Port of Los Angeles Centennial Oral History Project
Ron Rogers Oral History
Date of Interview: Unknown
Location: Los Angeles, California
Length of Interview: 01:40:39
Interviewer: MS – Unknown
Transcriber: NCC

Male Speaker: Hard question first. Please say your name and spell it.

Ronald Rogers: My name is Ronald Rogers, R-O-N-A-L-D, R-O-G-E-R-S.

MS: What year were you born and where?

RR: I was born in 1941, January, in Upland California at San Antonio Hospital on Foothill Boulevard.

MS: So, Upland is not known as a port channel.

RR: Upland is at the bottom of a mountain right by a place called Mount Baldy. It's about, oh, I don't know, 50, 60 miles from here.

MS: So, how did you get from Upland to San Pedro and active in the port?

RR: I left Upland as a young child. We came down to a place called Harbor City. It was a place then. We stayed there for a couple of years. My parents moved to San Diego. At the end of the war, my father got involved in the tuna fishing industry. We stayed down there for a couple of years and moved back to the area, I believe, in 1948. We moved up into the Harbor area here because my father was a seafaring person, merchant marina.

MS: What was Harbor City?

RR: Harbor City was a little town in the bottom of the hill between Lomita and Wilmington. It was not much there except a roadway. Harbor City was bordered by Western Avenue then, which was a little two-lane road. Pacific Coast Highway on the south side. East and west was another little two-lane road at that time. But, since it's changed quite a bit, there were no freeways at that time.

MS: Who lived in Harbor City? What kind of place was it?

RR: In Harbor City, it was a little house, a little two-bedroom house. I had one brother, and we lived in that. After we came back from San Diego, we moved to a place called Harbor City Pines, which is just above Harbor City and at the base of the hill, which is Palos Verdes. We lived there until I finished school. I went to elementary school, junior high school, and high school there.

MS: You're close enough to the port to observe. As a little kid, did you go there? Did you see any activity? What did you think about it when you're growing up?

RR: When I was growing up, I didn't really know too much about the harbor other than my dad worked – my stepfather worked in the harbor. We'd go down and meet him when the ships would come in and take him down when the ships had sailed. He worked for – the last shipping company he was with was Union Oil. Then he got involved in union activities and started working in Wilmington. Then I was still in high school at that time. Summer came up, and they

had a problem with the *Catalina* steamship. I was working at Warner Brothers Theater in San Pedro. It was the last place I was working before I went to work in the waterfront. I had an opportunity to go to work with a company called Island Boat Service – Catalina Island Boat Service, because the steamer wasn't running. They needed deckhands. So, the Union Hall had to supply all these extra deckhands because of the overflow and passengers in the smaller boats. So, I was in – I had a permit to work in the Union. I was in the Union Hall, and they sent us down as a deckhand. It was just a temporary job. Because *Catalina* only worked in the summer months from Memorial Day to Labor Day. Other than that, the island was nothing going on. So, all these wild kids would get a job as a deckhand on a boat running to *Catalina*. Some of them were the old taxis that they used to use on the *Rex* and the *Lux*, the old gambling ships they had out here. So, we had a colorful group down there. We would hustle luggage to the boats for tips. Then we'd get wages on top of that. So, it was a pretty good job for a kid working summer months in high school.

MS: What are some of your stories you remember from your wild days as a deckhand?

RR: The wild days at *Catalina* terminal seem to be between the parking lot at the steamer and the passengers working in the area of getting their tickets and boarding the boats. We had a deal with the boys in the parking lot. They could bring a luggage over to the office where we were working out of. We would take it from there to the boats. We wouldn't mess with their lot, and they wouldn't mess with our boats. So, we have pretty good agreement. In the lot, you just get thrown around in some dirt. But on the boats, it's somebody who wind up in the water. But anyhow, it was a working arrangement. It was pretty good for everybody involved. We had some wild times running back and forth to the island in the smaller boats.

MS: But tell me about some of those experiences. Do you remember what it was like?

RR: Some of the experiences we had on the boats were younger folks getting out of hand and trying to keep them corralled and keeping their enthusiasm down. That was the weekend that we started working on that Memorial Day. The first buccaneer ball was the first time they had tried that at Avalon. Avalon had a one-cell jail. They were not part of the county at that time. They had their own police department. Had one police officer and one matron. They were man and wife. If they had more than – if they had two people to put in jail, they had a woman and a man, the woman to get the jail, and the man would be shipped back to the mainland. Because they couldn't house them together. So, we would go over with early boat. If they were shipping anybody back, they would throw them on the boat. We had to tend to them or put up with them on the way back.

MS: So, what was the buccaneer ball and how was it?

RR: The buccaneer ball at *Catalina*, the first one was kind of like a pirate day thing. Everybody was just – it was a party atmosphere, and everybody just had a good time. Some got a little out of control. Some didn't. Sometimes we'd have three or four people to bring back at the same time, which we're not happy. As luck would have it, at the end of the weekend, when the buccaneer ball was just to close, that would have been on a Monday. They had brought people over the island every day, but nobody coming back. So, the island kept getting more and more

populated, more and more populated. So, before the weekend was up, they had people sleeping on benches, on the beach, in the streets, everywhere. They stopped putting anybody in jail because two reasons, didn't have jail, and the other one was they couldn't give them housing to stay in. So, it turned into a pretty wild affair.

MS: Really, it was a buccaneer ball.

RR: It was a buccaneer ball. Then the day before, everybody was to return to the mainland, we had some bad weather. So, the boats were running as long as they could, as long as the weather would allow it. As soon as we got over our last run, coming back to the mainland, which was in Wilmington, at the foot of Avalon where the old steamer pier was. So, we thought, "Well, we have to get the empty boats back to *Catalina*." But we couldn't take any passengers over because, like I said, everybody was coming back to the mainland. So, all the boats were going back, and we took one terrible beating. We finally got over there. We went to a mooring. We had company moorings for Catalina Island Company at that time. We could use them because of the bad weather and giving us a facility to tie up on. So, we had young people on the boat. Some had experience, and some didn't. So, we were trying to pick up a mooring in the wind one night, that night, so we could lay over and come back on a Monday morning and start bringing all these people back. There were a lot of people stranded. So, we had to tie up and spend the night on the island. Well, as soon as the boat crews got over one of the fellows – the work from one of the other companies, the parents got a hold of one of us. They said if they could find their son, find him, and put him in a room someplace. Because they didn't want him to wind up in jail. So, I never saw him again until the next day. But apparently, he didn't want him in jail because everybody was back on the boats. We started bringing everybody back in that day. This one fell when we reached into our mooring, the captain asked me, he says, "Now, you go up on the bow," and direct me towards the – there's a pole on the end of a float that's marked your anchor spot. So, you pull that up and a mooring line will be on the end of it. He just put it on the bow of the boat. That's where you can stay. So, he says, "Put the other guy in the boat, the rowboat. When we get to the mooring, he can hand you up. This is a little stick on the end of it. He can hand it to you, and you can tie the boat off." I said, "Okay." So, I told Larry, I said, "Get in the boat, and I'll go up on the bow. When we get up there, hand me the marker." I turned around. He didn't know how to row. So, I look out, and here he is going to see with the wind. The oars are flapping in the air like a wounded bird. So, we finally managed to get our mooring, and we had to go rescue him. So, then we got on the island, and they put us up for the night. We tried to behave and try to not get into much trouble.

MS: So, that was your initiation to the high seas?

RR: That was my initiation to the high seas and bad weather. My first experience was some really nasty weather. We took pretty good beating, but nobody got hurt. That was the bottom line. Everybody made it okay.

MS: Now, what about you? You had your sea legs from the beginning, or did that bad weather do you in?

RR: I had no idea how I could handle the seas. I remember when I first worked on the boats.

The first couple of days I went out on a boat, I would get home at night. I'd go home. I'd sit down at the dinner table, and everything would keep moving. Your equilibrium just keeps going even though you get off of it. It was an odd experience. It took me some time to get used to that. But I've never had any trouble with seasickness or anything like that. I guess, it's just one of those things. You either do or you don't.

MS: Let's come back a bit. I mean, you mentioned a couple of things. I'm going to go wind back in time. People don't know what the *Catalina* steamers were and what even a *Catalina* is. Give us some background. What is Catalina, and what were the *Catalina* steamer?

RR: Catalina was an island offshore about 24 miles off. There's only one little town that's called Avalon. It was 1 square mile. The island, I think it comes to around 73 square miles or something like that. It's all private. It's owned by the Wrigley Company. The only thing away from Avalon were some little camps. They had Girl Scout camp, a Boy Scout camp. There were different coves up and down on the island. They had a baseball camp which was up at the Isthmus. That's the only other part of the island that would allow people to come ashore. There's a little place on the backside of Catalina outside offshore side. It's called Cat Harbor. There's a little spot there where people could go and anchor up. But that is on the opposite side of the Isthmus, which is on the west end of the island.

MS: So, what's the story with the steamers?

RR: The steamers were owned by the Wrigley family or the Wrigley Company. There were two of them. The original ones, as I remember, was a little boat called the *Avalon*. It was not running when I started working in there. It was already put aside or mothballed or just sitting idle. The one that was running was the *SS Catalina*, which was built in 1925 by LA Shipyard, which became Todd Shipyard, which no longer exists. It was built by the family. Primary, it was built exclusively for the Catalina run. It ran for August of 1925 until in this – sometime around 1960 or so. Then they had some problems. Again, it went on a couple more runs and moved from Avalon – the foot of Avalon on Wilmington – to a new terminal which is under the Vincent Thomas Bridge. It ran for a few more years as a passenger ferry back and forth to the island until it no longer could run. It went idle and laid idle for around, well, I don't know, three, four years. It was just a kind of a derelict. Nobody could really pick it up and make it go again. There was a gentleman that – I can't remember the exact year and time – that bought the ship for his wife as a Valentine's Day gift. The fellow's name was Hymie Singer. I'll never forget it. Then we moved the ship a couple of times with tugs, and it never ran again. It has some anchorage time in Los Angeles in the anchorage area. Then it mysteriously left one night. Somebody towed it out, and it wound up in Ensenada. She sank there. She's, to this day, is still laying on the ground in Ensenada Bay in Mexico.

MS: I'm going to go back again another step as you mentioned your previous job with the Warner Theater. What was the Warner Theater? What was that job like?

RR: I was an usher for Stanley-Warner at Warner Brothers Theater on 6th Street. I just worked as an usher. Again, it was in the high school days. It felt like I was – got the opportunity to go to work in the harbor by signing up in the union. When I left Warner Brothers is when I actually

started on the tugboats or the *Catalina* boats.

MS: Well, again people don't know this whole idea of ushers at movie theaters. What did ushers do? I'm sure there's some adventures that ushers had too. What was your story there?

RR: Well, as an usher, I would work in the theater, assisting people to find their seats with a flashlight. You wear these little costumes or uniforms. You'd run up and down the aisles with a flashlight and pointed up and down the rows and try to keep people in line. There was not that much television and more movies than TV. Then I worked the loge area, and you'd see people disappear and reappear and things like that. They go up in the back aisle. Just make sure everybody was working aboveboard and stay clean, no drinking, and keep the riots down. Between that, that was that and school. So, I worked in San Pedro, but I went to a school outside of town in Harbor City, Lomita area, which was called Narbonne. So, being a person from Narbonne or (Gaucho?), a rival town compared to San Pedro, so I will leave my school identification at home and go to San Pedro, so I wouldn't get in any problems.

MS: Any particular adventures where people got out of line in the theater, and you had to take care of? I mean, obviously, we all know what goes on in the darkened theaters. Did you have to deal with that, too?

RR: We used to deal with a little bit of handicaps on the people, whether they wanted to watch the show or make mischief. I didn't really experience too many problems with that. Because kids were pretty good then. If they did get out of line, they didn't do it in front of anybody. So, it was –

MS: That must be considered a cool job to be able to watch movies all day.

RR: It was watching the same movie over and over and over, gets to be a really monotonous deal. You start reciting lines and singing songs and everything else to try to keep up with the film. They didn't change but once a week. So, you'd see the same film for seven days. Then hopefully, you get another one. If it ran too good, and the crowds were too big, you'd watch it again. So, it was really – it was not a heartbreak to leave there and go to work on the boats. I really enjoyed the boats and never looked back. Stanley-Warner became history.

MS: So, when you took that first boat deckhand job, did you feel the call of the sea at that point? I mean, what were your feelings about that work? Was there anything special about your life at that point in relation to the ships?

RR: When I started working on the boats after leaving the theaters, I was a senior in school. I started my senior year. At that time, I went to Narbonne, which is an LA City School. We had a senior programs class. You'd sit around, and you just talk about life and learn about what you're going to experience when you get out of school and try to get up to speed with bank accounts, budgeting, and try and just live. So, towards the end of that year, like I said, the *Catalina* boats, we only worked on those for Memorial Day to Labor Day. In Labor Day, the island closed. There was nothing going on except the people that live there year-round, and there was just a handful. There's not very many people over there. We had to write a term paper in the senior

programs class. For some reason, I wrote down about working in harbor and maybe working on tugboats. I thought it would be great to be able to do these things and maybe someday get higher, not knowing what that would be. So, at that time, it was just I like to work on tugboats and learn – get that experience. My interest in the tugs and things came from watching them work around the harbors. I was running in and out on passenger boats. At the time, I was working on a passenger boat. I said, "Life couldn't be any better than this." I could make enough money and sustain myself through my school time that I wouldn't have to work. So, I had plenty of time to play and enough money to keep me out of mischief. But in the back of my mind, I thought it would be great to be able to do this stuff. So, I just wrote down that my dreams of a career might be working on the waterfront and working in tugboats and harbor work. So, not knowing where I was going, it was something I had no idea how it was going to turn out.

MS: We're about the same age. Did you grow up with the book and the movie *Little Toot*? Did you know that?

RR: *Little Toot* was running around on TV at that time. There was another little fellow running around called *Beany and Cecil*. That was the number one show around town. We had *Little Toot* running around trying to get out of trouble, and he was always in trouble. So, anyway, when I left school, I went to work for a company called Borden Chemical out in Dominguez Hills area, after getting out of high school. It was such a boring job. It was an extrusion company where you made hoses and water hoses and things like that. So, I was not very interested in that type of career. So, I drifted back to the summer work on the *Catalina* boats. I got back down there. Memorial Day weekend started. I went back and signed up and did another dispatch for the *Catalina* boats. That would have been the summer of [19]61. Then I worked on that on the weekends, while I was working with Borden Chemical. I finished that up in the summer. When Labor Day came in, they laid everybody off at the boats. I decided that I wanted to work in the harbor. So, I quit the job Borden Chemical. I went to the Union Hall. I stayed in the Union Hall for a dispatch. I waited around there until I got a call in. They put a call in from Red Stack tugboats looking for deckhands. All their boats at that time were three-man boats. So, they had to get a fourth man on each crew because they were going to bigger boats. So, that left an opening to hire some extra hands. So, I was sitting in the Union Hall, and they put a call in for a couple of deckhands. They posted the job on the board. I went out and looked at the board. I said, "Well, they're looking for deckhands on a tugboat." I've never worked on a tugboat. So, the dispatcher comes out, and he says, "Hey," he says, "don't you want a job?" I said, "Yeah." He says, "Aren't you here for a job?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "Well, there's a job on the board for deckhands at Crowley's at Red Stack." I said, "I don't know anything about a deckhand." He says, "Does that say you have to know anything?" He says, "If you go over there, they'll teach you." He says, "If, he –" and I said, "Well, okay, I'll go over there. It's a casual job." Well, that company, at that time, there was a gentleman that ran the Red Stack tugboat company, general manager's name was – I'll be a son of a gun.

MS: Let's go back. I mean, what does the deckhand do on a *Catalina* ship? Then compare it to what a deckhand does on a tug.

RR: Well, the *Catalina* steamer – the deckhands on the *Catalina* steamer were mostly there for seamanship for mooring and unmooring of the ship, tying it up and leaving. They had pursers

and everybody to handle luggage and people that work with passengers over there. Because it was a shipboard operation. On the *Catalina* boats, it was a little bit different. The deckhands on the boats would usher passengers on and off the boats, assist in taking the tickets, taking the luggage onto the boats, storing the luggage, and getting the passengers ready to go and then do the mooring and unmooring of the boats, where the steamer had different departments to do each particular job.

MS: So, tell me the story again of how you got on the tug for the first time.

RR: I had left Warner Brothers. Now, I'm sitting in the Union Hall waiting to get a job in the harbor. So, I was sitting in the Union Hall one day, and they happened to get a call from Red Stack or Crowley looking for deckhands. They were looking for deckhands because the boats were going from three-man boats to four-man boats because of the size and horsepower in the bigger boats. So, anyway, I'm sitting in the hall with some other fellows, and they posted this job on the board about deckhands. I sat there and looked at it. The dispatcher comes out, and he says, "You guys looking for jobs, aren't you?" I said, "Yeah." He says, "Well, there's a job on the board. Somebody wants it. They're looking for a casual man at Red Stack." I said, "Well, I don't know about tugboats." He says, "Well, we don't ask you if you know anything. We're just going to send you over there. You'll learn when you get there." So, I said, "Well, I'll go." So, I went over, and I met up with two gentlemen over there. (Duke Decker?) was a general manager, and Captain McGillivray was the general manager.

MS: You said they're both the general manager. Start again.

RR: I met two people over there. Duke Decker was an office manager and dispatcher and took care of all of the runnings and the mechanics of the business. McGillivray was the general manager of the company, working for Mr. Crowley who was in San Francisco.

MS: You have to explain what was Red Stack.

RR: Red Stack was a tugboat company owned by a gentleman by the name of Crowley. It was always referred to as Red Stack because Crowley was very thrifty at the time. As the story goes, the stacks were only painted with primer. Because he wouldn't give anybody money to paint them anything else. So, he would at least primer them to keep them from rusting. So, that's the story I hear as how they got their names Red Stack. So, I went over there again, and I started on September 14th of 1961 with that company. There was one other tugboat company in the harbor that did ship-assist work. This was a ship-assist company. The other company was owned by Wrigley. That was Wrigley Transportation and Towing.

MS: So, that first day when you went over there, describe what happened and when you get on the boat and start working.

RR: When I went over – the day I went over to Crowley's to start working, they dispatched me to a tugboat called the *Sea Otter*. The *Sea Otter* was vacant one man, which was already a four-man boat, but the man had had a heart attack. I was filling in on his spot. So, I went aboard this boat not knowing anything about tugging and introduced myself. We just sat down and started

talking. They said, "Here's what you're going to have to do." So, I would work with the other deckhand, the senior deckhand, and he would show me around. He was my first experience on the tugboat. I had not a clue what to do. There was a lot of hollering, do this, do that, go here, go there, and making up the ships, throwing a heaving line to the ship to send our lines on a ship when we would assist the ship. Then just taking them in and making it – learning how to make them fast on bits and cleats and winches and capstans. So, it was a learning experience for quite a while. It got a lot of hollering and screaming.

MS: So, talk about the characters aboard the ship. What kind of guys are on those ship?

RR: The shipboard people were usually of another country. So, we would usually just holler up item before we'd throw a heaving line. Once the tug had landed on the ship, the captain would communicate with the man on the ship. Then we would drive these tugboats over and land alongside these ships. Depending on what our orders were, then we would tie up according to whatever the orders might be, whether it was on the bow or on the quarter. Bow being the forward – front end of the ship and the quarter being somewhere on the after backend of the ship, on one side or the other.

MS: What about your shipmates on the tug? Talk about them. What kind of characters were they?

RR: Some of the fellows that I worked with on a tugboat came from a lot of different areas. Some of them seem to be – at one point, they were all casual people. Remember, I was sent in as a casual. As for instance, I worked for that company almost 30 years. I was never told I was a permanent employee. I was hired as a casual. I was a casual for the rest of my life, and I never left. So, I assume I was a permanent employee after 30 years. The guys I worked with, some of them came off the oil patches from Central America – Central United States. Some of them came in out of the Navy. Some of the fellows came in from – straight out of school like I did. A lot of them came from the old ferry boats. The captains, there was – we had three captains who came off the ferry boat that used to run back and forth to Terminal Island. The other guys were just fellows that came in from offshore ships. It was hard to get people to work on tugboats because the conditions were a little different than it was for seafaring people that were going out on offshore ships. We had a fellow come down with a briefcase full of licenses and qualifications. It went for miles. So, he took his little briefcase. He got on board this tugboat, went up in the wheelhouse, and got the engines going. He said, "Let her go." All the guys on the deck, they let everything go, and the tug took off. They turned it around. I don't remember – the gentleman that came aboard that came into the office with his suitcase and –

MS: Pretend like you never told it before.

RR: One funny experience we had, I was working on a tugboat, and this gentleman came down. He had papers all over the place, licenses, and qualifications. It just never ended. He was sent down to be a tugboat operator. The old man, Captain McGillivray, the general manager of the company, said, "This guy is going to be great because he's got all kinds of qualifications." So, they put him on this tugboat, and they were going to take him out and let him run around the harbor and come back with a tugboat, get used to everything. So, I just can't remember his name

at this time. But he took off in his tugboat. He ran around the harbor. He came back to the dock and never stopped. It buried the tugboat into the pier. He put his papers all back in his briefcase, got off the boat, got in his car, and left. We never saw him again. So, I said, "Boy, that's qualification for you." So, at that time, there were no qualifications, and there was no licensing on tugboats. They were inland-operated boats. At that time, they never saw fit to require them to have a license because they never went out of the harbor. So, consequently, it was just a bunch of forgotten little guys down here, running around, bumping into ships. Later on, that all changed. Congress passed the law through some mishaps in the Gulf and East Coast areas where they had had some incidences on inland boats where people were hurt or loss of life and damaged. So, they decided that maybe we should give these people licenses and screen them a little bit. Maybe we could avoid having these problems. So, Congress passed a law at that time, which became effective at a certain date. Everybody that was driving a tugboat at that time – this would have been in the [19]70s. When they pass that law, they had to grandfather those that were already doing this for a living. Well, at that time, I had advanced myself to where I was driving a tugboat and captain of a tugboat. So, when they pass the law, they grandfathered myself and everybody else that didn't have a license that came from other areas, with a license to run inland tugboats, which would mean harbors, streams, and rivers and things like that.

MS: Let's go back. You started to say that being on a tugboat was not necessarily a job that seemed unwanted. Describe what was life like and what was the job like that made it not so popular with the people.

RR: The difference between working on tugboats and working on ships, the guys that worked on ships wouldn't necessarily – didn't care to go to work on the tugboats. Because they – it was like a – it's a dead-end job. You aren't going anywhere. You're not going to do anything. You can't advance anymore. Tugboats were just a little bit of a forgotten little thing at that time. So, you had no guarantees like you would have on a ship. Shipboard life was a little bit different than tugboat life.

MS: Explain the difference.

RR: The difference between living on a ship and living on a tugboat is on a ship, you live there twenty-four hours a day, day in, day out, until the end of your voyage or the end of your dispatch time. At that time, you could sail and get off any place you wanted. Then the union's changed where you had to stay on a ship for a certain amount of time. Then you go back to the shipping list and would rotate. On the tugboats, you just stay there. You aren't going to go anywhere. You aren't going to do anything different. You're just going to stay there and work around the harbor. In my way of thinking, I was happier on the tugboats as it turns out than I would have ever been on a ship. Working on tugboats, you never know what you're going to do. You never really know what you're going to go do. Even though I stayed in the harbor most of my career, jobs differ from day to day. You go here, you do this, you do that. You never do the same routine over and over. You're going to go move this. You're going to go move the ship. You're going to go move a barge. Well, you may not move anything. You're just running around. On a ship, it's a more regimental day. You have a watch, you stand, time off. In tugboats, you just bounce around. So, that was the way I wanted to go.

MS: Did your tugboat have a name?

RR: The tugboats all had names. The tugboats had names. Crowley were all like *Sea Hound*, *Sea Otter*. They call those funny boats because they had a squirrely way of being constructed. They had air steering and air transmissions. You could hear him in the dark. You could hear him in the fog. You couldn't sneak up on anybody. That's the reason for funny boats. It waddles like a duck. When you come alongside a ship, they just wiggle, wiggle, wiggle, wiggle like a snake, and then bounce on and off of ships until you had landed. Then you get your lines up, and you're landed.

MS: The ship that you went on, how did it run and how did it work? What kind of nickname did it have and why? Give me that information again.

RR: The tugboats that we worked on had different characteristics. There was one class of tugboats. It was a little more – a little harder to run or operate than the others. They called them funny boats because they were built with a long tapering stern and a broad shoulder on the bow. So, when you drive alongside a ship, because of the way a ship makes the water go around itself, you had to fight the current or the wake to bring your tugboat in. Well, this tapered tugboat would waddle like a duck. It would just waddle back and forth until you'd land the thing. Some of the fellows had more fun with them than others because they would bounce them against the ship and then have to come in and do it again like an airplane making a landing. It bounced off the ground and bounce and bounce. Some of these tugboats, it came in and had a bell. All boats have bells. That was required. So, every time the tugboat bounced off the ship, the bell would ring. So, it was either a one bell, two bell landings, depending how many times you bounced. Then like I say, once you got the thing planted against the side of the ship, which is running down the harbor, you get your lines up. Then it holds you there from then on. But some of the fun was just landing. You'd hold on. As a deckhand, you get someplace where you can hang on because some of the guys would bounce it pretty hard.

MS: What else about it that made it unique? You started talking about the air system. Help me understand it.

RR: On the funny boats, they had another characteristic that made him kind of an individual boat that we had two of these things. The rest of them were in San Francisco. The two that we had, they had air steering, and they had air drive in their transmission. They have air clutches. But the steering, as you would turn the boat from one direction to the other, either right or left, you hear this huge amount of air escaping as this ram would change from one way to the other. This air would escape just like a choo-choo train when it puffs its steam. There's this big, terrific sound coming out, whooshing sound. So, in the nighttime, if you want to sneak up on anybody, you couldn't do it with those – that particular boat because of the noise. You could hear him coming before you ever see him. In the fog, it couldn't get lost because you always know where they're at. As long as they're turning that steering wheel, you couldn't miss him. The other boats had electric steering. So, they were a little quieter. They had different – electric motors, electric drives. So, they were very, very quiet. They were good for sneaking around.

MS: But why would you want to sneak around?

RR: Well, sometimes when you just dispatched to a job for sneaking around, you might want to sneak around some area. Another guy will wind up getting the harder part of the job, and you will get the easier end of the job. So, we will usually take turns on that. But there are some crafty little fellows that like to maneuver so that give more ability to sneak around.

MS: Despite these big differences between the funny boats and the other ones, did each of the little boats that you worked – the little tugs that you worked on, did they have little characteristics? Did you get to know them as distinctive machines and boats? Or were they just pretty much, you could jump from one to the other without any second thoughts?

RR: Usually, when you go from boat to boat like that, you have to learn the characteristics of each of the boats and how they handle. Because each one has a different drive. They have a different steering. Some are faster than others. Some are faster engines than the others because of the way they change their gears from forward to reverse. So, you would break in on these different boats so that you could have the ability to go from boat to boat. Because nobody was really assigned – there were five fixed crews, and the rest of crews just bounced on empty boats. So, I think you had more advantage by going to different boats because you could learn the characteristics of each boat. As you learn the boats and you ran the boats and the better you got at running the boats, then you were able to move barges which gained more responsibility because it became a single unit. The tug and barge became a unit. Rather than assisting, you are now the unit. So, when the tug and the barge is together, the captain would leave the tug and go on the barge. The senior deckhand would become the operator of the tugboat. This is the progression of learning. This is how you, at that time, learn to get through the system. Once you got – became a good hand at handling the wheel and the captain was on the barge, then you would go graduate from that to what we call flat tows. A flat tow would be a ship that had no engine or had engine trouble. Or they were shifting the ship, they didn't want to use the engine. They would call the tugboat company and order a flat tow. So, a flat tow would mean one tugboat would come over and make up power to the ship and become the ship's power. That captain, again, would, just like the barge, he would go aboard the ship and the senior deckhand that was the operator in his place when he left. So, he would get a benefit, a pay benefit for doing a flat tow. So, he got extra bonus. He got more money by going on a ship and driving it. Consequently, the tug crew got a little bonus in their pay because they ran the tugboat without him. But they were as one unit. The tugboat wouldn't leave the ship until the captain was finished and he come back to the tugboat.

MS: So, on a flat tow, the tugboat would be behind the barge pushing it?

RR: Usually. In those days, when we were flat towing, it was a little different than today. The tugboat would make up on a quarter of a ship back where the propeller would be. That would, again, would become a ship's power. Then they would get assist tugs that would handle the ship for turning. Because the ship would never have enough speed to use its rudder again. It wouldn't use its rudder. The power tug would become the motor that would make it go frontwards and backwards and a little bit of steering with the aid of the tugboats.

MS: Now, when you were starting out and you were still a deckhand, you were learning. Were

there any experiences you remember or any situations that particularly stick in your mind that taught you some lessons, or at least that were memorable?

RR: Let's see. I will think about that.

MS: Particular jobs maybe or difficult jobs.

RR: Usually, when you moved up to that particular responsibility of coming up with the deck and going into the wheelhouse, the first time I did it, I'll probably never forget it where everything was done by – we had a little radio that the Army used to use. It came in like a backpack and had a little cord on the telephone receiver on it. That was our communication with our radio. We didn't have walkie-talkies and handsets back then. Then that would be the communication a lot with the tugboats that were working on that particular ship. The first time I was able to drive a tugboat, we were moving a little thing called a water barges. We used to take water to ships that were anchored. We owned the water barges. So, I went to the wheelhouse on this tugboat. The captain went on the barge. He gave me – he had enough confidence. He said, "I'll put you on a wheel. We'll see how you can do this thing." He had the engineer standing beside me, and the captain left. So, I'm standing in the wheelhouse waiting for his orders. So, pretty soon, I hear a command. He says, "You have to blow the whistle, move the gear, and turn the wheel." He gives me an order, and I figured out, "How am I going to blow the whistle, move the throttle, and steer this thing all at the same time?" I said, "You can't possibly do all this at one time." So, the engineer was – he was blowing the whistle, and I was moving the throttle. It took a little while to get used to, but it all came together. It wasn't as difficult as I thought it was going to be. Once you learn how to do it, it's like anything else, getting into the habit. As far as an experience goes, when you're working on a tugboat and the captain wants to rest a little bit, you've been running quite a few hours, and he wants to get a little rest. He'd let you drive the boat lightbulb, meaning you're going from place to place with no job, you're just going to a job or from a job. He'd say, "Okay," he says, "you drive the tugboat. I'm going to go lay down for a little bit." Then he'd watched it from behind. He'd never really go to sleep. He'd just kind of watch you. So, this one gentleman that I used to work with, he says, "Okay. Ron, take the boat to so and so." I said, "Okay." So, I'd take off. I always thought, "Well, if he doesn't go to sleep, he doesn't really have a lot of confidence in me." So, I would do my best to try not to keep him awake. I said, "If I figured if he could go to sleep, then he had confidence." So, when I would get to an area, then he would come back up. "It's okay. You can go down below and do your job, and I'll run the boat for the rest of the job." Because now we're working on a ship or something else. So, when I got better and had driven a little bit longer, he would let me land a tugboat or take a tugboat away from the ship once it's moving. Then we did a little training on that. So, to make this a little shorter, after I had learned all these different sequences, I'm driving across the bay one day, and I was going over to Long Beach. I made my first landing and him, I thought was asleep. So, I'm making this approach to this dock, and everything is going wrong. I said, "Oh, man, I'm going to crash this boat, and I'm going to blow all my chances. He's just going to lose all his confidence in me." So, the closer I get – the closer it gets, the closer it gets – you might want to edit this. His keyword was – I'm getting closer and closer. I did everything I could do, and I feel like I'm going to crash this. Oh, shit. He would show up. There he'd be. He said, "I'm okay until I hear you say that." He said, "I figure you're a trouble." Well, it wasn't too many of those. I finally got to where I can handle it. He would sleep, and I'd land the boat and

leave. Then he would be – he had missed the landing or had missed a takeoff, and that was where he became confident. I gained confidence in myself. Because I figured if he has confidence enough to leave me alone like that, then I must be learning something.

MS: What's the hardest job, hardest assignment to the tug?

RR: One of the hardest things to learn when you're driving a tugboat or getting experienced, one of the last things they would let you do is work a line. That would be, you'd have to take a ship's line and make it fast to your stern. At that time, we were using the ship's lines. They don't do that any longer, but that was their last shore – that was probably the most dangerous part of any – of working tugs on ships was working with ships lines. Because you would tow a ship backwards or frontwards from your stern. So, as you would take a ship out and tow it, they would gain speed. Well, speed becomes a hazard. If a tugboat gets too far out of line, they can't come back. What happens is it's like throwing – casting a line and getting a backlash and bam, she comes back. It's what we call getting in irons. Once a tugboat reaches a certain point, he cannot get out of that position. The boat will either slam against the ship, (hard?) a line, or turnover. There has been occasions where tugboats have turned over on the line. It's usually a catastrophe and a couple of occasions has been a loss of life.

MS: You have to explain it more clearly. What are the dangers you using the line from the ship?

RR: Yes, the ship overtaking you. While you're working on a line like this, like I say, it's the last thing you want to learn because that's the last thing any captain is going to turn you lose on because it is the most dangerous. The ship, when it starts moving, if he goes fast enough, he will go faster than you and overtake you. It's his motion that causes the problem. It's not the problem you're doing it. It's what he starts doing while you're doing it. If you get to a point, these old-fashioned tugboats, they had single-screw tugs and a rudder. They couldn't turn like the tugboats of today. The modern tugboats are completely different. So, what happens is, we'll get in irons, the tugboat gets sideways, and it would drag him backwards like towing a car backwards when he doesn't want to go backwards. Usually, it will flip the boat.

MS: Did you witness any accidents or things like that? Can you tell me about those?

RR: Through my career working on tugboats, I've probably been involved in – not involved but witnessed a few incidences where ships have had problems. One time we had a ship going into Todd Shipyard, and the captain wanted me to tie up a certain way. I thought, "I don't know. I don't have a lot of confidence in this because if the weather isn't that –" we had a little bit of wind. We're putting a ship on a drydock. When we were going into the drydock, if he got out of line, he would have to drive the ship out. This is where, again, would cause a problem with ship because the tugboat is going backwards again, and he can't go that way. He would bury us. So, I told the crew, "At this point," I said, "if anything goes wrong, I'll ring general quarters." Now, I was a tugboat captain at this time. They were docking this ship into the drydock. It got out of line with the wind. They took the command of aborting the drydocking and leave. I was backwards. I passed the word, I said, "You've got to let this tugboat go because they're going to drive this ship out." So, I ran the general quarters, and we cleared the ship. As the ship drove

out, he ran right into the dock. They had a little tugboat sitting there that the shipyard called the *Yankee*. The last time I saw the *Yankee*, at that time, it went into dock stern first. He came out from underneath the dock full speed ahead, come out of there like a torpedo, and went around the corner. I didn't see him for the rest of the day. He didn't come back at all. Then the ship just went out. We got him out of the dock and got him all squared around and put him to anchor until he could get him back in again.

MS: Again, it's hard for me to visualize this. Describe where you are, where the ship is.

RR: Once I was taking this ship into Todd, we were taking him stern first into the drydock, which is sunk in the water, and you drive in this little bitty thing. They pump the water out. It floats the ship, so they can work on. When he found that he was not in line to go in and he decided to drive the ship out of the drydock, which would take the tugboat backwards, and we couldn't go backwards at that time. So, I passed the word to let the tug go, and that ship would slide down my side. Well, as he left the dock, he had – there was another dock in front of him so he couldn't turn around there because of the wind. He went up, and he hit this dock. Well, after he hit the dock, that stopped the ship. So, he could regroup it, and we can tie back up to the ship and then assist him out. So, we took him out and laid him at the anchorage. It didn't hurt the ship, it hurt the dock. So, we put the ship to anchor until the weather came down, and the wind was down. Then we take the ship back in and put him back in the drydock.

MS: Now I understand.

RR: Another time, another incident was a ship coming into Los Angeles. It had a pilot aboard from another company. I was working for a tugboat company again. This ship was a turbo. It had a turbine engine in it, not a conventional piston engine. It's a turbine engine. They were fairly new ships. They were built for the Navy. They were running back and forth to Alaska. They would come up the main channel and was going to turn around and back into a fuel dock. It was a tanker. There was another ship, *D'Amico* ship, on Terminal Island. This ship would come down the channel and make a right-hand turn and then back up to park. Well, as he made his right-hand turn, they couldn't stop the turbine. It just kept going. So, when they put it in reverse, it didn't go in reverse. It just kept going ahead. Well, it went – kept going ahead until it hit the *D'Amico* ship which was in front of it. He hit him right in the middle straight on. Well, after this collision occurred, luckily, there was no fire because the ship was gas free. It was inerted. So, now, the ship was pinned inside the other ship. They did not want to pull the two ships apart. They had concerns about the other ship falling over. So, they left these two ships together like that for three days while they took the rest of the cargo out of the ship that was pinned to the dock. When they got all through, they got everybody off and got everybody on standby and ready to take these two ships apart. Because they had feared that the other ship would roll over. Well, they backed the ship out after it had been sitting there for three days. They backed the ship out, and it didn't even move. It just sat there like nothing had ever happened. So, there was three days of anguish and concern that wasn't really necessary.

MS: What were the role the tugs in all of that?

RR: The tugboats just stayed there and pushed, made sure everything stayed right in place so

that those ships would not get apart. That was good duty because you could just sit there all day long and just run the boat instead of running from place to place, here and there, back and forth to Long Beach to LA to Long Beach to Wilmington to LA. The crews around those boats just sat there. That was a good world to be in, just sit there and get paid for it instead of running.

MS: Talk about some of the characters you remember that you met during your days at the harbor, the good old days.

RR: One gentleman that I met and worked with on the tugboats when I was so ambitious and wanting to learn how to run a tugboat and operate a tugboat and learn a little bit about tugboats, his name was Captain (McConkey?). Old man Mack was a very colorful individual. When I first left the union, one of the best clues I ever got was, "When you get on that boat, little boy," he says, "learn how to make coffee. Because the first thing you want to do is have coffee and talk about things." So, I said, "Okay." So, I learned how to make coffee. That was my first endeavor. Once we got that down, I got on a tugboat. He says, "Make sure the captain always has coffee." I said, "Okay. I'll never forget that, and I'll do that." So, I got down here, and I was on this tugboat with a guy by the name of Captain McConkey, Mack. So, I go up to the wheelhouse, and I'm standing around watching him. He's driving this tugboat, and I was just overwhelmed at all this stuff, like this is great. So, I said, "Captain, would you like a cup of coffee?" He said, "I sure would." So, I went down and made a pot of coffee. I take up a fresh cup of coffee, and I handed it to him thinking that everything's going to be great. He turned around. He started drinking his coffee. He drove the tugboat for a little bit. He turned, looked at me, says, "What are you doing here?" I said, "Well, I'm up here to learn and see how you drive a tugboat and learn how to run one and, well, someday, maybe I can do that." He says, "Well," he says, "I've got my coffee. That's all you need. You could go back downstairs." You go below. You don't go downstairs, you go below." So, he says, "You go below." I thought, "Gee, that was kind of crude. I was up there trying to learn, and he doesn't want to teach me anything." In those days, he had become a threat. If you learned how to do something they knew how to do, they felt like you're going to try and compete for the job. So, I learned a lesson there to myself. I thought, "Well, if anybody ever comes to be and I get into a position where I can help somebody or try to teach somebody how to do what I do, I would be more than happy to do that." Going through that with somebody else, I thought that you could lose your art here. If he goes, what is he going to leave me with? So, I thought, "If I can have younger people, if I ever get to that place, I would not do that to them." But these were the older days. As time goes on, things change. So, when I finally became a – finally got the opportunity to be a captain on a tugboat, it all started about full time captain was about 1974. From that day forward, anybody that showed any interest to learn how to run a tugboat or drive a tugboat or anything else, I was – I would teach them anything that I knew to help them out. Well, I kind of kept that with me in my whole career. It's paid off because I got lot of good shipmates out there that have – not that I know anymore, anybody else, but it helped them get over hard spot.

MS: What would be especially valuable tip that you would pass on to somebody?

RR: The most valuable tip I could give anybody that would want to run a tugboat, as I look back, would probably be patience, take your time, don't rush it, and never be afraid to ask any question. Because there's no question, it's – anything you can think of is worth asking. As these

guys would come up and try to run a tugboat or do what I do, everybody does it a little bit different. When they do it, I watch it. If they get into a position that I can't get out of or they go beyond my limits, then I would step in and interfere. So, I'll give them the freedom of letting them do it their way, unless it's something that I can't get out of. So, this has been my best aid for teaching. It makes the person a little more comfortable just learning. Because they aren't – they don't feel like there's a hammer over them.

MS: What is the toughest situation you can get into that you don't want to get into?

RR: The toughest situation that a person might get into when they get into trying to drive a tugboat would be speed or weather or just don't have enough knowledge to get in and out of certain situations because of speed, or it could be not going fast enough. You need to go faster to do certain things. You need to go slower to do certain things. So, as far as the limits go, it's an onsite decision. You can write books from now on. Until you get in a situation, and you can actually see it happen, you can use those – that knowledge, the book knowledge, up to a point, but then you're going to have to use skills from then on.

MS: How do you get from tugboat to a pilot?

RR: Well, once, I got into the wheelhouse after being a deckhand for quite a few years, then I got into driving the tugboat for quite a few years. Once I started driving the tugboats and working with the pilots, I thought, "Gee, it'd be great to move in another step." So, the only way you can do that is to get experience in piloting. Well, in the tugboat industry, we had a little unique situation back in those days that we don't have today, where a tugboat operator would do what we call, I said earlier about flat tows, where the captain would go aboard. Once you got enough experience and somebody was willing to let you go out and do it, they'd start you with smaller things and move you up. I would be qualified to go do a flat tow. So, I would leave the tugboat and some – a junior man would come up on the wheel or the senior deckhand. He would run the tugboat. So, after you do that, you start thinking about maybe being a pilot if you want to be a pilot. It's piloting in another – it's piloting in a different sense of the word. So, we had an agreement with the pilot companies. In those years, we would move ships that had no rudder or had no engine and couldn't work themselves with the tugboats. The pilots wouldn't work ships without engines. We would not work ships with engines. So, that kept us in our own areas. So, if a pilot got on a ship and was bringing in the harbor and he lost it, and he said, "Okay. Captain, it's now a flat tow. You can have it. I'm gone." So, the tugboat would pick up the ship. Then the captain's tugboat would go on and would work it as the ship becomes a barge if it hasn't got an engine. So, that's what the pretense that it worked on. After working a few, started working flat-toes and getting around and having that desire to get on a ship and drive it with an engine, I thought, "Boy, I'd like to be a pilot and get up there and see it from that end." So, I went out and started riding ships. It was required to ride ships for a certain amount of trips. Then you could, at that time, take a license after you qualified on your trips, riding ships in and out with a pilot and observing the trips in and out with a pilot. Once you get enough trips in, depending on what you were doing, the Coast Guard would give you the amount of trips you'd have to make. Once you satisfied that issue, then you could go in and take an examination for your pilotage. So, on the lines of thinking of becoming a pilot, I thought, "Well, this would be a great opportunity." So, I went out and got permission to ride on ships while I was still working for the tugboat

companies. I'm riding on the ships and getting my trips in. One day, I happened to be on the dock where I worked at the tugboat company, and Captain McGillivray was there. Captain McGillivray says, "Where you been, Sonny?" I said, "Well, I've been out riding ships. I want to see what it looks like from that end, so that I can work the tugboat a little bit better. That way, I'd have more knowledge." He says, "Well, aren't you happy here?" Like I'm going to quit and go away. I just tried to explain to him I wanted to learn how to run the tugboat better. If I knew how they were thinking, I could run the tugboat a little bit better. So, I thought it was kind of funny that he'd just come up right out of the blue and said, "Well, aren't you happy here?" So, I stayed there, again, like I said. Because we had no licenses, I had a little difficulty trying to qualify on an inland license only for pilotage. Because I had nothing, I couldn't endorse nothing until I got a license. So, again, once Congress passed the law and they grandfathered me with a license, then I went back and rode again and got my trips in and was qualified to be a pilot.

MS: Well, people don't know what a pilot is. What is a pilot in a harbor?

RR: Now, when you become a pilot, once you're qualified, you have your license, and you become a pilot. A pilot's duty is, you work for a piloting company. This is required by federal law and through tariffs and different ports as to what sizes and limits there are. But there's a basic cutoff. It's 10,000 tons. Once you get 10,000 and over, then it's required to have a licensed pilot on board to go in U.S. waters. Your pilot's license is good for a geographic area, like San Pedro Bay, which would include Long Beach, Anaheim Bay, and Los Angeles Harbor. So, now, I have a license. If I'm employed by the piloting company, when a ship arrives from overseas, it's a mile or four miles off of the breakwater, a pilot's duties would be to get in a little boat. They'll take you out to the ship. They have a ladder called a Jacob's Ladder that they hang on the side of a ship. Then you climb up this ladder and get on board the ship. Then you're taken to the wheelhouse. You and the captain will have an exchange of information as to how the ship is doing, where it's going, how we're going to get there, all the different things that you might encounter. Once you've reached an agreement on all this, then the pilot will take command of the ship with the agreement of the captain. He becomes the person that directs the ship into the port. You don't drive a ship like you drive a car. You give directions and you give commands with the engine, the speeds that you might want to stop the engine, start the engine, reverse the engine, turn right, turn left so many degrees. Then you drive it through the channel. The roles the tugboats play when you're piloting is like an airplane. When the ship goes slower, it loses its ability to steer. Or as it goes slower and you want to slow the ship down without using the ship's engines, you use the tugboats. So, as the ship loses its speed, you'll have a tugboat push or pull to turn it one way or the other. That's the reason the tugboat comes into play. Once that's satisfied and you get the ship landed, then you release the tugboats. You're finished with the engines and you're finished with all the commands on the bridge of the ship. It's moored to a dock. You'll go down a gangway. You'll get in a little car. It'll take you back to your pilot's station, and you wait for your next job.

MS: So, you're not actually steering the boat. You're telling whoever's steering the boat what to do?

RR: While piloting a ship, you don't really touch the wheel. You don't touch the throttles or anything else. You'll give an order to a quartermaster. On all ships, it's required that somebody

will speak English. By using the English commands, they will follow your orders. If you want 5-degree rudder to right or starboard, or 10 degrees or 20 degrees or hard over in any direction, they will repeat the order and initiate the command. If you say, "Stop the engine," the man will move a telegraph and stop the engine. So, this is how it's done. It's done by word of mouth. It's like a conductor in an orchestra. You just tell them what to do, when to do it, how much to do, and how little to do. That's how you guide the ship in. Then the other part is your tugboats come into play, you use the ship's equipment and the tugboats to assist you in docking the ships.

MS: Now, if these ships are coming back and forth on regular runs, wouldn't the captain of the ship get to know the harbor pretty well after doing this, and why would they need a pilot? Or is it just because they're going to so many ports, they could never know all the different ports?

RR: The uniqueness of being a pilot, as compared to being the captain of the ship, two reasons require a pilot. One is you're foreign and don't have an American license. So, you're not licensed to enter or leave the port because you don't have an American license. If you have an American license, then you can get your pilotage. Tariffs require it. Federal regulations require pilots in certain instances. If you're an American and you have a master's or a mate's license, you can get a pilotage endorsement for the geographic areas that you go to. A lot of guys don't like piloting. They don't want to handle a ship. They don't care to handle a ship. They're not confident doing it. In all reality, a lot of them don't have the knack of piloting because they've never had the time to put into it, to learn how to do it. Even though you get a license, you still haven't learned how to be a pilot. You've just gotten your trips in. Then once you get your license, now you can learn. If somebody wants to hire you and take you on as a pilot, the first thing you're going to do is go into a training program. Some are quite extensive. At the Port of Los Angeles, we have the best program going bar none. That's the best training program in the world. We have simulator requirements. We have man-model requirements. We update them, man-model experiences. We go to lakes where they have model ships that you actually get in and drive. We do that once every four years.

MS: Skipping ahead, this is all interesting. Give me the specifics on training to be a pilot. What do you do to train to be a pilot?

RR: Well, to train a pilot and once a new man comes aboard, he'll start riding and observing. He'll ride for a certain amount of time depending on his knowledge and his experience. He'll ride a certain period of time and observe and work with the pilot. Usually, these are guys that have their licenses. They have to have a license to start. When we take them on and train them, depending on their experience levels, they'll ride and observe, like I said. Then they might start out doing smaller jobs while being observed with a full-time pilot. Once he gets those jobs under his belt, then they graduate him to bigger ships and different areas. Even though he has his license, he still has to train. So, we go to different areas and different sizes until he works through the different tonnages until he gets up to qualify for any ship. Our ships are running up to over a hundred thousand tons now.

MS: You're talking about simulators. What are these other things that are done for training?

RR: Yes. Along with the training program, on-job training, with our particular piloting service

here in Los Angeles, we require simulator training. These are areas where they have simulators that are actual bridges simulated. They have everything in them that a ship would have. It has 360-degree pictures, like a television. So, it puts you in the steering wheelhouse of a ship with all the same equipment that you would find on the ships, new ones and old ones. You drive these ships in and out of geographic areas in training with different weather conditions in the simulator, just like an airline pilot. It's just like anybody else that's in simulation training. They have these throughout the United States. We use them every two years for full pilots and training pilots. So, these are great aids and they're a great help, especially the younger fellows coming in because you can do no damage. If you think you've got something going and you're in a simulator, well, push it to the limit. See what you can do. You find it out. You say, "Wow. I can't do that." Well, now you know why. Then it goes one step better from the simulator training to the manned model training. Now, there are not too many around. There's one in the East Coast of the United States. There's one in France and there's another one in England. I understand there's a couple more being developed. This gives you the ability to get into a model ship that's scaled to everything. The engine is scaled to the size. So, if you get in a specific ship with a certain size engine in a real ship, that model is going to do exactly the same thing. The propeller is going to be the same power as the big ship. So, you'll see it at a different level. It is very worthwhile.

MS: You go into a model harbor, or is that also pictures?

RR: The areas that you drive these model ships in are model harbors. They're built with the same conditions that certain harbors have. The one in Grenoble, to me, is probably the best one that I've ever been to. The lake is man-made. It was not a lake. It was made. The depths are all controlled. The channels are made to a certain degree to be exact for the ships that we're driving. The lake maintains a certain level of water. It has a skimmer like a swimming pool, so the water never changes its depth. If it gets dry, it pumps more water in. If it gets too full, it siphons off into a reservoir and it keeps it circulating. So, that's probably the best one around. The others are lakes or ponds. They have no control over it in the same way. Weather conditions are a little different with the models because you can't control the wind. You might have a 1 mile an hour wind on a little model. It could be 10, 20, or 50 mile an hour wind on a real ship. So, the wind is not the thing that we can control on the models.

MS: Of all your piloting experiences, are there any one or two or three jobs that jump out at you where things really were unusual?

RR: [laughter] I'm sorry.

MS: That's all right.

MS: That's okay.

RR: I have one gentleman I work with. He's a very entertaining captain, a very capable man. But he has a habit of saying smashing. He's from England. The first time I met him, I got aboard his ship, and he says, "Oh, that's a smashing idea. That's a smashing good idea." I say, "Captain, that's one word we don't use. We don't say smashing. It's a good idea or it's a great

idea. It's never smashing." He said, "Oh, I understand. I understand." I said, "That just doesn't look good." [laughter] So, that was kind of an entertaining phrase that I've run across. Let's see. What was the other one? I had another one in my mind there.

MS: Was there any particular close calls or –

RR: Well, a close call is a hard call to make because close call is different to different people. A close encounter is something that comes up every now and then. You'll say, "Well, what's a close encounter?" My answer to a close encounter is if you can put a ship on a dry dock and you only have a foot of clearance, or you have a ship and you pass another ship with a hundred feet, which one's a close encounter? It's a hard call to make. I think if you have to do something very evasive to avoid something like that, then that's something that you haven't planned on. You had to do some extreme maneuvering or some extreme commands.

MS: Do you have any examples of that?

RR: I've had a couple where something didn't go right. You had to do an extreme maneuver to avoid a situation. That would be out of the ordinary. So, that would be something that I would call a close encounter, whether it's close to something or not, or just missing something.

MS: What makes a great pilot? I mean, what makes a pilot especially good? What are the characteristics of a great pilot?

RR: What makes a great pilot? That's a tough one to answer. Your peers.

MS: What makes a –

RR: The people that you work with. You've got to remember, when you board a ship as a pilot, you're going to get on a ship that's probably got $6, $7, $800 million worth of stuff or more. In today's world, it's a large event now and it's a large investment. So, this ship comes all the way around the world. It comes flying up to Los Angeles. He has to stop and wait for a person he's never met, never seen, doesn't know. Here comes this little boat. This guy crawls up a ladder. He runs up there with a big smile on his face and says, "Hey, how you doing?" He is going to turn this thing over to you and let you drive this ship. It's his responsibility to take care of everything that's there, the ship and the cargo and his crew. Turning that over to a person he's never seen, has no clue about how good he is or how bad he is, where he came from, what his experience is. It takes a lot of confidence and consideration for a person to say, "Okay, Mr. Pilot. Here she is. Everything is running well. Take us in." So, this is an area that I work on myself. I work on to try to create a little confidence in there, so he's comfortable and I'm comfortable. I'm not going to do as good as I might want to do if I feel he's going to be not happy with the way I'm doing it. So, I try to encourage a little confidence between us by conversation, body language. You address the issue by, "If there's something you don't like the way I'm doing it, captain, tell me. If it's something you want to do, tell me. Don't be afraid to jump in. I'm open for any suggestions you have. It's your ship. We want to take care of it. So, if you have confidence in me, we'll do it." If you stop and think about that, that's a hard issue to come across. Body language has a lot to do with it.

MS: Give me an example.

RR: Your body language, if you're nervous, you're sitting there, you're chewing your fingers, you're scratching your head, you're indecisive on your decisions, you're weak on your commands. There's a lot of things that body language can generate that somebody else might watch. So, your body language and your nervousness are always available to somebody else. If a captain is nervous about the way I'm doing something, he gives me little signals. He'll indicate, "Well, we're turning at such a rate. We're going at such a speed." If he keeps reminding me of the speed, then he's not comfortable, I'll slow it down even more to make him comfortable. These are the little things you do, the subtle things you do to get a relationship going because I'm going to see him again someday.

MS: Well, that's my next question. Do people (bolts?), come in and say, "I want Ron to pilot me in here?"

RR: Oh, when you do this piloting and you do these things over and over again and you get where you see the certain captains over and over, we have a system that allows us to do a job in rotation. You can't say, "Okay." Well, I'll come in there and I'll say, "Well, I want Frank to come out and do my ship." When you call the pilot station, you're going to say, "Well, who's working today? I'd like Frank to come out and do my ship, or I would like Mike to come out and do my ship." We avoid it. At anything we do, we're in a strict rotation. All our guys are confident. All our guys are capable. Everybody works a little bit different. No two guys work alike. So, these are the things that these captains have to put up with. They do it very well because they interface.

MS: Kind of one of the final questions, you're at the controls of these big ships. Did you ever say, beyond piloting, "I want to take that ship to Shanghai?" Have you ever thought of doing the high seas or –

RR: When you're piloting a ship, if you're taking them out, coming in is one maneuver. Departing is another one. When you're taking a ship out and if you're a pilot and you like piloting, your job is over once you pass the lighthouse, or you get to a sea buoy. It's fifteen days of nothing, steering a straight line and just going up and over weather conditions and making another port. Most of the ships turn around in thirty-two to forty-five days. They'll go to the Orient, make their stops over there and come back here. There's fifteen days of play over here while that guy is going straight across the ocean. I kid every now and then when the boat is a little late or something. I say, "Well, I guess I'll just go to Oakland, or I guess I'll just go to Hawaii, or maybe I'll go to Panama, and I'll fly home." In some areas, they do that because weather conditions don't allow them to pick a pilot up and the ship can keep going. There's been times where guys will come down from San Francisco and fly home.

MS: So, you've never been tempted to –

RR: I've never had the ambition or the temptation to just stay on it and go all the way. I just say, "No. I'm going to take you out as far as the buoy, and I'm going home. I'll catch you when you

come back. Then we can have another go around with it." But I've never had that dream to go out. I've always stayed in the harbor my whole career. I've gotten with the tugboat companies for almost thirty years in there. I made, I think, four trips that I thought would be good trips to make. One was to go through the Panama Canal. They were looking for a crew to bring a tug back from Louisiana. So, I said, "I'll take the job." I went to Louisiana and brought the tug around, went through the Panama Canal and came home. I thought, "Boy, that's pretty cool. I'd like to go the other way." So, lo and behold, a few years later, there was a chance to go the other direction, to go through the canal eastbound. So, I went down. I went through the canal. I went up to the mouth of the Mississippi River and went up to New Orleans and got off in Algiers. I said, "Well, this is pretty good." Because I made the Mississippi, which I wanted to do, and I went through the canal the other direction, which I wanted to do. That brings us back to the fact that you want to ride a ship out and take it where it's going. I said, "No. I've done everything I want to do. So, I'll just get off the buoy and let you guys go."

MS: [laughter] Do pilots ever meet from different ports and get together and trade war stories with each other? Is there kind of a pilots' association that talks about it?

RR: When you're piloting and you've done all these things and you've trained a few guys here and you've trained a few guys there and you've met guys that have been on American ships that have been up and down the coast and they go into piloting in San Francisco or up Columbia River or Puget Sound and the other areas that I've visited around the world and the East Coast, you get to know the fellows. Because you've worked with them on occasion, or you've met them while they're training and riding to get their routes. So, when you go to another area, you can always pop in and say, "Hi. I've got friends in San Francisco, and I've got friends up in Puget Sound and some in the Columbia River." When you get up in the areas, you kind of wander around, say hi to guys and go about your business, you kind of keep in touch throughout your career.

RR: Because this is an international business, are there legendary pilots that are talked about, like Hans in Rotterdam and somebody in Shanghai and, oh, that great pilot in Hong Kong or that crazy guy who was in Sydney? I mean, is there anything like that going around?

MS: Well, through the years, there's been some colorful pilots back in the olden days, as they call the olden days, compared to today's world where things are a little bit tighter now. The regulations are a lot stiffer now and responsibilities are a lot heavier now. In the old days, you'd take a ship out. Before you went out on the ship, you'd go down to the captain's office or salon and you'd have a go around. You'd have a few horns and then talk about what you're going to do and say, "Okay. Let's go to work now." You'd go up there and do the job. There were a few fellows around that had some colorful histories. We had one in Los Angeles one time, he had cauliflower ears. He was a wrestler and a fighter. He didn't have any ears left. Some of them come from the lumber coast, the lumber industry. In the old days, the old lumber schooners run up and down the coast without the aid of radar and all the old stuff. These guys, they got nicknames for blockheads, squareheads, stubborn, you name it. They'd stop a ship and have a fight and just go back to business again. These days are gone, but those days were there. They were very colorful. There's a lot of books written about a lot of these guys, Swenson's and Alley's and Myers and Grimstead's and Grimestone's. It's amazing. It's amazing. But today's

world is not that lackadaisical. It's very rigid. But I was lucky enough to grow up in a time where we could have more fun, and we had more freedom. The regulations weren't as great. I'm probably one of the only guys in the world that's ever waterskied with a tugboat.

RR: I forgot about a costume.

MS: Well, give me some stories about the old days before things got so regimented.

RR: Okay.

MS: Go ahead.

RR: Going back to things that used to be a little bit more relaxed, we didn't have dress codes or things like that. We had a couple of younger fellows that were on tugboats that liked to wear costumes. So, we were greeting passenger ships. This one fellow had this mask that you'd pull completely over your head. He would disguise you completely like a gorilla. So, he'd put this on. He'd put his coat on. He'd put these furry gloves on. He'd come out of the galley and come out of the deckhouse while we were alongside the passenger ships. He'd run up and down the deck hollering and screaming. People would look around like, "Good Lord, what is this going on down there?" So, word got back to the office that these funny things were happening on these tugboats around the ships. We had another gentleman. His brother was a wrestler. So, he had this brief wrestling uniform. He'd put it on. Old Sam would come flying out of the deckhouse in his bathing suit, running around on the deck like a wrestler gone mad. All of a sudden, it just got to be building up, building up. So, somebody sent a letter to our tugboat company, stating that some of the stuff they're seeing there is very disturbing. So, we all got memos to behave ourselves and put our clothes on and behave like gentlemen because we were not helping our image at all. So, that was the result of that one. As I became more into being a captain on a tugboat, I got assigned to a tugboat one time. It's a tugboat called a direct reversible. The engine is very powerful. The tugboat was pretty fast. I drove this tugboat around. I got to thinking, I said, "This thing is pretty fast. I bet you can waterski." So, it had a door and a galley. It was kind of a screen door. I thought, "Well, we'll make us a hydroplane." So, we got some heaving lines out and we tied them onto this door, threw it off the stern of the tugboat. I had put on a bathing suit. I ran out and jumped on this thing and said, "Go for it." The tugboat took off. By golly, that thing was just skipping along. I said, "This is pretty cool. I'm going to bring some water skis down. I think we can do this." So, it'll never go fast enough for one ski, but it'll work with two. So, we put the old hydroplane away. Put one more trip on the hydroplane. We had a younger fellow that was a tugboat captain like myself. He was out driving the boat one day. He saw us doing this. So, he says, "That's pretty cool." He put on his Bermudas. He jumped on the hydroplane. We were towing him across the harbor, across through the anchorage from Long Beach to Los Angeles. We had these little harbor cruise boats that used to go around. Well, he didn't snap his pants. As we were towing him along across the anchorage, his pants slid down. We wouldn't stop the boat because we knew the passenger boat was coming. So, we just went right on by him. He was not a happy camper. We wouldn't stop until the boat got clear. Then when it did stop, we didn't know if we wanted to get him out of the water or not. [laughter] But anyway, he survived it all. We didn't get any letters on that one, though. The other one was, after that, I brought some water skis down. The tugboat was called the *Glory*. I got up to the

wheelhouse, got on my bathing suit, got the ropes all ready. I had the senior man on there, Captain Jim Penny. Captain Jim Penny was on there. We took off on the tugboat. I said, "Okay. Stop this thing out in the anchorage." We were going from Los Angeles to Long Beach. Well, we had little police boats at that time that ran around. They happened to see us out there messing around. They wondered what were we doing. So, they come motoring over in our direction. Well, in the meantime, I said, "Okay. Go for it," full speed ahead. So, we took off. I popped up on the water skis. I said, "By golly, there was proof that you can ski behind this boat." So, I stayed on the skis. We went off to Long Beach. That poor little police boat left L.A. and followed us all the way over to Long Beach. I don't remember how far he went before he stopped, but I'm pretty sure I skied longer than he stayed with us. So, we got over to Long Beach. We stopped the boat. I got back in. I said, "That's pretty good." Again, like I said, we had a lot of fun back then. I probably grew up in probably the fondest times of doing what I've been doing because of not having all the restrictions that we have today. You could probably still do some of the stuff. We used to have barbecues going on tugboats. You'd go alongside and say, "What are you guys doing back there? Things are on fire." Then, "Oh, we're cooking dinner. We're going to have a barbecue." I had a big plank set up on a boat deck for a diving board. You'd be going across the anchor and say, "Okay. Swim called." Everybody just jumped off the board. The tugboat would go adrift. You have to swim. We always had to leave a ladder hanging over because you couldn't get back without it, or somebody has to stay on board and bring the boat back to us. A little nonsense every now and then, then we get another letter that they started trimming our diet. One of the fellows went into the office. This is when I made the clincher to leave. He took one of my shipmates and made him a boss. I said, "There's no way I could work for that man." Los Angeles offered me a job. I say, "Goodbye." But our relationship has continued. I'm happy that I've done what I've done. I've had a great career.

MS: You talked about how the harbor has changed over the years.

RR: Yes. As far as having my career –

MS: Tell me how many years you've worked here.

RR: My career in the harbor started in 1959. The harbor that I worked in in 1959 is not the harbor that I'm working in today. Some of it has completely disappeared. Some of it is still there but rearranged. It's just been a great experience watching the evolution occur. It's good and bad. The future is progress. It's great to look back on history. The whole bottom line of this centennial thing is reflecting, seeing the good and seeing the bad, and see the happy and the sad. Oh, I'm sorry about that.

MS: What is he happiest –

RR: The happiest probably is just having a great career. I've been blessed. I've been very lucky. I've been able to do what I wanted to do. As fate would have it, in the beginning, going back to high school, is predicting what I was going to do. Now, I'm looking at the – I'm sorry.

MS: No, no, no, no. So, what is that? What is so moving to you when you look back?

RR: The fun. The fun. It's just been a great career. I guess the saddest part is thinking about you're getting to be a certain age and retire. My wife says, "As long as you're having fun, keep doing what you're doing. If you don't have any fun, then go ahead and get out." She said, "What are you going to do if you retire?" I have a lot of hobbies. I play with trains. I have model trains and cars. I play with cars and trains. I have an old car. I have a new car. I have a sports car. I have a Model A that I play with.

MS: No boats?

RR: No boats. No. I've got an RV. That one, I can park. I don't have to worry about tides. I don't have to worry about floods. When I want it, I drive it. It stops. It doesn't go anywhere. Boats, you can't stop. You got to work on them day in, day out, but –

RR: But retirement is a tough thought for you?

RR: Yes. It really is. It really is if you stop and think about it. I'm just glad that I was able to do it when I did. I think I probably got the best of it because I came in with the old equipment. Now, they have equipment that's completely new, state of the art. No rudders. No propellers. These things are cycloidals. They're azimuth drives. They're even coming into water jets. Tugboats are becoming docking modules. They're round. They don't even have the shape of a boat. They go in any direction because they have no rudders and they're cycloidals. I call them paddle boats because they spin around and around like a paddle boat. Paddle wheelers on the side, these are flat on the bottom and around they go. So, I've seen them for, I think, the best part of it. The kids that are coming up today don't have the depth that I was lucky enough to go through. That gets you out of the hard spots. Sometimes you get in some bad weather and a bad condition. You think you forgot some of this stuff and you say, "Wow, I was there once before. This is what I did to get out of it because it reflects of something I've seen." These are the little innuendos that the new people don't have. This is the stuff that you lose. You lose a little bit as time goes. The cameraman of yesterday did a little different than the cameraman of today. The equipment is different. The end result is something to see, but it's how you got there.

MS: Very different. Yes.

RR: So, my job is the same way, watching it grow.

MS: When you do retire, what are you going to miss the most?

RR: The fun.

MS: When I retire –

RR: When I retire, I'll miss the fun. I'll probably stay here until somebody pulls the fun away. I left the tugboats when they took all my fun away. When they took my swimming rights away and my waterskiing rights away, I went to piloting full-time. I've worked with different companies. This has been the best, the top.

RR: So, should we look for you one day waterskiing behind a container ship coming in?

RR: No. I don't think they go fast enough.

[laughter]

Actually, I could probably waterski behind a new ship if they had a rope long enough. It's been a blast. It's been a blast. If you guys want to go out and do any filming, nothing will bother me.

MS: Well, that's something certainly in our list of things to do because we need to illustrate.

RR: You need to ride one to see what it's like. You're welcome to go with me anytime you want. I've had tons of people go with me. I've had classes go with me. I had one incident where the Coast Guard was going out with me. I had two or three training pilots and four or five Coast Guard gentlemen. We're going to go from Long Beach to Los Angeles. We're going to go through the drawbridges. The Coast Guard guy says, "So, you're going to go through the drawbridge?" I said, "Yes." I say, "We're going to go the back way to Long Beach." He says, "Oh." He says, "I don't know." He says, "What do you think about that?" I say, "Well, we'll probably miss it, anyway, meaning we're going to hit it." "Gee," he says, "I don't want to hear that." [laughter] I said, "Oh, don't worry about it. If we don't make it, we'll hit it." We're backing this ship. Talking about comical situations, I had this ship one day. I'm taking him into a berth called 163. We have to turn around and back this ship down a very narrow channel. I had three training pilots with me. So, we go up in there. We get up into the main basin, which is under the Vincent Thomas Bridge. We turn the ship around, so we can go backwards up an area called (Slip One?). We're backing the ship up. There's a ship at another berth that we have to go around. Well, it's going to get very close. So, I told the captain, I say, "Captain, we're going to go ahead and go in there. We can do it all right. There's no problem. It's going to be close, but there's no problem getting it in." So, we turn the ship and we start backing it in. Well, these training pilots are standing there, watching. Every time I turn around, the captain is not with me, but the new pilots are. I say, "Has anybody seen the captain?" "Well, he's in the wheelhouse doing whatever he's doing." I said, "Well, he should be out here on the wing watching with us." So, I would go in and I got him. I say, "Captain, you got to come out here and stay here because we're going to get in an area now that we're going to have to be aware of what's going on. I want you right here to watch it with me. So, when I give you some orders, we can get on it." He agreed. So, we walked out and we're standing there. I'm watching it. We're still going around this other ship and it's getting very close. So, I thought, "Well, I could –" I turned around to talk to the captain, and he was gone again. I'm thinking now is not the time for him to go someplace. He needs to be here. So, I told the guys, the training pilots that were with me, I said, "Gentlemen, watch this." So, I went around. As I'm walking into the wheelhouse, I'm saying, "Cato, where are you? My little friend, Cato." They just about died laughing. They lost it. Anyway, I found the captain and I took him by his ear. I say, "You've got to come out. I want you to stand right here with me. You've got to stay here." He stayed there for the rest of the trip. But the whole idea, now when I go around with the gentlemen that were with me, I'll say, "Cato, where are you?" They still remember. Some of these things you don't forget. They just pop in and out.

MS: Well, you wouldn't want him to come lunging out and do some kung fu.

RR: Oh, no. If he come and did some kung fu, that would have been all she wrote. The junior pilots would have become senior pilots.

[laughter]

MS: Those are great stories. Well, we've got to, unfortunately, move on. But this is really good. These are terrific stories. You can have it when I'm gone."

[end of transcript]