Port of Los Angeles Centennial Oral History Project
John Royal Oral History
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Male Speaker: Hard question first. Please say your name and spell it.

John Royal: [laughter] My name is John Royal, J-O-H-N, R-O-Y-A-L.

MS: John, what year were you born and what city or where were you born?

JR: I was born on June 24th, 1922 in Wolf Creek, Colorado, on a homestead 18 miles east of Steamboat Springs.

MS: Good. Tell me about your father and your parents. Who were they and what did they do?

JR: Well, my father was born in Northern Italy. He came over to this country and was seventeen years old. He landed in Pueblo, Colorado 4th of July, I think, 1913. He was seventeen years of age. My mother was born in New Castle, Colorado. Her parents immigrated here from Italy also.

MS: Now, why Italy to Colorado? That's not an obvious choice.

JR: Well, actually my grandfather -- they worked in the coal mines. When my father came, he had a brother who worked in the steel mills in Pueblo. So, he went down there to look for his brother who'd stayed in the country about nine years and went back to Italy. But my dad never did.

MS: Then how did he or you get to San Pedro?

JR: Well, in 1928, the coal mines went down pretty bad and there wasn't much work and things got pretty bad. They were working on a piece of property up there at Wolf, a homestead, and things got very bad. So, he decided that there must be greener grass somewhere else. So, he decided he was going to go to Canada. But my mother had a sister who lived in Wilmington. So, she told my dad, "Before we go to Canada, I want to stop in Wilmington and say goodbye to my sister." Which we did and we never left. We lived in Wilmington six months. Then we moved to San Pedro. The old man worked on the federal breakwater. He helped build the Don Hotel. Then he went to work on the waterfront and stayed there until he retired.

MS: So, you came to San Pedro with your parents?

JR: Yes.

MS: How old were you?

JR: Well, let's see. Twenty-two to twenty-eight, I was about six or going on seven, I believe.

MS: What are your earliest memories of San Pedro and Wilmington when you were a little kid? What do you remember first about it?

JR: Well, I don't remember too much about Wilmington. We lived there for six months, but we

lived out behind Banning High School that time. There was a lot of fields and dairies out there and what have you. It wasn't very well populated. But then when we moved to Pedro it was more populated. I remember I had never been exposed to anything like I'd found here in San Pedro. I came down the waterfront here as a kid and I got a job hustling sheets. They had the Old Navy landing there at the foot of 5th Street in the Red Car Depot. We got a half a cent of sheet which sold for 3 cents. So, it was quite an experience. All I'd ever seen was rattlesnakes and coyotes and what have you in Colorado. When I got here, the boss gave me the newspapers and told me to get on the corner down on 5th and Front. The next I knew, some guy was pounding my head in. He said, "This is my corner." So, I went to the next corner and got the same treatment. But in time I was accepted. I hustled sheets on it for a long time. At that time, the Navy was stationed here, the whole Great White Fleet. There must have been ten thousand sailors a day that came ashore. I used to feel sorry for the soldiers at Fort MacArthur because it's just a handful of those. Whenever they'd get in them barroom brawls or on the waterfront down here, the soldiers didn't stand a chance. But Harbor Boulevard at that time was dirt. From Front Street out to the Red Car Depot, it was about almost three streets wide. Every year they'd have a huge carnival come to town down about where the bridge is now. Everybody would turn out for the carnival and they'd be here for about a week.

MS: As a little kid that must be pretty memorable. Tell me about more about it as a little kid going to that carnival.

JR: We'd go down. It was really something. First time I'd seen it; I was just amazed. Then me and another kid I was hustling sheets with, when it came time to collect tickets we'd run around the back and climb one of the tents and catch the show. Then the carnie hands were pretty clever. They'd have a guy up there and he'd challenge the sailors to wrestle. He'd say, "You guys are supposed to defend your country. You can't defend yourself." He didn't sell them. Out of the masses of the sailor, some sailor jumped up on the platform there and took off his jersey. "Guys, you know we can't do it here. We got to go in the tent." So, everybody ran to buy tickets. We'd run around the back and climb one of the fences. Then the carnie hands started tripping up the sailor wrestler because he was beating the carnie wrestler. So, the sailors got mad and they pulled down the main pole holding up the tent [laughter] and it collapsed. Everybody had a heck of a time getting out of there without suffocating [laughter]. After that, a big fight ensued on the street out in front of the dirt street between all the carnie hands and their sailors. But it was really a lot of excitement for a kid who'd come out of Wolf Creek [laughter].

MS: [laughter] What else was going on in the carnival that you enjoyed seeing? What was happening there?

JR: Well, just everything about a carnival having never seen one. They had all kinds of games and pinballs and throwing balls and all sorts of things. Of course, they had all this stuff. Now, I guess you'd call it cotton candy and all them goodies that you weren't really familiar with. But they had trapeze acts and they had wild animals. It was quite good to be honest with you. That lasted about a week down here. They had quite a turnout. But it was like an annual event.

MS: Where were you living when you first came?

JR: We lived on 15th in Beacon for about six months. Then we moved over to 470 Santa Cruz Street. I left the 15th Street Grammar School and went to Barton Hill. Then from 470 Santa Cruz Street, we moved down the corner to 135 North Mesa. Then in [19]34, we moved up to 767 West 1st Street. My dad bought the house.

MS: What was Beacon Street? A sort of a famous neighborhood? What was that like when you were here?

JR: Oh, Beacon Street was wide open. On the street level, they had all the gin mills. Down below under the gin mills, they had the Chinese gambling joints. Up on the second floor, they had the cathouses [laughter]. Between the seamen and the sailors and the soldiers and the guys looking for work as longshoreman and guys waiting to find a ship, there was a lot of hub of activity.

MS: As a little kid, did you hang out around there or would they allow you to do that?

JR: Oh, yes, we could go everywhere. But if we'd ever tried to go up into one of the cathouses, the colored madam would kick you in the butt and drive you down the stairs. You'd go up there and try to sell papers. So, we'd hang around downstairs and some of the seamen would be drunk and we'd sell them a two-day old newspaper or maybe three days old. But there was no longshoreman union at that time. They called it Happy Valley on 3rd and Pacific. 4th Street from Pacific, all the way down to the waterfront, there was a jungle of castor bean trees and a lot of jungle shanties in there and hobos and that. Guys waiting to get ships would live in those shanties there and batch. In the meantime, while they're waiting for a ship or any other work, they'd scrounge around for their jobs in that. A lot of the neighbors, the Italian and Yugoslav families, had gardens and had chickens. They used to get mad because a lot of these guys would go up at nighttime and raid their garden and raid their chicken coops and that. But since I grew up, I found out at one time Jack London lived there and was waiting for a ship. Then I found out that Ernest Hemingway one time, same way. Another one, the last one, was oh, geez, Louis L'Amour. They all had something in history similar at one time, whether everyone tried boxing. Then every one of them tried shipping out in the Merchant Marine. They told their stories about the waterfront at that time and how it was living in the jungle over there.

MS: Well, describe Happy Valley. We're going to change tapes. This is great. This is really good. Let's go back to Happy Valley. I'm going to often ask you questions again and repeat them. What was Happy Valley? Describe what it was and what did it look like and who lived there.

JR: Well, Happy Valley extended from 2nd Street and Mesa down to 3rd and over to 4th Street. It was a gulf coming down from Pacific Avenue and even above and down all the way to the waterfront. There was a lot of undergrowth of castor bean trees in there. The place was loaded with a lot of shanties with the – they used to call them bums or hobos or whatever. But there were guys who were waiting to grab a ship or waiting for a job or whatever. They'd live in there and batch in there and they'd do what they could do to make ends meet and that. It used to be sort of a taboo thing. They used to tell the kids, "You don't go around Happy Valley." But we used to run from 2nd Street and Mesa, run right down through Happy Valley and the castor bean

trees on the trail, right down to the water edge down to the Red Car Depot, see? It was a shortcut. On 3rd Street there was a huge bluff before you got to 4th Street. They had long, wooden steps going from 3rd Street up on top of the bluff to get the houses on top there. Then in the front of those houses was 4th Street and a couple of apartments. There was one hotel there. I think it was called the Nelson Rooms, and it was a cathouse [laughter]. But anyhow, there was not any serious trouble that I can remember there. But one kid one time did get grabbed by somebody in Happy Valley there and beat him up and abused him and what have you. So, that scared the beans out of everybody else about Happy Valley. But they seemed to be a jolly bunch of guys. They seemed to be going their own way there. The rest of the crowd just sort of left them alone. You never knew who was or wasn't living in Happy Valley. But we used to always run down through there because it was a shortcut rather than going to down Pacific and coming down.

MS: So, they had their little shanties and each shanty had a little fireplace or something they'd cook in?

JR: Yes. They batched, yes. Sometimes there were two guys living in one of them shacks, and other times three or four. Some guys owned one and would rent out to the other guys. It was very cheap at that time. But it was sort of – oh, I don't know how to describe it – I guess sort of a relaxed area and a relaxed time there. The police were very active on Beacon Street, around there. But I never saw much police activity in Happy Valley. But the police were pretty tough on those days and sort of notorious. They'd walk in pairs up and down Beacon Street and Palos Verdes and Front Street and in and out. They seemed to take a delight at that time of catching seamen and longshoremen looking for work and other guys and kicking them in the butt and chasing them around. But there was a lot of activity in those days on the waterfront there.

MS: This is the [19]30s we're talking about?

JR: Yes.

MS: Now, there was an area near there, I understand, BAB?

JR: Oh, yes.

MS: Tell me about that.

JR: BAB, Bare Ass Beach [laughter]. It was down the street here. Oh, right about where the bridge is. Then below that was Mexican Hollywood. You probably heard about that. If you didn't live in Mexican Hollywood and you weren't a Mexican kid, you had to have a lot of guts to go down there. But BAB, the kids used to go down there and swim in the nude. Then when the Red Cars would leave the depot and go out through the trestle to go out to Wilmington and Long Beach and elsewhere, the kids would moon the ride cars [laughter]. Then they'd perform in that until the cops would come. The other thing, they had a lot of lumber yards around here at that time and kids would knock some of the lumber over into that water and make a raft. Then get the raft out in the middle of the bay and the coastguard would come and take it away from you. Half the time, you'd swim on the other side to Terminal Island and you'd lay there in the sunshine

for a while until you got warm. Then you had to swim all the way back against the wind like a dummy [laughter]. There was a lot of activity. The banana boats used to tie up at the foot of 1st Street down near Pier 90. Me and another kid one time found an old skiff under the docks and we rode it out alongside this banana boat. We looked up and there was this longshoreman standing on the rail smoking. He looked down and he said, "What do you kids want, some bananas?" We said, "Yes, we'd like some bananas." He said, "Don't go away." So, these two longshoremen disappeared. When they came back, they had a stalk of bananas about that big and about that round, and they heaped it over the side. I went out about the skiff and the other came out of the stern. The bananas went right through in the middle and they sunk the skiff [laughter]. So, we had to swim to the dock. Then one kid would steal a hand of bananas and run like hell to Mexican Hollywood. The guards would go chase him, then they'd tell the kids to go steal all the bananas they wanted. It was nothing really serious or nobody got hurt. The longshoremen would work on the ships and even the seamen got a lot of daylight out of watching the kids play these games with the guards.

MS: Well, tell me about Mexican Hollywood. What was that?

JR: It was a village down there.

MS: Start with, "Mexican Hollywood was."

JR: Well, it used to –

MS: Did you explain that to him, Nell?

MS: Yes.

MS: Yes. You have to start your sentence by saying, "Mexican Hollywood was," so we know what you're talking about.

JR: Mexican Hollywood was a village that was east of Harbor Boulevard. It was down by the train trestle that went across where right now used to be Todd Shipyard. When the Red Cars would leave the depot here, they'd go down and get on that trestle and go to Wilmington, Santa Monica, Long Beach, and what have you. The only people who lived there, to my knowledge, were people of Mexican extraction. When I went to Barton Hill School, almost 90 percent of the students were kids out of Mexican Hollywood. For a long time, I never got into Mexican Hollywood. Then I saved my money and I bought a used bicycle for 12 bucks. My old man told me, "Don't take it to school." Well, the last day of school I didn't pay attention to him and I took it to school and somebody stole it. So, I looked around and I found it was in Mexican Hollywood. So, I went down there and I found my bike and its chain was off. The sprocket was bent, the wheel was bent, and it was all beat up. So, I got that and I got a beating on top of it [laughter]. Then when I got home, I think my old man kicked me in the butt too for taking the bike to school. But later on, after a series of fights I got to know all those Mexican guys pretty good. They finally accepted me. Of course, it didn't happen very easy. They'd gang up on you. But if you were smart, whether it was on Happy Valley or wherever you'd catch one of them alone, you'd even a keel. Then you'd tell them while they're chewy, "Next time you guys put a

ring around me, you're going to let this go on." Then next time you'd catch Arturo or whoever, Jesus. So, when they catch you and they put a ring on and they're going to work you over, you'd look at them and you say, "Hey, you're going to let this go on?" They guy would say, "Oh, come on, guys. He's all right. Leave him alone." So, then they started accepting that I had no more trouble.

MS: But basically, it was for a kid who wasn't a Mexican going into Mexican Hollywood, it wasn't a good idea?

JR: No. I found that out the hard way [laughter].

MS: Tell me about that.

JR: Well, I just told you. I went down there to retrieve my bicycle and I got whipped by some of the Mexican kids. But I did get my bicycle back, but the frame I think was bent, the sprocket was bent, the bike was ruined. But later on, on Ofarrell Street, there was a steep hill. It went real down steep. The kids would build soap boxes and two would stand down by where there's Harbor Boulevard there and they'd watch. There wasn't very much traffic and they'd go ahead. Then the guys would come down that Ofarrell Street Hill, and they'd cross all the way down to the east end of Harbor Boulevard where it hit Mexican Hollywood. But you could come off that hill real fast. There was always something to try. As you got a little older, you'd go down and fish off the docks.

MS: What about Terminal Island? Did you ever go to Terminal Island?

JR: Oh, yes, sure.

MS: Why don't you tell me about that.

JR: Yes. Well Terminal Island, there wasn't many ships in the Harbor at that time. They had a ferry boat called the *Ace*, and another one they charged a nickel to ride the ferry and you'd take it across the bay. A guy named Chappy had a little cafe there, coffee sort of a breakfast type thing. The fishermen and longshoreman and cannery workers or whatever, would stop and have breakfast or coffee or to grab a couple of donuts. So, you'd take the ferry across the bay there to Chappy's Cafe. Then if you were to look on to the canneries or over the Fish Harbor, that was one thing. But my mother used to give me a lunch and a couple sandwiches in a brown paper bag and tell me, "Go find your dad and bring him his lunch." Because in those days if you were picked off the waterfront on a shape-up system to work a ship, you couldn't leave. You had to stay with the ship until it was done. Sometimes the men worked two and three days and nights on a ship. So, I'd go look across there. I looked down and there weren't many docks. You could see maybe one or two or three ships on it. Then you'd go down until you found a ship your old man was on, and you'd give him his lunch in that. It was a pretty tough time that they were limited as to the amount of time they could leave the ship to go in the warehouse and go to the restroom. That was all before they got organized, and it was tough going. Fish Harbor, they had a lot of canneries. The kids would go over there and they'd bump fish off of some of the boats and take them back on this side of the fish markets and sell them to the fish markets. The

markets would turn around and sell them off [laughter] to the public. But there was always something either going over the Fish Harbor or –

MS: Describe Fish Harbor. What was that? Who lived there? What went on in Fish Harbor?

JR: Well, Fish Harbor as you probably know, they had a huge Japanese colony that was right behind the canneries. Oh, they had their own Shinto temple and they had their own school. One third of the fishing fleet at that time was Japanese. Then there was the one third, I think were Italians. The other third was Yugoslavs or Croatians. So, the women who lived in the village of Japanese Village when the cannery would get fish from the boats, they'd blow a whistle. No matter what time of the day or night it was, all the Japanese women would leave their little shanties that were built by the canneries and come within a block or two blocks of the canneries in the back, come and work in the canneries. They worked on shifts, cleaning and packing the fish. There was a hub of activity. When you were a kid and you went over there, they had the Japanese kites flying and a lot of paraphernalia like that. When a child was born, it was a boy or girl, they had certain kites that symbolized a boy or girl was born. There was no problem. The Japanese were great until Pearl Harbor. The Italian were together and the Yugoslavs were together, and they never sort of co-mingled.

MS: Did you ever go into a cannery and watch went on over there?

JR: Oh, yes, sure.

MS: Tell me about what went on in canneries.

JR: Well, a cannery they had long tables. The boat would come alongside that dock that had like finger piers and they had a vertical lift and it would rail the fish out into this lift and take it all the way up to this. Then there was water from one of the canneries because the street in front of the cannery went below. Then that flowing of water would take that fish into the cannery. There was a scale house there and the fish were supposedly weighed. Then it went into a huge holding tank. From there it was dispersed to these long tables where the women were there. Then they had a tremendous number of, later, Filipino butchers. They were very good with knives especially with tuna. They would gut and clean that tuna. Then the women would clean it and hand pack them in the cans. Geez, I guess at one time, I'd say they were probably fifteen thousand cannery workers and they had about fifteen canneries. There were two in Wilmington and two in Newport, one in Oxnard, and ten or eleven of them here in Terminal Island.

MS: This doesn't sound like a particularly good job.

JR: Oh, yes.

MS: Tell me about the job, what the conditions were like.

JR: Hard job, yes. There were no real conditions. When you went to work, you worked until the job was done whether you were done or not. But later when I got older when I went fishing – that's another story – but yes, it was mule labor. But at that time, even longshore guys who were

longshoremen working on the waterfront, a lot of them quit and left. They said that this was mule labor and there was no pay to speak of. So, they left it and went elsewhere. But with the trucks coming in to bring the supplies like the CJ Company and the others that were selling supplies to the fish boats and nets and the oil skins, the Southwest gear and boots and that. Then they had the fuel oil docks there. Then they had the ice company. In those days, they had those 300-pound blocks of ice and they had a grinder who would run up and blow the ice in the hole before they invented a spray system and a brine system on the boats.

MS: Did you hang around the fishing boats too when you were young?

JR: Oh, yes.

MS: Describe what that scene was like.

JR: Again, I wanted to go fishing, but I didn't know nobody. My dad got acquainted with an old Italian guy that had a little 22-foot Monterey, and he'd fish for the markets. My dad talked to him. He said, "My kid here wants to go fishing. Why don't you take him out?" So, he said, "Okay." So, he took me out and he was jigging for barracuda. He sat in a cockpit on the stir with a tiller stirring a bone and he'd have a jug of wine and a loaf of French bread hollowed out. He had everything but his shoes stuffed in that French bread. He'd sit back there and I was seasick as a dog and I'd get up on the barn there with a bone puking my guts out. He'd yell at me, "Hey, Johan, come on mangia. Come back here and eat [laughter]. Drink some wine." So, then we'd drag maybe ten trolling lines with a white bone jig with a piece of red handkerchief on it. We'd get about three boxes of long barracuda. Then he'd say, "Oh, that's enough for today. We go home." Then we'd go chugging into Harbor and down in front of the market. Then he'd sell three or four boxes of the barracuda at the markets. Then he tied a little boat up and put gunnysacks on it and wet them down. Then he'd light his little Italian cheroot, a little stogie cigar. Then he'd walk up there to 13th, 14th, 15th Street where all the fishermen were living at that time. But that was my first experience fishing. Boy, it took me a long time to get over the seasickness [laughter]. But that was about the extent of my fishing until after the end of World War II. Then I went to it full time.

MS: Let's go back to the [19]30s. You were a kid, but do you remember anything about the [19]34 strike?

JR: Oh, yes, sure. Yes.

MS: Tell me about that.

JR: Well, my father was involved in that very heavily.

MS: "My father was involved in the 1934 strike."

JR: My father was involved in the 1934 strike.

MS: Start again. Why don't you start again? "My father was –"

JR: My father in 1934 was working on the docks and he was involved in the 1934 strike. They'd been having a tough time on the waterfront there. They had an old Fink Hall on 7th Street behind the Majestic Café. Across the street was a La Salle. Down below in the alley, it was steep. There were about three buildings up on top and the Department of Water Power and then the Waterfront Employers Association, and then Majestic Café. Then down that steep alley and underneath, there was huge basements with no doors on them. It was made one big hall. All the guys looking for work or a day's pay on a ship hung out there. They called it the old Fink Hall or Slave Market. They didn't have any money those days, and so they'd lag pennies and play penny poker. Us news boys would hang around there trying to sell sheets. When the cops would come down the alley, we would tell them. Then the cops would kick us in the butt because they said that we were warning the longshoremen or warning the workers that they were coming. So, the conditions were very bad.

MS: Well, explain, what is a Fink Hall? Why was it called a Fink Hall? "A Fink Hall was –"

JR: The Fink Hall was those guys who were hired by the companies and didn't want a union. The mass of the men wanted a union because they wanted to get some conditions and some decent pay. So, anybody who worked out of that hall at that time or worked for the Waterfront Employers Association, were considered sort of like a fink. But then when they had that [19]34 strike and that's when Harry Bridges came down from Frisco. They had Wobbly Hill or Liberty Hill here at that time. Going up 5th Street, there was only one building on 5th there about up here, right up about 5th and Center, I guess called the Salvation Army Hotel. Behind it was a huge field. So, Harry Bridges wouldn't give them a hall to talk to these longshoremen who were trying to organize. So, they built a wooden platform out there. My dad took me with him. There were all these unemployed longshoremen and even seamen also out in the field there listening to Harry Bridges talk to them. Then three or four touring cars pulled up and some guys got out with plain clothes on and long overcoats. They walked through the crowd and they grabbed Harry Bridges and the other guy and hauled them off. All the longshoremen around there and the workers got really violent. They pulled back their coats and they all had Browning submachine guns, so everybody backed up. So, they hauled Harry Bridges away and the other guy. I think a day or two days later, they released Harry Bridges. The other guy, they found him over in East Wilmington or Dominguez in an oil sump and he was dead. The police said that they didn't know what happened. They said that all they knew is when they released him, he was alive and he was well. So, that was the beginning. In the meantime, the ship owners and the employers built big stockade at Pier 145 in Wilmington. They used to call it the bullpen. So, the house had tents in there and they had Chinese cooks and had big stoves and they had guards and had guard towers. They'd watch it day and night with search lights. You would go up and they'd solicit these kids up at the University of Southern California to come down to work the ships and promise them a lot of good stuff. So, my dad had a 1926 Chrysler and he had one of the few cars. We'd load it up with guys and I'd go with him. They'd go out to Dominguez, which was fields then. They had a switching station there for the Red Cars. They'd stop the Red Car at the switching station. They'd tell on young kids, "Don't go down to Pedro because you're going to get in very bad trouble and get beat up. You're not wanted to go down there because they're trying to make a union." So, most of them would turn around and go back. A few said to hell with it and they went on down anyhow. So, in [19]34, it had to come to a head because they

decided to hit that bullpen at midnight. I came home from Barton Hill School at 3:00 p.m. and there were a lot of guys that would be longshoreman in the backyard and down my dad's wine cellar there at 135 Mesa. I went down the basement and they were making weapons. Then my dad saw me and he said, "You don't belong here. Get the hell out." He chased me out. So, at midnight with all these weapons and everything – and they'd done the same thing at Point Fermin Park and other locations – at midnight they all hit that bullpen over at 145. They were met with fire hoses, search lights, tear gas, special armed guards, I guess, and police and detectives. So, my dad was pretty strong and he had a nickname. They used to call him Jumbo. He had big hands. The stockade was made of thick planks and they were about, I guess, 8 or 9 feet tall. So, next to him were, as he described, two kids. It turned out to be one was John Mathlin, who later I knew, and Dick Parker. They were trying to get in there, so they couldn't. So, my dad said he told those kids, "Get out of the way." He broke a couple of those timbers off. Once he pulled them off, Dick Parker went through and then John Mathlin went through. Then he pulled some more planks off, then he went through. Dick Parker went down and he thought he got hit with tear gas. It turned out he was shot. My dad looked up and there was a detective who he knew and was popular in waterfront but not very popular, but well-known named Herbert Hackey. He was standing and he said to my dad, "Hey, Jumbo, I didn't shoot him. I didn't shoot him. I didn't shoot him." My dad said that he thinks that Detective Hackey shot Dick Parker and then threw the gun in the bay. Well, anyhow, all hell broke loose. They set the camp on fire and they beat the hell out of all of the guys who were living in those compounds and that. One of the guys, Joe Hernandez, my dad gave him a camp axe to chop the fire hoses so they wouldn't have too much pressure. But I don't know how long it lasted. But my dad came home and then he told my mother, "If anybody asks you, tell them I was home all night." My folks lived in the back bedroom and my three sisters had a room on the side of the hallway and I slept on the cot by the front door because they had no other room. At 5:00 a.m., three touring cars pulled up and they knocked on the door. My mother went to the door and they wanted to come in. She said, "Well, let me go put a bathrobe on." They said, "No." They just shoved the door open and knocked her down and went straight to the back of the house and got the old man. I think it took about four of them to drag him out with his long underwear and all. They threw him in a touring car and we didn't know where he went. So, took us a couple days to find out that they took him at the Lincoln Heights Jail. In the meantime, another guy had been shot named Knudsen. So, that brought this strike to a head pretty doggone fast. Then they released the old man and he came home.

MS: What did they do with him in jail?

JR: Well, he didn't want to talk about it too much. But he said that the bathroom facility left a lot to be desired. He said there was a hole in the cement about that round in the corner for a toilet. He said they shackled him with a chain to his ankles and that. It was, I guess, pretty primitive.

MS: Was this the so-called Red Squad, the guys with touring cars?

JR: Yes.

MS: Tell me about them.

JR: Well, you couldn't find out too much about them. You knew who they were and the guys knew when they were coming and that. But I think some of those guys in that squad were imported in by the companies because I don't think any local people would dare be involved with something like what was going on and live here. So, I think they were imported.

MS: What was the result of the [19]34 strike?

JR: Well, during the [19]34 strike, things were bad. But all the restaurants in town gave the longshoremen credit. The Japanese farmers on the hillside and truck farmers gave them produce and the fishermen give them tons of fish. Then they had a hall on 8th across the street from Andrews Memorial gym up there and swimming pool. They made a soup kitchen there. What they did, the single men would go in there and they'd feed them. These are the guys who were on strike and doing picket duty. The men who were married and had a family, they'd come in there and give them some vegetables, a piece of fish, or a piece of meat, and then they'd take it home to their families. There was one guy named Erickson who had about a 25-foot boat. At midnight at night, they'd take that little boat and there was about half a dozen of them. My dad wanted them. They'd go all the way to Santa Cruz Island. They'd shoot, oh, twenty, thirty head of sheep and goats and skin them and throw them in the ice and come back down here. Then he'd take his 26 Chrysler with a wooden steak bed trailer. The automobile ferry that would operate on 1st Street down there stopped at midnight. So, then he'd back that trailer down the ramp because the ferry was right on the side. Then Erickson would bring that little fish boat in and they'd unload the twenty or thirty carcasses. They'd haul them up the soup kitchen and then he'd chop it up. All the little neighborhood mom-and-pop stores would give them credit. I remember Harry Bridge repeatedly would tell the guys, "When this is all over, you got to honor those people and pay your debt." They were very pleased because they said that when it got all over and went to work again, they'd all paid back those little mom-and-pop stores and what have you. But it was really bad there for a while.

MS: But at the end, you got the right to organize.

JR: Yes. They organized the union from coast wise, the International Longshore and Warehouse Union. They got conditions to start with. They had an old hall they run around 5th and Palos Verdes Street, that the longshoremen did before they had a union. Then I used to go in that old hall. My dad gave me a baseball cap and he covered it with union buttons. I had a shoe shine box and papers. I'd go in the hall and I was one of the only kids, I guess, allowed in that hall. All these longshoremen looking and waiting around either to go and pick a dude or whatever, would tell me, "Hey, kid, you're going to give me a shine?" They all had feet about that big. You got a nickel for a shine and you'd take a can of polish to shine one shoe. The guy said, "You know I'm on strike." I said, "Yes." "Well, I can't pay until the strike's –" "Oh, okay." But then they'd pay you anyhow and then you'd sell them a paper. But it was funny. But that's where they hung out while they were waiting to do picket duty and what have you. Then later when they won the strike, they built a dispatch hall between 6th Street and 5th Street on Palos Verdes. That's where they were dispatching longshoreman out of.

MS: Tell me about the dispatch office. That was a result of the strike getting that.

JR: Yes.

MS: How did that work? What was that place and how did that work?

JR: Well, what they did, every worker had a number. I think my dad was 481. I'm not sure, but I got it at home. They had two things. One time in dispatch hall when they wanted to equalize the work and everybody gets a fair shake, they had like a bullet, big boards like this with holes in, the perforation. Everybody had a wooden plug with their number on the plug. They would go down there and when they'd work, they'd put it in a hole. They'd call it the plugin. In the morning, the dispatcher would draw those plugs out and they'd call that number and then the guy got a job. They'd rotate it around so it got equalized out. Then later they went to a system called a brass. They gave you something about the size of a quarter and made a brass with your number stamped on it and they had tubes outside to haul in. You could go by anytime at day or night and put the thing on top of that tube and it would drop in on the inside. Then they did the same thing there. They pulled the brass out and dispatch them that way to equalize it. Then when they got to Union Hall before they built the hall in Wilmington, they used to meet in New Wilmington Bowl over in Wilmington where there were wrestlers and boxing matches and that. But then they got the dispatch hall there in Wilmington. Then the guys would go in the hall in the morning and go up to the windows and they'd sign in the night before and they had their name in there. It was a good system. Everybody got a pretty fair shake. Sometimes you had to wait two or three days before your number came up.

MS: Did you get involved? Let's go back to Beacon Street for a second when you hung out there. What were the particular places there and what were they like and what went on?

JR: Oh, you had the Goodfellows there.

MS: You have to say, "On Beacon Street."

JR: Oh, on Beacon Street there were a lot of gin mills and bars. The most famous one, I guess was on 5th and Beacon, was Shanghai Reds. Then across the street from Shanghai Reds on the opposite corner was another one called the Log Cabin. Then when you went back on Beacon Street going between Beacon Street and Harbor Boulevard down there, there was one called the – oh, I just said it – Goodfellows, I think, or something like that. The bar went straight, so you could go in from either street. But they had bars all over and you could go from one bar to the other. Well, the guys had nothing to do when they were looking for work, whether it was waiting for a ship or for a job on the waterfront. So, most of the time they hung around the gin mills there.

MS: We started talking about the gambling ships that were off. People don't know about that. What is that? Tell me about those.

JR: Well, at that time they had two –

MS: Well, give me a year roughly.

JR: The gambling ships – oh, let's see.

MS: Mid to late [19]30s, I guess.

JR: Late [19]30s. I was trying to think related to the strike.

MS: Yes, start again.

JR: Yes. I'm not sure of the year, but I think it was in the late [19]30s. They'd get the water taxi and take them out to the gambling ships. They'd gamble and then they'd get the water taxi and come back in. Then eventually they were doing away with the gambling ships.

MS: Just start in the beginning that there were two gambling ships, what the names were, who owned them. So, start from the beginning.

JR: Well, the two gambling ships, one was called the *Rex* and the other one was *Tango*. Nobody knew who owned them. But it was reputed they were owned by the mafia. But nobody knew and nobody really cared [laughter]. That was quite a thing because they'd get a free ride out to the water, out of the water. Then they had food and booze and stuff out there and they'd gamble. I never did. I wasn't old enough and I never had a chance to go out on them. They were pretty popular at that time. Just before the war, I think the government done away with them.

MS: Why were they in ships? Why weren't they on the shore someplace?

JR: Well, they felt that if they were anchored outside the 3-mile line, I guess it was they were beyond the continental limits of the United States and had a certain amount of protection on the high seas. I don't know for sure. But there's another story that goes to that later I'll tell you about. But I assume that was why. Then too, it wasn't accessible for the police and others to come and raid them because they could see them coming. I don't know for sure, but I would assume that was part of the reasons.

MS: So, talk about how you first got involved working in longshoreman.

JR: Well, my dad got sick there just before the war. So, at that time you could work on your old man's book if he'd become sick or injured. So, I went over there at the hall and they let me work on my dad's book. The first job I got was at Pier 187 in Wilmington there. It used to be by the old Catalina Terminal. They were loading out crates of oranges about that big. They had a partition in the middle and they had little slats about that thick on the end. You'd have to pick the crate of oranges up. Pretty soon though, you had no hide left on your fingertips. I would hear these old timers they'd say to each other – because I was running out of gas – they'd say to each other, "Oh, that's Jumbo's kid. Help him out. He's a good kid. Help him out." The old-timers would help me out a lot. That was the way I broke in. So, I worked around there off and on for about two years but it wasn't too much work. So, then when the war came on, I went to night school and learned how to weld. I became a welder and I got a job in the shipyard welding. So, my dad was still recuperating. I worked in there. I could have stayed out of the war, but I

wanted to go. So, I went up to the Air Force and they turned me down because they said my eyes were bad or something at the time. So, I came back to Pedro and I was pretty low. I got talking with all the Pedro guys and most of the Pedro kids by that time were shipping out. It was sort of a natural thing. They told me, "Well, why don't you ship out?" I told them, "Well, I never thought of that." So, I went down to enroll to get into Merchant Marine. They sent me to Catalina Island to a maritime school. I went over there and took training for a month and learned how to fight fire and all kinds of things and seamen ship and deck nomenclature and that. Then I shipped out into Merchant Marine. Then at the end of the war, I went to the officer school up in Alameda, California. Then when the war was over, from Okinawa I came back to San Pedro in April of 1946. I wanted to go back into the Longshoreman's Union because I had worked there as an extra on my dad's book. But they turned me down because they said I wasn't a veteran. I was really surprised and so was my old man. So, when they turned me down, I was shocked. So, I came back to Pedro and I got a job on a fish boat. By then I'd been sailing the Merchant Marine as the highest second mate and I had a navigator's license. I had a license, any water and any tinge of the world and all that. So, I got a job on the boat so that I could navigate and I could splice cable and splice wire and all that. So, I started fishing. There was a fisherman's union called the Fishermen and Allied Workers' Union. It was headquartered in Seattle, and a guy named Joe Jurich was the head of it. But this local here in Pedro wasn't doing a hell of a lot down here. These guys were on the tail end of the dog down here. So, I started a movement along with about a half a dozen other fishermen; Bob Petrich, Nick Pattiv, and Malcolm, Pete Boskovich organizing the fishermen that were in the International Fishermen and Allied Workers' Union. The AFL-CIO signed and pledged cards to join the ILWU. We had a lot of trouble at that time and waterfront goons.

MS: But why weren't you getting ahead of them? I want to go back a second.

JR: Yes, go ahead.

MS: Where were you in December 7th, 1941? You remember that day?

JR: Yes. They had a field out of Fort MacArthur called Trona Field. All the sailors on the battle wagons used to send their teams ashore and they'd play baseball and football against each other, soccer. I was out there. By that time, the fleet was stationed in Hawaii. It had moved a couple years earlier. So, I was out there watching I think it was a baseball game between two of the ships. About 3:00 p.m., an announcement came over the loud speaker that Pearl Harbor had been bombed that morning. Everybody in the bleachers panicked and got scared because, jeez, didn't know what to expect. Hell, I didn't even know where Pearl Harbor was [laughter]. But that's the first time I heard about it. Then everybody got all excited about the war and they worried about the Japanese invading the West Coast. At that time, they had a lumber schooner called the *Ab Soroka*. When I went out there, she got torpedoed off of Point Fermin, blew the stern off and I think killed the cook. So, they'd run her around the break wandering in and berthed at Carrillo Beach. But that's how I heard about Pearl Harbor was at Trona Field.

MS: But then this lumber ship, was it a Japanese submarine?

JR: Japanese. They said it was a Japanese sub that torpedoed this coastwise lumber schooner,

the *Ab Soroka*. They surmised that there must have been a mothership, because a small Jap sub couldn't have come all the way across the Pacific. Then later we heard tales that the Japanese submarine surfaced up off of Santa Barbara and shelled their oil refineries and things of that nature. But they claimed that they found that sub off of White Point or Portuguese bend out here. It was on the shelf there and they were going to retrieve it and then it slipped off and went down to the deep water and they lost it. But they said they did find it. But I don't know.

MS: What impact did the war have on San Pedro? It changed this place.

JR: Oh, yes. Well, when the military came through here, all the soldiers were drafted. Kids from all over the United States; New York, Chicago, Oklahoma, Arkansas, all came into Fort MacArthur here and part of it the embarkation or shipping out as well as in Frisco. All the hub of activity, all the wartime activities taking place and ships loading up with the cargoes to haul the servicemen in the battlefields in the islands. It woke San Pedro up. San Pedro was sort of like a sleeping village in a way, but that just threw it on the map right away.

MS: Did you know any of the Japanese families who got moved out?

JR: Oh, yes, sure.

MS: Tell me about that.

JR: I knew just about them because those kids all would come across the bay and come to Junior High and San Pedro High School. Then at 3:00 p.m., they'd take the ferry and go back across bay and they'd go to Japanese school. Then about every other year, I'd say to the guy, "Hey, I don't see Masami Nishanaka. Where's Masami?" "Oh, he went to Japan. Yes, he went to school in Japan." Next year, Masami would be back here and the same with others. So, they'd educate them here one year and one year in Japan. Some of them got caught over there after Pearl Harbor. They were born here in Terminal Island, but they got caught over there. But there was one family, they were a Russian family. Their name was Kasilof. There was Ike and Jimmy and Anna. They were the only Caucasians and they could speak Japanese more fluently than the Japanese. They used them, I think the American did, during the war for interpretation out there. But I remember old man Fusihuchi had down past Happy Valley close to Harbor Boulevard, he had a little mom-and-pop store. He had half a dozen Mexican ladies making tortillas in the morning in the back. Then people would go down there and buy those tortillas. Then up the street about two blocks was another Japanese store. I was working on a milk truck running and bringing milk in and that at that time. They told me, "We give you the store, you take it." One guy just bought a new meat case and paid 2,000 bucks for it for the meat and that. "You take everything. You keep it. When the war is over, we come home, you give it back. If we don't come back, you keep it." I told him, "I'm just a kid. What the hell? I don't think about –" So, sure enough in a couple nights later, all the carpetbaggers came down from L.A. First, they hauled the Japanese away. Then the next night, all the carpetbaggers hit down and just looted the whole goddamn place. It was really a sad affair especially where you knew the guys or the kids. We didn't know anything about sabotage or about the war. Then they confiscated the Japanese fleet because there were stories that the Japanese fish boats on Terminal Island had torpedo tubes concealed in the bows, and they could wreak havoc on the coast. Then the

American Navy had no navy here at that time and no Coast Guard. So, they commandeered the bigger fishing boats out of San Pedro, Frisco, San Diego. They put a lieutenant on every one of them and they sent them out to sea. They formed the first line of defense for the Coast Guard for the United States government from Panama all the way to Alaska. It was all fish boats. That was our first line of defense and the first Coast Guard. A lot of those guys later with their fishing tuna vessels, got into inner island service where they moved them out to the islands and they hauled cargo and men from island to island and supplies. Yes.

MS: Never knew that.

JR: Yes.

MS: Let's go ahead to your union organizing days in the fisherman's union. You said you used to ran into a lot of troubles with goons and stuff like that.

JR: Oh, yes.

MS: Tell me those stories.

JR: [laughter] Well, the AFL-CIO didn't take lightly to the fact that we were trying to break away from them and go into the Longshoreman's Union. So, there was a lot of waterfront beefs at that time, and they'd send some goons down and guys got beat up. In my case, I got beat up a couple times. One night they shot the front of my house off with shotguns, double-aught shot. I had a wife and two kids and scared the holy hell out of them. Then I found out who was to blame for it and I paid him a visit one morning and I never had no more trouble. Then we finally got enough signatures.

MS: Wait a second. You're skipping over some details here. You said you got beat up a couple times. Tell me those stories and tell me the story of the visit that calmed everything down with that guy, the details.

JR: Oh, well, nothing. I talked to him and we came to an understanding [laughter].

MS: Oh, yes?

JR: Yes.

MS: You're a pretty powerful speaker, I guess.

JR: Yes. Well, I had some help too about that long. Anyhow, a lot of guys were afraid to sign a pledge card asking for a National Labor Board election. So, we'd have to meet them in the alleys or in the back streets or down on the dock where they weren't seen. They were afraid to sign up. Finally, we got enough signatures, this handful of guys. We petitioned a National Liberation Board and we had a big donnybrook argument, pro and con with the National Liberation. They did give us an election. As it turned out, the Yugoslav and Croatians voted to leave the AFL-CIO and form Local 33 ILWU, International Longshore and Warehouse Union. But the Italians

didn't. They stayed with the AFL-CIO. So, then there was a split, and then the hatred from the old country between the Italians and the Yugoslavs came to surface. It wasn't very good. When I was trying to organize them, I'd see an Italian fisherman. When they'd talk to me, they'd say, "Hey, you see this?" They'd show me a scar. He said, "I got that in Trieste from the Slavs." Then I'd go in and talk to me. "You see this? I got that in Italy from those Vagos." They had brought that hatred over from the old country. I guess it just died off here lately with the sons and daughters growing up. But at that time, it was very prevalent. But those were pretty tough times when the organizing was going on because it wasn't like the war you knew who the enemy was. There you didn't know when the goon, where they came from. One time in Frisco, I was in San Diego and organizing and I got a call from the International Frisco saying that they found out that somebody was sending four guys from Frisco down to San Diego to take care of me. That I should either get out of town or be aware of myself and watch where I went and where I stayed and that. They never found me but they found some other guys in another labor war that was going on. They killed three or four of them and they got caught. About four or five of them got sent to prison for that.

MS: So, between unions?

JR: Yes, between unions. So, then we didn't have a hiring hall. To get a job in a fish boat, you had to go down a fish boat and ask for it. Then the boaters were controlled by the canneries because the canneries loaned them the money to buy or build the boat. Then the captain controlled the crew because he didn't want no trouble. He said, "If we make trouble, the cannery is going to take the boat away." So, the captain would manipulate the crew and take advantage of them because of the influence. Because I was so involved with the union, I couldn't get a job. I walked around until I'd have 5 cents for the Barton Hill bus. So, I didn't know what the hell to do and I had an old sixty-two Plymouth I got from a neighbor of mine who died in a coop. I went over with the longshoreman and I started carrying bananas and working extra like years ago. Started all over again. Then I finally got into the union and I became very active and held just about every position but president. Then I was getting ready to run for president of the local and this fisherman's union I helped organize got into trouble with the AFL-CIO again. The cannery's influence on the boaters took eighteen fish boats away from the ILWU and gave them to the AFL. It started a big baruffa and lot of court battle. So, they called Harry Bridges up in Frisco and they wanted some help. He said, "We haven't got nobody up here who knows anything about it." So, they came down and they went down here and they asked Bobby Petrich if he wanted to come back over and help him out. He said, "No, Nick Pattiv and Boskovich, Malcolm." So, they came in. I didn't want to go back until May. I got blackballed out there. Here, I got a pension plan to look at, I got a welfare plan, and I got a paycheck. Over there, I didn't have none and I don't want to go back over there. Harry said, "Well, what if we worked out an arrangement where we could take care of that for you?" I said, "Well, then I might consider it." So, they did. They worked out to make me an international rep to qualify. That way, the international could justify paying for my pension and my welfare and whatever. So, I came over to help the fishermen out in [19]57 for one year and they decided to keep me. We had an annual election. I told the guys, "Anytime you're sick of me, tell me and I'm gone." They reelected me for forty years. So, it became a way of life. Then I got into the political arena because going to Sacramento to fight what DDT was doing to the ocean and fighting, everything was blamed on the fishermen. I got into the lawsuit fights in the State Department. I got

appointed to several national and international commissions and oceans and atmospheres. I even got an appointment from President Nixon. I wasn't Republican. All of my Republican friends, which weren't too many, but on the canneries wanted to know what I knew and how come President Nixon appointed me to the Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration that met with the Department of Commerce every month. I told them, "You guys don't listen very good, do you?" I said, "I've been telling you guys all along that Nixon was a dumb bastard and he just proved it." So, they didn't know what the hell to say [laughter].

MS: [laughter]

JR: So, anyhow probably if I'd have stayed over longshoring instead of coming back to fish, I'd probably went up in Frisco and been a successor to Harry.

MS: Well, Harry Bridges is an important man in the history. You met him, you knew him. Who was Harry? For people don't know who he is, who was Harry Bridges? Give me a sense of a man. Who was he as a man?

JR: Harry Bridges was born in Melbourne, Australia. His parents had a dying hatred of the British and they called him Pommie bastard [laughter]. I got down there years later. But anyhow, then he went to sea out in Australia as a young man. Then on one of his trips as a seaman, he got off the ship in Frisco. Then he started working on docks extra waiting for another ship, I guess. Then he saw how deplorable the conditions were out there, and he started telling the guys, "Why don't you guys get organized and get together?" Everybody thought well, it was just a lot of talking. So, he kept persisting. In the meantime, they got a pretty good movement going. Before they got through with it, he had been the major cause to organize them from all the way to Alaska, the workers.

MS: You met him.

JR: Oh, yes.

MS: How would you describe what kind of man he was?

JR: Oh, Harry, he wasn't a real big man, but he had a mind like a trap. He was good. But the one thing about him, he was not pretentious. He was open and above board. When some of the fellow officers international at the conventions would want their raises in pay, and the convention was ready to give them the raise in pay. Harry would get up and say, "Now, wait a minute, boys." He said, "We're doing all right." Because they were making equal to what the workers were making. Some of his fellow officers wanted more money. They'd get so mad at him every convention because he'd say – there'd be five hundred guys in the convention – "Listen, boys, we're doing okay. The boys are right. They don't need no more money." But the guys were ready to give it to them, a raise. They'd get so goddamn mad at him [laughter]. But he was a good guy. Then he was persecuted. They tried to deport him. I think it was Chief Justice Black said the last time after three times before the Supreme Court, said that the man had been persecuted enough and worse than anybody in the history. So, they said enough is enough. So, then they left him alone. But the guys were buying defense stamps and raising money for

Harry Bridges' defense. Later it would become Harry Bridges, Roberts, and then Schmidt. But when I first got into fisherman's union, I was helping out down there, it was funny. One day a guy pulled up out in front in an old wreck of a car. The guy gets out and comes in and it was Harry Bridges. I'd like to fan out, "What the hell are you doing here?" He said, "Well, I know you just got started here and I wanted to come and see how you're doing [laughter]." Because Harry Lambert from the Seamen's Union would come to town, but he'd load the Don Hotel up with about fifty guys before he'd hit town. He always had about three car loads of guys with him wherever we went. Harry shows up in on the old wreck of a car and parks it and gets out and comes in all by himself [laughter]. But they accused him of being a communist and all that. But in all the years I knew Harry and I attended all of the convention and that, he never tried to sell me a bill of goods or nothing like that. But I think that somebody, probably the government or the steamship companies and the employers, wanted to get rid of them. So, that was a pretty popular way to get rid of somebody at that time, say they were a commie. I got in fights in high school because of my dad being a longshoreman. In fact, one time I almost got kicked out of high school. Some guy got up and said, "All these goddamn longshoremen, they ought to deport them and especially the Italians, and send them back to Italy. The rest of them, they should incarcerate them." The teacher let him keep puking up his gut. So, I went up there and I punched the shit out him. So, they took me down the principal's office and wanted to kick me out of school. So, they let me stay in school, but I had to change all my curricular and have different classes [laughter].

MS: Well, let's see. We're getting toward the end here. We could talk and maybe we may come back together and talk again because there's a lot there.

JR: I know, I get carried away easily.

MS: No, it was terrific. It's a kind of a summary thing for people. A hundred years from now, fifty years from now, if you wanted to tell people what they should know about San Pedro and what they should know about this Harbor, why it's important to you, what would you say? What does it mean to you? What does this Harbor, what does this town of San Pedro mean to you?

JR: Well, it means a hell of –

MS: "San Pedro is –"

JR: San Pedro means an awful lot to me because I've been here practically all my life. It was a nice little town until they built the freeway from L.A. down to the Harbor, and people found out they could drive down in a half an hour and live up on the hill and smell fresh air and go back up in the garbage dump. So, they ruined Pedro. When they voted to make San Pedro part of L.A., everybody was very unhappy. Vincent Thomas, he was a good guy, our assemblyman. In 1940, he won on a ticket. If he got elected, he was going to lead a fight in Sacramento to help San Pedro succeed away from L.A. It didn't work out. Then every five or six years when Vince would get an opponent [laughter], he'd resurrect that story and use it again. But Pedro was a good town until the freeway came and then until the L.A. politicians got in the act. We became sort of the dumping grounds for a lot of stuff, I guess, out of L.A. that I didn't appreciate and still don't until this day. See, Long Beach didn't have Los Angeles on their back. Long Beach was a

sleeping town. Iowa citizens, they called it Little Iowa. They didn't have nothing. They had the Pico. They didn't have a dock. Long Beach kept their money, and they build a dock. They got up there and they surpassed Pedro because L.A. was draining off a lot of the funds from the Harbor where Long Beach didn't have no L.A. to do then. But when they merged with L.A., the entire complexion down here changed. Then a lot of people who never knew where San Pedro was – well, in fact, years ago people were afraid of San Pedro. If you were out of town and you mentioned you were from San Pedro, they'd go, "Oh, Jesus. Pedro, the guy must have a gun or a knife. He's from Pedro [laughter]." Ripley didn't help out a lot. He wrote in his article one time, he said, "San Pedro, the toughest port on the coast. You can get beat up for a dime or killed for a dollar." Gee, that didn't help. But going back to L.A., I think the worst thing that happened at Harbor area, both Wilmington and San Pedro, L.A. took them over.

MS: What's the best thing about this place?

JR: Now?

MS: Now.

JR: Well, the best thing now is that a lot of commerce, peace. We don't have anywhere the disruption and troubles you had before. The unions negotiated a three-year, five-year contract, and once in a while they have to go on strike to get it settled. But there's been pretty good stability and the influx of all of the cargo out. Now, where they had a handful longshoremen, I think right now we're running about eight thousand guys down here. Everybody now wants to be a longshoreman because of the benefits and the wages. Guys I know including lawyers who used to tell me that, call me outfit and you call me bastard, they're longshoreman today. I told one, "You got a lot of guts." He said, "Well, John, if you can't beat them, join them [laughter]."

MS: [laughter] There's another question we'll make. You were with the Fisherman's Union for forty years.

JR: Yes.

MS: What happened from the creation?

JR: Well, I was longer than that, but I was forty years in office.

MS: Yes. What happened in the years that you were involved with fishing at the time when it was the biggest in the world, right?

JR: Right. Well, we were number one the men.

MS: Why don't you say, "The fishing business."

JR: The fishing industry in San Pedro was very big. Then the only one bigger at that for years was down in New Orleans and in the South. They had the menhaden industry and they provided the greatest amount of tonnage. Then one year, San Pedro or the California beat them because

they set a record. I think it was 770,000 tons of sardines in one season. The season would start in August and go until December. Then they'd change the sardine nets and set them ashore and put the tuna nets on and go to Mexico for tuna.

MS: So, what happened from that day where you were the biggest in the world to today on the fishing part?

JR: Well, everything was fine. Then StarKist Tuna, which used to be French Sardine, and then Don Loker who played Don Winslow in the movies, married into the Bogdanovich family, and a hell of a nice guy. He got him to change it French Sardine to StarKist Tuna. They turned around here and sold it to the Heinz Corporation. Then the Van Camp Seafood, who was their competitor and just about as big, sold their outfit out to the Ralston Purina. They were multinational corporations. So, then they immediately opened up operations in Puerto Rico. I tried to block it even when I was on the Harbor Commission. I met with an official in that. They said labor costs. Well, then we showed them labor costs wasn't the reason. So, they got a lot of benefits by going international from, I guess, the government elsewhere. So, from Puerto Rico, then they went to American Samoa. I went out to two or three trips. Then from American Samoa, they went over to I guess Indonesia and what have you. But it got it to West Coast and fifteen thousand cannery workers eventually lost their jobs. All the canneries closed down. The boats that were left survived fishing on sardines and mackerel and squid here. Once in a while, when the bluefin tuna comes up from Mexico in the summertime, they'd catch some bluefin and what have you. But it was a beautiful industry. Like I said we had about 125 boats that were stationed here. I think in San Pedro at that time there were purse seiners and they had equally that many in San Diego. But they were bigger and they were bait boats where the men caught with a pole and line. Then they converted to purse seining in [19]57 because they'd make one trip to a purse seiner street. So, anyhow then they all moved out. The tuna fleet, the big boats followed and went out to Samoa and then over to Thailand. That killed the industry here.

MS: Well, was it a question of fewer fish or too expensive?

JR: No. They can say what they want and I don't believe them. But it's a matter of greed for the dollar. They were making plenty of money right here. But there were certain tremendous benefits to be had if you went multinational and international. So, I even talked to some of the key people at that time, and I told them, "Well, the government should step in and take hold because these canneries benefit from the city, the county, and the state and the tax benefits and everything here to build themselves up." Now, for all these benefits, leave all this behind and leave everybody gutted. Let them say, "Okay, if you want to go overseas and be multinational and develop another country, it's fine. But you must keep your base of operation here because you benefited from city, county, and state to develop you. Now, do what you want." But they said, "Oh, we can't do that," the government. I said, "Well, what do you mean you can't do that?" "Well, we can't do that." So, we tried everything in the world but we couldn't stop it. So, once the canneries went, that was the end of the industry. It was a shame because it was beautiful. We had 125 boats here. When the sardine season was on, boats would come down from Monterey, from San Francisco, from Oregon, Washington. We'd have a size of four hundred boats sit down here. That created a hell of a lot of employment for the truckers and the drivers and suppliers and the merchandise and the fuel depots and the ice plants. It was a big hub

of activity. It was really something.

MS: Describe what it's like today.

JR: Oh, today it's like somebody dropped an atomic bomb over in Terminal Island. I went over there about two years ago and now you can't go back there. It'll tear your guts out. There's nothing left. The canneries are gone. Even the streets and the pavements tore up. It's just desolate. There's nothing there. They had Harbor Boat Shipyard, they're gone. I think maybe Larson might still be there. But there's nothing. If you see the pictures of all the canneries and all the boats, when the fleet come in loaded with fish, from one end of Fish Harbor, you could jump on this boat and walk on this boat and this boat and this boat all the way across Fish Harbor to the other side without wetting your feet. They were all waiting to unload to go back out. They provided work, I guess, for maybe five to seven different people, the allied industries that depended on the fishermen to make a buck. But we'd done everything we could possibly do. But we had a lot of trouble as we went along with imports from Japan early on. Then trouble. When things started happening bad out here, they blamed the fishermen. It took them five years in the Sacramento to find out it was DDT that was a problem that killed the kelp beds. They had to fish and gave them out there killing the sea urchins with hammers, because they said they were killing the kelp. Then when they built the outfall out there, they only went out a mile. They should have gone out about 2 miles so they'd get out in the open road instead. But they poisoned this coast for a thousand years. Then right after World War II when I came back and I got involved in fish, the government had towboats down here with barges and had 25-pound metal kegs of atomic waste. They had them loaded on the barge and we were too mad to see them dumping them down on the 60-mile bank and up off the Farallon Islands out of Frisco. We protested and demonstrated, and so they stopped. Then they took and encased them in cement, every one of those 25-gallon metal drums. They said now they're good for a thousand years. So, they went out and dumped on the 60-mile bank down between here and San Diego and elsewhere and now you got fishes' – what's the word – mutation up in the Farallon Islands on some of the banks down in San Diego. The albacore used to come in from Mexico in the summertime between Catalina and Pedro. The half-day boats would make three trips out. That's how close the albacore was. On the fourth trip, they'd worked for themselves and get a load to go to the cannery. Then after that happened, the albacore went offshore and she came in up off of Oregon. Because the whole goddamn coast was poisoned down here. Now they're saying that again. I was reading the paper the other day and got mad as hell because they're saying, well, the fishermen are depleting the stocks. They bombed Clemente Island steady for twenty goddamn years, underwater explosions, underwater all kinds of stuff. The biggest thing was the DDT. But all these were manmade disturbances and manmade poison that poisoned the whole goddamn coast and they're blaming the fishermen. The fishermen didn't kill the fish [laughter]. Monsanto Company that made the DDT finally they run them out and they went to Mexico. That's why I would never buy any vegetables from Mexico because they were using it. Then I read in the paper the other day, they were having some trouble up in Colorado. Come to find out, I was reading it and right at the bottom line, it said Monsanto Company where they got involved in developing some kind of an alfalfa. They said that it turned out to be poisonous now and it's causing a devastation throughout Wyoming. Monsanto Company, yes.

MS: Well, it sounds like we could go on and on and on with that one too. We're going to have

to call a hold to it.

JR: Yes.

[end of transcript]