

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

Emilei Noceti: Emily Noceti, E-M-I-L-E-I, last name is N-O-C-E-T-I.

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

EN: I was born in 1974, and in Seattle, Washington.

MS: Good. Now, tell us about your father and his relation to the port.

EN: I don't know what year. I believe it was 1969 when my father was a longshoreman. What had happened was my mother's father was a longshoreman in Hawaii. There was a greater opportunity to move to the mainland, which they call it. They decided to move to Seattle. There was sponsorship. So, my father became a longshoreman through good word of saying he was of age, good worker, and got him in at that time.

MS: When and how did he come down to San Pedro?

EN: My father came in – actually, he transferred to the LA Long Beach Port, I believe it was 1985. He saw there was a greater opportunity to work a little bit more. What he did is he would just come down here and volunteer. His decision, because he did that, was because he had two girls going into college, which were my two older sisters. I was still a little bit younger. He liked it down here. Just saw there was a lot of work. I believe he did a reciprocal transfer with another longshoreman. What it was is, he wanted to go to Seattle, and my father wanted to move down to California.

MS: You came down with him then in [19]85?

EN: When my mother and my father moved down here in 1985, they kind of tested the waters to see what it was. I was probably about, I think, maybe twelve at that time. I know I was in junior high. A year later, I went ahead and moved here with them.

MS: So, tell us about how you got involved with the port and the harbor.

EN: I got involved in the union strictly because my father had passed away. My father was more struck on education. He really didn't want his girls down here. He didn't have the opportunity of education when he was growing up. Because he had a good job, and my mother was working in the United States, they decided not to really educate us about the harbor. When he passed away, it was then I decided – people had come up to me and said, "There's an opportunity for you to get in through the permissive role. Why don't you try it?" I never knew anything about it. But since my sisters were going – they finished college, but I had to make a stance there. I could have finished going to University of Washington, but because I know my mother – it was such a tragedy. It was unexpected. She wasn't working. So, then I decided to go ahead and try it, so I can take care of her.

MS: Well, tell me the story of your father's death. How'd you first hear about it? What was the

impact on your family, your mother? Just tell me the story of when you first heard about it and all that.

EN: Okay. I was in Seattle when my father passed away. He was very young. I believe he was forty-nine, to be exact. He just decided he wanted to lose a whole bunch of weight because he wanted to see his grandchildren. Well, what had happened is he was losing too much weight, and his heart couldn't handle it. He just had a massive cardiac arrest. So, when he had passed away, it was a big impact on our family, especially my mother. Because of course, she couldn't believe that. Of course, they were best friends. But we just kind of had to be strong about it. God decided it was my father's time to go. So, we put our heads together. Our main concern was to take care of my mother. But since she was a nurse at San Pedro Peninsula, but decided she couldn't work, couldn't live around that kind of environment in the hospital, the sick and all that. So, we just decided to move my mother back to Seattle. We took care of her. I did the opposite. I moved to San Pedro. I moved in with my dad's partner and his family in Riverside. So, every day, I would commute from Riverside and back. That was before Fast Track. They just kind of really helped me out and took me underneath their wings. I didn't have to pay any rent, do anything. They just – save your money, take care of your mother. Probably about two years, as soon as we got on our feet, I was able to settle my mom into Seattle. She decided to stay in Seattle with all – she had all the grandkids there. I decided to stay here and try it out.

MS: When you say your father's partner, his working partner, right?

EN: His working partner.

MS: Explain what that was.

EN: My father's working partner is just someone that he was really close to. They would work all the time, mostly just like a family, someone he trusted with his family and himself, his best friend, basically.

MS: That was at the harbor he was working with him?

EN: Right.

MS: So, explain that. Start again and explain his partner working at the harbor.

EN: My father's partner was a person who would just be a best friend, he would go to work with all the time. His name was Ron (Arriaga?). They were just best friends really.

MS: They worked together on the port.

EN: They worked together all the time at the port. Picked up the same jobs, just did everything together, basically.

MS: So, what is the permissive rule? How did that apply and get you into the job?

EN: From what I understand, the permissive rule is when someone passes away, and they're active – and I believe it was the age of 62, since they were the head of household –they passed down their job or their book, which they call it, to a sibling. What that does is a sibling is able to be head of household and basically just takes care of the widow, help them get on their feet. It's just family. Union's family taking care of each other.

MS: Had you ever thought of working on the docks ever, as a young girl?

EN: Oh, I never thought I would be working on the waterfront, especially in California. Seattle is my hometown. I've always loved it there. When I came to California, I thought it was too hot, and who would move here? Now, I think the opposite. I don't think I would move back to Seattle. I love California and for what it is, the sunshine, the positive energy. I just was going to school all the time. I was going to the University of Washington. I remember driving to school. I would see the port on the right-hand side in Seattle. I never knew what it really meant because my father really wanted us to do the education.

MS: Now, as a young girl, what were your dreams? What did you see yourself becoming and what did you want to be?

EN: Growing up, I wanted to actually be some kind of field of biology – medical field. I just found it fascinating. My sister's in the medical field. I don't know. It's just something that I thought I'd be interested in. But there was a change of heart. After I came here, I think my calling was really just having a family, being here, working on the waterfront. What I see the waterfront, I don't see it just as working, having a job. I see I really know what union's about. It's family. There's the pensioners, or they call it the old timers. The stories that I've read through the Harry Bridges Institute. All the books that I've read, just what they fought was tremendous. I'm just thinking about my grandkids or my son, maybe one day they would like to work down here. It's just a sense of family. It's really neat.

MS: What about your father? Did he tell you about the port and encourage you to work here and take his job eventually?

EN: My father told me nothing about the waterfront. I knew he was a crane driver, and that was about it. He was always about education. I played sports all my life, but when it came down to when I graduated, it was, okay, it's time to be serious now. He was very old fashioned. Let's get going on the education. He wanted us to be set up where he feels like he got blessed to be on the waterfront. He knows that an education is probably the most important thing. I've kind of got the same mentality with my son. He wanted to right away become a longshoreman or apply. We wouldn't allow him to do that. My husband and I both worked down here. We both have blessed jobs. We want you to get education first. If you still feel that's what you want to do, then it's okay. Even though we spent all that money on education.

[laughter]

MS: What about your mom? What did she think about your decision to come down to the waterfront?

EN: At that point, my mom didn't want me to be on the waterfront. She just thought it was way too dangerous. She didn't think, as the youngest, her baby can handle it. She was very protective. At that point, I told my mother, "We have to do what we have to do now. It's to take care of you. I have to do it." So, she always followed my father, what his sayings were, what he did. Basically, I just said, "This is what I'm happy with now. I'll go ahead and do it. I don't know if I'll be happy with it. But this is what I've got to do right now." Education's got to be put on the side. Because even though he wanted me to follow my education, it just wasn't practical right now. I had to take care of my mother.

MS: Did you get encouragement from anyone to do this?

EN: I got encouraged by, I guess his name was Bruce Krieger. He was a health and benefits officer for Local 13 at that time. He said he knew my father, and he would help me out. I was very intimidated because I came from Seattle. When they showed me what a UTR, which is a utility truck that moves the containers around, I couldn't even back my own car into a spot, let alone a forty-foot container. So, I was a little bit intimidated. He just encouraged me, "Just try it out." He introduced me to a lot of people. I was like one of the youngest ones there. When you walk into a big hall like that, everybody knew you had to come in through a deceased or permissive rule. So, everybody pretty much took care of me.

MS: How old were you?

EN: I was nineteen years old when I first started working on the waterfront.

MS: Tell me more about your dad's partner. Did he encourage you to do the job too? That special relationship that he and your father had.

EN: My dad's partner encouraged me in a way where, "You're going to go through some hard times. You're going to make some of the money where you may want to go a different way. Like everywhere else, there's different things on the waterfront. You just have to know what you're going to be doing going to work. It's a very dangerous job." He encouraged a lot. He got me my first pair of boots and gloves. I was looking at these gloves and boots, going, "What about tennis shoes?" Or "Here's a pair of coveralls." I never thought I would be doing anything like that. But he encouraged me by making it a little bit easier, introducing some of the friends, going down showing me, what is this? You'll be doing that. He'll say, "You'll be driving one of these one day. You'll be driving a top handler one day." I looked at him, I said, "Never. That thing is way too big." He just – "You'll see." He goes, "I know you can do it because you've got a strong mind." Yes, he didn't have any doubt. I guess that's what encouraged me.

MS: Again, explain the work relationship between your dad and his partner. I mean, how did they work together? What were their jobs together?

EN: My dad's work relationship with Ron Arriaga, which was my dad's work partner, they worked cranes together. When they weren't working cranes together, they would pick up a UTR and just – I don't know exactly how they met, but I just know that it was a really – well, I think

how they met really was Ron's wife, which is Terry, she worked in a hospital. My mother was a nurse. They were both nurses. They just found that real interesting. My mom and my dad were really just down here by themselves. So, when he found someone that had the same interest with my mother, it just started from there. They just hit it off from the beginning. Everything that they did – when he would work, Ron would work. When they would take off, it would be because they're going on vacation together.

MS: What was your mom's response to your decision to do this, aside from the fact that it was dangerous? I mean, did she really try to convince you otherwise?

EN: My mom's response at that time was, she didn't want me to do it, but if it's going to make me happy, go ahead and do it.

MS: Now, what did your sisters think of it?

EN: My sisters thought I was crazy [laughter]. They thought, "Why would you want to move to California? Your dad wanted the education of biology, medical field, whatever you wanted to do. You're just going to leave all that education behind." Because at that time, my sister was almost graduating and getting her master's. But basically, this time, I didn't listen to them. I just said, "I know this is the right thing. If I don't like it, I could always come back."

MS: Do you remember some of your early experiences on the job, something that stuck in your mind?

EN: Some of the early experiences I had were, I'm dirty all the time [laughter]. I'm dirty, and I'm tired. My muscles are just – I was always athletic. But some of the stuff I was doing at a CFS station was throwing cargo. I remember getting my first pair of gloves, and I remember losing them one day. They would say, "Hey, you always got to carry a pair of gloves." But for some reason, I thought I would always have those pair of gloves. It just stuck to me like some of the people I know, they said, "You're going to have to have a thick skin. Sometimes, when the guys talk down here, it's not very nice." I was actually very sensitive to people. But from being here and knowing what my rights are and being a woman, I've got the leather skin now.

MS: Any particular experiences – you don't have to name names – where you found yourself in awkward or difficult situations because of being a woman?

EN: Any awkward positions would probably be like more of the labor. I'm a clerk now, but I was in Local 13. It would be like lashing. Some of the guys would think, "Oh, these girls can't pull their weight." Obviously, they think differently now. But back then, it would only be a couple of the girls that would actually take those jobs. But being the size I am and knowing I can do it, every time I went on a job, I had to prove myself. I made my own jacket. It wasn't who my father was. Oh, he was a strong lasher, or my dad did this. It was, even though that was my father, I had to prove to everybody that I can do it. When I couldn't do the job, I would just say, "You know what? I don't think this is right for me." They would have more respect. Just giving a hundred percent is what they wanted. But if I knew I couldn't handle it, I would tell them, I would reap it out or not work. They had more respect for that. I've got along with a lot

of the guys here. I just feel like I got respect from them.

MS: What about other women on the job? Was there a special connection between other women or do you just do the job?

EN: Other women on the waterfront, any woman that comes down here, you've got to be strong. You've got mothers down here. You've got people that belong to the PTA – all kinds of people. We're just like everybody else. I just look at them as everybody else. I don't look at them like, why don't you give her that because it's a little bit easier? I just look at them like everybody else.

MS: So, there was no particular kind of camaraderie between the women sort of sharing war stories and commiserating with the situation? Or did you just independently do your job?

EN: I just independently did my job. I just do my best. I never really tried to be with the girls that would have their little dramas. There's drama everywhere. They would have their little whatever. But basically, I would just do my job and then just try to go home safe.

MS: So, now, you developed a different kind of partner on the waterfront. Tell us about your lifetime partner and how you met and that connection to the waterfront.

EN: My lifetime partner, Anthony Noceti, my husband, he was a class B, which was, I could say – where would I say that? Not exactly how you would say class B. But anyways –

MS: He was one step above a casual.

EN: Right. One step above a casual.

MS: Start again then.

EN: Okay. My lifetime partner, Anthony Noceti, we met, not on the waterfront. He was a casual. I was never a casual. He was a casual. Came up to a class B, which is a step above a casual. Actually, we met in Seattle, Washington, playing softball game. The international held a softball tournament, which all the locals got together. A couple of friends introduced us. It was funny because I didn't tell him the truth. He said, "Where are you from?" I said, "Seattle." The reason why I said Seattle is because I'd just moved to California, and I didn't really want everybody to know what was going on. My mother and my aunts were there cooking at the tournament. So, he strictly thought that I was just down there for the softball tournament, even though we both worked on the waterfront, and we were on different shifts. That's why we never met. I was days, and he was nights. So, it was funny because we get on the airplane, and we just happened to pick up the same flight. He said, "I thought you lived in Seattle." I go, "Well, I do live in Seattle, but my father passed away. I got in as a longshoreman. Now, I'm working on the waterfront." It just happened from there. We kept on talking. We didn't know that we lived only five blocks away from each other. Later, when we started dating, probably about three months into it, we started talking about family. It was just so a coincidence that his mother and my father passed away the same year, same month, just five days apart. We've been together ever since.

MS: So, what's special about a waterfront marriage?

EN: A special thing about the waterfront marriage, I just look at it as a merit. I mean, just because he's a longshoreman. I'm a longshoreman. There's no specialty about it. We all have our differences. We try to not bring work home like everybody else does. Because I have my opinion and my opinion's not always the same as my husband's [laughter]. Yes, figure that one out. So, we just feel like we're blessed. Even if he wasn't working on the waterfront, I would be happy with him.

MS: What job does he have in the waterfront?

EN: My husband's job on the waterfront, he's in Local 13. He's a heavy lift driver. Drives the forklifts. But also, he'll drive a trans. It just, what's work's available, he'll just go to work.

MS: But both sharing the same job and same experiences on the job is unusual. How many married longshore families or couples are there? Is it pretty uncommon or is it common?

EN: Marriages on the waterfront with both husband and wife, I see a lot of it, but I'm not too sure. I don't keep – maybe I know maybe like five or six. But a lot of my friends, it's mostly my husband's friends that work on the waterfront. My best friend, she stays at home and takes care of the family.

MS: Obviously, since he married you and you married him, he didn't have any difficulty with the idea of a woman longshoreman, right, your husband?

EN: No. My husband doesn't have any problem with me being a longshoreman. He has a problem with some of the girls on there [laughter]. But again, my husband and I have the same mentality; just do your job. He'll say some of these girls do a good job, and some of them just are inexperienced. He'll try to teach them. But if they can't do it, he'll say, "Hey, we've got a job to do, and you can't handle it. We suggest you do something else." He'll tell it like it is. But he's a little bit more kinder, more sensitive to women than he would be with one of his friends or a guy. But if you can do your job and in a safe way, he's all for it.

MS: What do you think the future of women on the docks, on the waterfront, is this going to be increasingly a profession for women? Or is it going to be always a relatively small proportion of the workforce here?

EN: Women being on the waterfront, they've come a long way. I think now that guys will accept it that we can do labor. We're just like everybody else, just trying to get a living. I don't know how much it will increase. But in the past couple years, I've seen all my girlfriends, they're casuals now. I tend to discriminate against them. I thought that they're miss prissy prissy with the nails. I didn't think they could do it, and I was wrong. They can do it. They're working all the time. Every time when we go to a birthday party, "Hey, where's So-and-So?." "Oh, she's at the casual hall." So, they're really dedicated to it. It's mostly all my friends. I live in San Pedro. So, a lot of my friends are in San Pedro. They see what everybody else is doing. They see the

unity. San Pedro's a close community family. They want to be a part of it as well.

MS: You said about your own children and daughter, I mean, will you take your father's attitude toward them as far as working on the waterfront?

EN: Taking my father's attitude, absolutely not. I think it was just a different generation where they grew up. My dad's way was, he wanted my mother working at that point. But he just thought he really wanted to be the caretaker for his family. He wanted to provide and feel like he has a good job. He's blessed. He wanted to make sure that his kids and his wife were well taken care of, and they were.

MS: But in relation to your own children, what is going to be your attitude toward them as far as working on the dock?

EN: My attitude with my own children – I have a stepson right now. I might have more in the future. I'm not sure yet. But my attitude would be maybe the same as my father. I want you to have the best of the best. I want you to know what a family is. I think my father didn't really educate me on what a union was or unity. But I think I've now taught my son – I've involved him in some of the projects – who we are, where we came from, how we got here, and who got us here. So, I gave him that education. But as far as working, you never know what's going to happen in life. I think with an education, you can never go wrong. So, as far as an education, my son definitely is getting the education before he decides to come to the waterfront.

MS: Talk about the generations of younger people who are in the union who assumed that eight-hour day was always there. Health benefits were always there, pensions were always there. Is that a problem within the union? Making people aware of the history of what went on?

EN: Right. The problem with the education is some of the people on the waterfront now are not so – from the longshoremen community, not from the harbor area. Some of them travel from Riverside. Some come out of state. I think with the education, they don't know who got us here. Some of them think of it as a job. But it's actually more than that. We've got great benefits. We've got great family here. An injury to one is an injury to all. We really believe in that. We all stick together. I think we've got education classes coming now. We've got an education program for the people who want to learn. We always try to encourage them to educate themselves. We tell them – like how I learned. I went to the Harry Bridges. (Shan Dinato?) was a great help to me. David Arian. I would go in there. They'd give me a book. Let's read about the, not just the longshoremen here, but let's go to Hawaii about the Hilo massacre. So, that's how I got my education with them. I guess we have to give them some kind of enlightenment. No one wants to just say, "Okay. Here's a book." You have to be enlightened about the waterfront. I think with the contracts coming up, the lockout that we had, some of the generation, it gave them a wake-up call to say, "Wow, you know what? This is a good job." My benefits and everything could be gone in a heartbeat. But the new people that are coming in, the casuals, I just think they need to get educated so they know how important and what we've got here. They fought hard for it.

MS: From your point of view, what gives you the most satisfaction of your job?

EN: The most satisfaction I get on the waterfront is everyone going home safe. I work as a rail planner at Evergreen right now. This is kind of crazy, but I think of like, we send out cargo to across the world. I think just knowing the world's going round and round, and the ILWU takes those containers. There was a saying on a crane. I don't know who quoted it. But it says, "ILWU makes the world go round and round." We just help little kids be happy at Christmas. People that need their steel in Vegas, people that need lumber to build houses, it just makes the whole world need what they need.

MS: Can't beat that.

EN: Yes.

MS: Anything else you want to talk about?

EN: No. I think that's it.

MS: Good. If you can move your chair about a foot or two to the left. I'm going to take a still photo of you.

[end of transcript]