin Lighthouse. I think that's when they knew that the hundredth birthday was coming up, and they had to redo this tower. So, Bill and John redid the tower.

MS: Were you there for the hundredth birthday party?

MM: [affirmative]

MS: Tell me about that. What was it like?

MM: The hundredth birthday party of the Point Fermin Lighthouse was very wonderful. I was there. I accompanied my aunts. My uncles were not around, but my Aunt Juanita and my Aunt Thelma were around. I accompanied them to the hundredth birthday of the lighthouse. It was a great day. It was a day where we had a huge birthday cake the shape of the lighthouse. What John Olguin went through to get everybody in town to make that cake. We had an old Model T parade. We had all kinds of activities for children. It was just a wonderful day, speeches and that. They had worked very hard on building that lantern gallery for the lighthouse to bring it back to what it was. Actually, John broke his leg in the middle of that, and Bill Olesen ended up doing most of the work [laughter] on that. But John was good at telling them where to put things.

MS: Well, when people say to you today – this is a kind of a final observation – when people say, "Why should we care about this old lighthouse," why should we care about the Point Fermin Lighthouse and want to preserve it and want to visit it and want to know about it? It doesn't do anything anymore. I mean, who cares? Why?

MM: We want to keep and care and just finesse the memory of the Point Fermin Lighthouse and all it did in history for our future. Because if we don't learn from our past, we cannot give anything to our future. As an educator, I know the powerfulness of educating people about the history. The Point Fermin Lighthouse is a real prominent mark in the development of the Port of Los Angeles, in the development of the City of Los Angeles, in the development of our little town of San Pedro, which has grown to be a big city. But it's very important. It's important.

The lighthouse is important for the maritime history. We have children now growing up with GPS, global positioning systems. We have children who might not learn how to read a map. They don't know that there were times in the history where lighthouse keepers, my aunts included, had to signal ships out at sea, and they had no radio communication. So, they would have to use their flags and put flags up. We're teaching them now, when they come to the lighthouse. I teach them that once my aunts put the flag up, upside down, accidentally, and oh, my God, the ship turned and came right to the lighthouse. Then they looked, my grandfather said a few choice words to these two girls, and they brought it down swiftly and put it back up. So, they knew the importance of that. Our children have to learn how things developed and how communication is developed. The lighthouses throughout the world have always been a symbol of man's caring for another man. Because you're on the land, but you have a fellow human being at the sea. I think that's why lighthouses have always hit a good point in people's lives and memories in that you can't see anything too bad about a lighthouse. We're very dedicated at the Point Fermin Lighthouse to educating our young, our young adults, our young children about what people did to make it safer for other people to come here and travel. I think that's an important issue.

MS: Perfect.

MM: Okay?

MS: Good.

MM: All right.

MS: Tell me an interesting story about how the signaling took place involving your aunts.

MM: My Aunt Juanita and Thelma, they were always there helping my grandfather with the light and that. A lot of people don't realize that in the light house, you have to communicate – in the early days, there was very little communication as far as radio and things like that. They were topside with my grandfather one day and noticing ships going down the coast. They were putting up the American flag. Being giddy teenage girls, they put it up. I can imagine them giggling and all that. All of a sudden, they noticed that the ship out at sea turned and was heading directly for the point. My grandfather looked up at the flag, noticed it was upside down, which indicates distress, come, help, SOS everything. He said a few choice words to these two girls. They hurriedly brought it back down, turn it upside down, and put it back up. The ship turned and went on its way to the port. But that's just one of the stories that they have.

MS: Great.

MM: Okay?

MS: Okay.

[end of transcript]