Port of Los Angeles Centennial Oral History Project
Laura Warren Oral History
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Male Speaker: Laura, the hard question first, please say your name and spell it.

Laura Warren: My name is Laura Warren, L-A-U-R-A, W-A-R-R-E-N.

MS: If you don't mind, can I ask the date you were born and where?

LW: March 22nd, 1951, in Long Beach, California.

MS: Where did you grow up? You grew up in Wilmington, right?

LW: Yes, I grew up in Wilmington. My parents are from Wilmington, and my grandparents as well. They moved there at the turn of the century and had established businesses and did business with the port.

MS: You said your father and your grandfather both (went?) back to Wilmington.

LW: Actually, in 1905, my paternal great grandparents and grandparents moved here from Louisiana. There was a depression, a bank panic at that time, and they lost everything. So, they moved here, sold some of their properties in Venice, and ended up moving to Wilmington. My great uncle was Mr. Wrigley's agent and oversaw a lot of his business interests in the port, as well as Catalina Corporation as well. My maternal grandparents and great grandparents moved here from Kentucky about that time and started a printing company. They lived in Wilmington until their deaths, matter of fact. So, we've been around a long time.

MS: Well, you're going to have to explain to some people, who was Mr. Wrigley? What's his importance to all this?

LW: Well, Mr. Wrigley, of course, you know, was the chewing gum magnet out of Chicago, and he purchased Santa Catalina Island. He had a lot of business interests in Southern California. One of them, of course, was the development of the Port of Los Angeles through Wilmington Transportation Company and then the aircraft and transportation companies between here and Catalina. In 1919, as a matter of fact, my great uncle and my grandparents brought around the first Catalina steamship, which was called the *Avalon*. She was built in New York in 1919, brought her around, and she started in service between here, the mainland, and Catalina Island. Mr. Wrigley bought it for tourist development, aside from other things.

MS: When you say brought it around, they actually sailed it?

LW: Yes. As matter of fact, my grandparents brought her around from New York in 1919. Then she was put into service. At that time, there was some discussion about having it out of Santa Monica or Redondo Beach or the Port of Los Angeles. Well, actually, it came out of the Port of LA. So, both Catalina Island and Wilmington Transportation and port development in Wilmington have been a big part of my life all the way through.

MS: Go again about Wilmington Transportation. This is your great grandfather.

LW: This is my great uncle and my great grandparents as well.

MS: Talk more about your great grandparents. Who were they? Where they came? What did they do when they got here?

LW: Well, my great grandparents were plantation owners in Louisiana. They were rice and cane and lumber people out of pretty much Northwestern. They had concerns in Logansport and Alexandria, Louisiana and then Thibodaux as well. Like I say, there was a bank panic or a depression in 1905. It wiped everybody out. They moved here, sold what was left of their properties, and set up camp here.

MS: Why did they come here?

LW: Well, California, I think, at that time, was the land of opportunity. Everybody was moving here. If they weren't buying an orange grove, they were trying to get involved in, you know, land speculation and things like that. They actually first lived in Venice because they had property in Venice. They sold it. Then they moved here and eventually moved to a small house in the late [19]20s. That was at 1138 Banning Boulevard in Wilmington, and that's where my dad was born. That was the family home, so to speak.

MS: Now, did you know your grandparents?

LW: They passed away before I was born. But it's kind of funny, because in my family, even though you're dead, you know, you're still considered there at dinner. In other words, they're just late, they haven't shown up yet. So, it's not as though you die in the family. You're just not seen lately. So, the history is still alive well and discussed at every meal. It's that with both sets of parents. It's pretty funny [laughter].

MS: Tell me what you know about your grandparents when they got here. What was Wilmington like? What was the area like when they settled? What did they do when they got here?

LW: Oh, well, sure. As a matter of fact, let me tell you their names. Because I guess you should know. They were the Alexanders and the Davidsons on my dad's side and then the Boones on my mother's. My mom is a direct descendant from Daniel Boone, and we had a lot of artifacts which we donated about 20 years ago to a think tank in Washington, D.C. for Daniel Boone. He was a surveyor before he was an explorer, so to speak. Anyway, Wilmington was pretty much a destination point for like Ford Motor Company. They set up a huge plant here, and a lot of people, the executives, had their homes built along Banning Park area, Lakme, Banning, and bullying and Cary Avenue, as a matter of fact. So, a lot of the executives, in the [19]20s and the [19]30s, lived just around Banning Boulevard. Wilmington was a port town. There were lots of merchant seamen. There was a very healthy commercial corridor, lots of camphor trees and lots of oil derricks, if I may add, and lots of oil pumps. I used to play on them as a child, but I never told my parents.

MS: You keep saying this name Banning. Who was Mr. Banning?

LW: Phineas Banning was the founder of Wilmington. He named it for Wilmington, Delaware, his birthplace. Wilmington was a terminus, in his eyes, a natural port. So, what he developed was a lighterage service that would take cargo – it could be geese. At one time, Wilmington was called Goosetown – and would transport live poultry to steamships. But actually, they were really more – they weren't steamships at the time. They were, as a matter of fact, brigantines, I think, as a matter of fact. So, he would carry cargo back and forth between the land and to the ships that were docked in the outer harbor area. There was a port, but it was – there were also tidelands. So, the lighterage was a very effective way to transport cargo back and forth. Anyway, Banning – Phineas Banning developed it. Southern Pacific Railroad came in and developed a terminus, a rail terminus, which was very critical to Wilmington's development. Wilmington was very instrumental in the development of the city of Los Angeles. Had it not been for them, I don't think that Los Angeles would have developed into the city that it is today, had it not been for Wilmington.

MS: Again, what did your grandparents do when they got to Wilmington?

LW: My maternal grandparents established Marine Printing Company, which was a printing company, and they did a lot of business with all of the steamship companies and the related businesses in the port and in the area. Then my paternal grandparents, my grandfather worked as a purser aboard the *Catalina* steamer, the actual *Catalina*. My uncle, Dots, Dalton Alexander, was Mr. Wrigley's agent. So, he worked along with WT Company, and they named a company – a tugboat for him in the late [19]30s, the *Dalton Alexander*. She was in service up to about 1962 and then was moved to the Pacific Northwest, where I think she's still in service to this day and maybe known as the *Sherry*. I'm not sure yet.

MS: What was the Catalina steamer? Tell me what that is.

LW: Oh, it's wonderful. As a matter of fact, the *Catalina* steamer – the first vessel was the *Avalon*, and she was built in 1919. Then the *Catalina* steamer was built in the mid-[19]20s. What it did was transport people back and forth to the mainland. The casino was built, as you know, as an area to go and dance. Ballroom dancing was popular. Everyone dressed and spent the days, you know, so to speak, or the weekends in Catalina. It was marvelous. I spent most of my childhood going back and forth on the steamer myself. She was taken out of service in the [19]80s and kind of died a very sad death, so to speak, in – off the coast of Mexico. She sank. There was talk of bringing her back into service, but she was too old. She was scuttled basically.

MS: Give me the circumstances of her death. What happened?

LW: The *Catalina* was very old, and there was faster transport. You could take, basically, a much faster vessel, like a hydroplane or whatever, or you could take the airplane over, back and forth. So, people were more inclined, you know, to take a faster mode of transportation rather than just ride on the old *Catalina*. Plus, she was very old and needed a lot of work. So, she was sold. It was thought to be a good idea – business move and, like I say, ended up in Mexico and died a very sad death. You know, when vessels die, it's always sad. It's a loss. They have a life force, I think.

MS: Now, you grew up in Wilmington.

LW: Yes.

MS: Tell us about the Wilmington you remember as a little girl. What are your memories of Wilmington?

LW: Oh, well, I did grow up in Wilmington and – a lot of fun. I had a magnificent time. My first or my earliest memories would be probably on a tug, being taken out with lots of blankets and everything and wrapped up and taken into the pilothouse on a tug for United Towing. We would go out and meet a barge. I was a frequent guest on the port pilot's boat as a baby, all the way until adulthood actually, when the *Angelina* – that was the port's boat that came into service. When my uncle was harbor commissioner, we would go out on her as well. But going back and forth, actually being a part of the port and in the port was not unusual for me as a child, and also playing on the oil derricks, if we didn't tell our folks, and some of the pump equipment. Downtown Wilmington was very vital, thriving. Everybody knew everybody in Wilmington. In fact, there was not a place that you couldn't go and not know people. What was really wonderful too about Wilmington, which later played a very important part in my life, is that everyone was from another country. We had lots of Pacific Islanders, lots of people from Mexico, Portuguese, African Americans, you name it. So, I grew up basically in almost a United Nations atmosphere. I thought that was very important later on for what I do now.

MS: I skipped over your father. Tell me about your father. What did he do? How did he get involved in Wilmington?

LW: Well, you know, my father was born and raised in Wilmington, just like my mother. So, my father took over the print shop, Marine Printing, and operated that for several years, until we sold it in the late [19]60s. In fact, the gentleman that bought it was our press boy, Leal Wasson, who just passed away a couple of years ago. Leal was not only the press boy at the print shop, but he was also our babysitter. He was fun because he would teach us the latest dances. He was an older kid, a great babysitter. He would take us to The Pike in Long Beach and let us do a lot of stuff my parents never knew about, and that was good. So, he was a good guy. My dad was very successful at the print shop. My mother stayed home and raised us, was a member of the Wilmington Junior Club, and, like I say, we were just out and about all over town and very social. That's the kind of town it was.

MS: So many things I want you to talk about here. We'll just start with The Pike. What was The Pike? What memories do you have of that?

LW: The Long Beach Pike was wonderful. It had lots of rides. My favorite was the Crazy Mouse, and that was a small version of the large roller coaster. That, you know, really threw you around a lot and was a lot of fun. In fact, because of that, my lifelong ambition before I die is to ride a luge, which I will do next year. It was probably not unlike riding the luge. There were lots of, you know, games where you could win things. There were lots of sailors. There were just a lot of different people. So, it was a big deal to go to The Pike and spend the day. I

remember I would – I won a black panther with emerald-green eyes, which my mother abhorred. But I still put it in my French provincial bedroom and insisted that it stay there because I won it. There was Rainbow Pier as well, which kind of was a demilune, if you will, or a half circle that went out over a part of Long Beach. You could see the pier. You could see The Pike. You could see the skyline of Long Beach. It was very charming and very lovely.

MS: Now, you mentioned a club in association with your mother. What was that club?

LW: Well, that was the Junior Women's Club of Wilmington, which was a very active group of women that did a lot of things for the community. My grandmother was also a member, my grandmother, Jay Davidson, and then my aunt Ava was Ava Roamer. So, all of them participated in the Wilmington Junior club. They had their teas. They raised money for special events and did their part for the community, and I still do mine.

MS: You said there was a vibrant little downtown in Wilmington. Describe that. What was there? What would you do there?

LW: Oh, well, Downtown Wilmington was fascinating, particularly on Saturdays. Everyone did their shopping. There were shoe stores, (Cody's?) shoes, Tots to Teens, my dad's store, Marine Printing, which was right in the 800 block of Avalon. Then we had Avalon Jewelers, which was owned by Eddie Pash, a wonderful fellow. We had five-and-dime stores. We had department stores. We had a lot of specialty shops. We had restaurants. Everything was very vibrant, and doctor's offices. It was just not unlike Main Street, I guess, in any other part of the country, and very active and continued to be so up to this day. Although there have been demographic changes in town, Wilmington is still very, very vibrant and very vital in its commercial corridor.

MS: Tell us more about the Banning and the Banning House and your experience as a young girl with that.

LW: Well, the Banning House – I lived at 1218 Cary, and it was just north of our home by about seven or eight houses. All of the children in the neighborhood, all of the kids, we all met at the park and spent every Saturday and Sunday there, as well as after school. It was wonderful because there was a large, kind of a marshy pond. You could get frogs. You could play in the carriage house, because the caretaker at Banning House at that time was, you know, oblivious to whatever you did. So, we could climb in and out of the carriages. You had to be careful of black widows and things like that, but that was a play area. Then you could skateboard. There was a little courtyard adjacent to the house, and it had a steep incline. If you were brave and you felt that you would survive, you skateboarded down the incline and then made the circle around the little fountain, which accounted for a lot of damaged knees and (dents?) and things like that. But you never give up as a kid. Then you would play in the trees You could shoot archers – play – shoot – you know, bows and arrows with archery. Play carroms in the house, in the big playhouse. You could play tennis as well, and you could swing. You know, there were bonfires at Halloween, which was very fascinating. That was big news. We liked that. You could also get candy out of the Banning House, which a lot of people probably don't realize or remember on Halloween. So, it was a favorite haunt, and we enjoyed it.

MS: But a house like that had to have the reputation of being a haunted house.

LW: Well, as a matter – you know, the Banning House had the reputation, but the actual haunted place in Wilmington that I actually know from experience would have been the Drum Barracks, which was just down the street on Banning Boulevard. The Drum Barracks was a civil war museum. At one time, it was a Union Army outpost, and it was put into place to protect, you know, the gold that was being dug in California during the Civil War and prior to that. It was to ensure that the gold did not fall into southern sympathy hands. So, the Drum Barracks, yes, is most definitely haunted. A very dear friend of mine, the former director, Marge O'Brien, a very recognized Civil War historian nationally, did a wonderful job with bringing it back to its actual and correct historical state. The Drum Barracks is a very fascinating place to visit. But there is a little ball – a little boy that bounces the ball, and you can hear it in the second story. I've experienced that. I've also experienced the woman in the brown gown that would just come and look at you and walk off. I thought it was a –

MS: Well, tell me those experiences about the ball and the woman. Tell me the story. What happened?

LW: I can tell you. What happened is that I was visiting one day. I was having coffee with Marge in the morning, and there was a ball bouncing upstairs. I said to Marge – who's not, you know, inclined to fantastic stories – I said, "Is there somebody visiting?" She said, "Oh, that's the little boy that lives upstairs. It's a ghost." I said, "Oh, this is wonderful." So, I ran upstairs. Yes, the ball was going on, but there was no ball. But you could hear it. I had donated a melodeon to one of the rooms, which was the gentleman that was the – I think the general or the chief officer for the Drum Barracks, you know, back at that time. The general's wife had a room. So, we put the melodeon in the room. There was a brown wedding dress on the bed. Because you were – went into town, married in brown at that time. So, we saw her. She used to watch out the window. You could feel it. It ended up that there was a television series with Robert Stack – I'll have to remember the name of it, but – *Unsolved Mysteries*. So, they visited the Drum Barracks, and everyone that has gone on to the hereafter were in their glory. They were fascinated with it. But it's – it does – it most definitely is haunted. At the same time, we used to dig around there as children for many balls and things like that. Because when I was growing up and just lived down the street from the Drum Barracks, it was a boarding house, and that was kind of interesting, too.

MS: In passing, you told us the story about going to the bar. Tell me about that.

LW: [laughter] Well, my dad, you know, had Marine Printing, which was just three doors south of the Harbor Lights, a very famous seamen's bar and merchant marine bar in Wilmington. Because Wilmington was a very favored port, a call, you know, for the Merchant Marine. Well, Saturdays, my brother, we would walk to my dad's store and – well, we wanted to raise money for the show. Well, sometimes the money was available, and sometimes it wasn't.

MS: You have to explain, for the movies, right?

LW: Yes. We would go to my dad's store, and we would want to get money to go to the

Granada Theater down the street and see the latest (Jerry?) movie flick or Disney or something. Anyway, sometimes the money was available, and sometimes it wasn't there. We couldn't ask, you know, the printer, the pressman. So, there were a lot of canes and sunglasses left over from my great grandfather in the back of the print shop, and all these little tin cups that they used to melt the type, you know. Because at that time, people actually melted, you know, the metal to pour the type. So, we put on sunglasses and took canes and little cups. We would stand out in front of the bar between 12:00 and 12:30 p.m. because the bar opens at 11:00 a.m. on Saturdays. We could raise enough money from the seamen going in and out. Some were drunk, and some were going in to get drunk. We could probably raise about $5 which, you know, in 1957 was quite a bit of money. That covered not only the entry fee for the Granada Theater, but that could also get us lots of candy and then maybe a chocolate soda at (Desi?) Stationers, either going or coming from the show. We continued this for several weeks until we were caught. Then our business venture – that was our first one – ended very quickly and with a big to-do in the family. But we made a lot of money. It was fascinating.

MS: What was Desi Stationers?

LW: Oh, Desi Stationers was the place in town where everybody bought their stationary supplies, aside from Marine Printing. They had a soda fountain, and a marvelous one. So, you could get your chocolate sodas and your grilled cheese sandwiches. A lot of people met for lunch. They owned a tremendous amount of property in town, almost as much as, I think, as the (Denny?) family owned or the (Menvig?) families. They kept their stationary business in Wilmington until probably the late [19]80s. Then they relocated to Carson, which used to be called Keystone, which was north of Wilmington.

MS: Going back, you said in passing, as a little girl, you're going out on tugboats. Now, tell me about a little girl on tugboats. Why were you there? How did you get there? What's that?

LW: Well, when we were children, you know, our relatives worked for port companies. My aunt worked for United Towing. My Uncle Dot's legacy with Wilmington Transportation, although he passed on, was still alive and well. So, we were always included in a lot of things that other children probably never even realized existed. So, it was the norm in the family – plus the association with the Catalina Corporation – we were always included in a lot of special events, riding the tugboats, pilot boat going out to meet, you know, large ships, either breakbulk vessels and later on, full containerized vessels, 12:00 am, 1:00 a.m., and watch them climb the Jacob's Ladder. That would be the port pilot. We thought that was pretty neat stuff. So, as long as you bundled up and everything, it was a great trip, and there was always hot chocolate.

MS: I'm going to go over that again. Tugboats, describe that. Tell me about going on, what was it like? Where did you go? What did the tugboat do?

LW: Sure.

MS: What were you doing when you were there?

LW: Well, let me explain to you what a tugboat would do. A tugboat normally works alongside

the vessel and helps it dock. At the same time, it can help the dock – the vessel move into the main channel as it makes its way out of the port. There was Wilmington Transportation. That was one of the companies. That, of course, is what my Uncle Dot worked with as part of Mr. Wrigley's business operations. Then there would be the water taxis. H-10 was very well known. It was called H-10 for the Hungry 10, and it was a group of men that put together a water taxi service for the crew members that would maybe be in the outer harbor area and would need a lift into shore. Vessels normally stayed in the Port of Los Angeles much longer than they do now. The average turnaround time now, I think, is probably thirty-six hours. At that time, when I was growing up, it could be seven to ten days, because you had mostly breakbulk operations or loose cargo, and not a lot, if any, containers, until the [19]60s. So, tugboats helped the vessels dock and pull away. The port pilots, you know, met the vessels in the outer harbor and brought them in and then led them out. Then you also had the water taxi services. Then you had the bunkering operations as well. The bunkering operations was basically where the ship would take oil, take on oil in the Port of Los Angeles. We got to witness that every now and then. That was pretty dangerous, but I think I've done that five times in my life.

MS: Describe to me – you're a little girl, you're going out on a pilot boat – what was it like? What did you feel? What did you see?

LW: When we were little, we would go out on the pilot boats – well, well into our teens. We'd normally go out late at night. That was exciting because, you know, the tidal surge was high. It was cold normally, and very windy once you reached a point. When you went beyond Terminal Island prison, it got pretty windy out there in the outer harbor. You would go out and meet the ships. It was very fascinating, the radio contact and the plans and how they were going to go alongside the vessel. You know, what happened is, is when you have a pilot boat – now, a lot of vessels have elevators, but then they didn't. They had what they called Jacob's Ladder. So, what the port pilot had to do, that was going to ride in with the ship, is jump and hope he connected with this rope. There might be a 6- or 7-foot tidal surge to consider. The pilot boat was right alongside the ship. So, we would watch that. You had to be very quiet. Because you didn't want to interfere with anybody's, you know, concentration. That was exciting. So, you just wrapped up. You had your hot chocolate and would watch this operation and then turn around and follow the vessel in. It was wonderful. Or you would take the captain – you would, you know, go out and then retrieve the port pilot from the vessel as she was going out of the port, leaving the port. Again, he had to climb down the ladder and make an educated guess about the jump and land on deck. So, that was a fascinating thing to watch.

MS: You were never tempted to go up the ladder?

LW: As a matter of fact, yes, but it was forbidden. I wanted to do it badly. But we did fall overboard when we were children.

MS: Tell me that.

LW: Well, my uncle was a harbor commissioner at the time. He would take us out on the *Angelina*. That was the port's press boat, so to speak. We would go out late at night. Well, one evening, my Uncle George – he was a lot of fun – took us out, and there was a large spill of

borax into the harbor. There were these giant, giant clouds of borax soap. They looked like little, you know, bubbly islands all over the place. We had to see this. We couldn't pass it up. So, we went out on the *Angelina*. We were so engrossed in the – you know, the floating islands of, you know, soap bubbles, we fell in. So, that was pretty exciting. Because we fell in right under the Vincent Thomas Bridge, which is, you know, kind of an exciting area because a lot of – there's a lot of ship traffic. So, we were retrieved out of that. My Uncle George thought it was funny. They let us stew out there for a little while, as a matter of fact, too. Because I guess we were being a little rambunctious. So, they wanted to teach us a lesson. It was kind of neat because you were floating around in the harbor, and there were these bubbles all around you. You couldn't see anything, I remember, but looking up, and we were under the Vincent Thomas Bridge. We were covered with bubbles. It was a lot of fun.

MS: You went to Northern California for a while. Then you came back, and you went to San Pedro High School. Talk about the relationship. What was the difference between Wilmington and San Pedro?

LW: When I was living in Wilmington, there was a large difference between the communities of Wilmington and San Pedro. San Pedro was really more European in many ways. You had lots of Croatians, Italians, Portuguese, and Norwegians. In Wilmington, we had a large population of Pacific Islanders. We had Hispanics. We had African Americans. So, we had a much different demographic makeup than, let's say, San Pedro. Also, the work ethic was a little different too. In San Pedro, you would have lots of families that were involved in fishing and perhaps even ship's chandlery work. In Wilmington, they were really pretty much more dock-related people working for the ILWU as union longshoremen, marine clerks, and foreman. Also, the mindset was completely different. Wilmington people, if I may say so, in my memory of it, were really a little more adventurous. We would – it was nothing for us to drive to Pasadena and put a nickel on the rail tracks, you know, in Pasadena and then go on to Bakersfield for a hot fudge Sunday, which in San Pedro, not much at all. Most of my friends would maybe travel to Gary, Indiana to see Croatian relatives or even Italian relatives in New York. But normally, they didn't leave San Pedro very much. It was pretty isolated at that time. Wilmington was a little flatter and a little more open for leaving town and then coming back. Then, of course, there was a very serious rivalry between San Pedro High School and Banning High School to the point where several football games, there were knocked heads. It was the standard operating procedure for years and years and years.

MS: Tell me more about that rivalry. What went on? What was the operating procedure?

LW: Well, we had the Pilots. That was the Banning High School team. They were red and black. Then you had the Pirates from San Pedro, which were black and gold. Both teams were extremely aggressive and competitive, particularly when the teams met with each other. As a result, you know, many of the people in the stands would get pretty active and aggressive and competitive too, after the games. It was nothing unusual to have, well, slugfest after the games, either in Pedro or in Wilmington. It was just considered normal. My cousin participated in many and so did our babysitters.

MS: You went, eventually, to San Pedro High School.

LW: Yes.

MS: Were you betraying your community by doing that?

LW: I attended San Pedro High School from 1967 to 1968. I had lived for several years in Sacramento and had gone to a girls' Catholic school. So, coming back to the port, particularly moving to San Pedro, was a very big adjustment. Because I had – I was in Sacramento, California, which was very exciting politically, and we lived in a high-rise downtown. So, everyone that we interacted with – I used to play – the Governor of the State of California, Pat Brown, would play baseball with us every Tuesday afternoon in the fall because he visited people in the building to do business with him. So, when I moved to San Pedro, it was a big adjustment, coming into an area that, again, at that time, was a little more isolated and insulated than what I'd been used to, particularly coming from Wilmington. Secondly, the football games, when we did play Banning, well, I would sit on the Banning side because I'm a Wilmington person. I didn't make any apologies about it either, and no one said anything to me about it. But I was pretty quiet in school and just kind of got used to – from a Catholic school mindset into a public-school mindset and San Pedro as well. I married a San Pedro person and have been here for several years. There's really been – there have been a lot of changes in the San Pedro community. It's opened up a lot than what it used to be like in the [19]50s and the [19]60s; that's for sure.

MS: Were there the equivalent of *Romeo and Juliet* romances between Wilmington and San Pedro?

LW: When my parents were growing up in Wilmington, mostly Wilmington people pretty much stuck with Wilmington people, and San Pedro people stuck with San Pedro. Because, again, you had some cultural considerations working in the background. You had perhaps very old Italian or old Croatian – at that time, Yugoslavian, but they were still Croatian – mindsets working or older Portuguese and Norwegian, as opposed to Wilmington, which was a completely different way of thinking. So, yes, there were some changes. There were some *Romeo and Juliet* stories. Some of the families, there were big – it was a big deal to adapt to the changes. I kind of experienced that myself because I was at Pedro High, but I was a Wilmington person. So, I really hadn't had a lot of introductions to a European cultural way of thinking. I remember one date where I went to a family's home, and they were Italian. The mother wanted me to look at the wedding dress. Because they were delighted that I was dating their son, and, oh, boy, there was going to be a wedding. Well – and I just couldn't wait to get out of there. I was horrified. I was very polite about it, but, you know, I could have run home rather than taking the car. So, that was a big adjustment that never happened, nor would it, in Wilmington.

MS: Well, tell me any more stories you remember about the culture shock of San Pedro.

LW: Well, it was – San Pedro was just different. Like I say, a lot of people here – living here at the time were involved in fishing or industries related to the canneries, either actually working in the canneries or distribution or whatever. So, the mindset was different because it was really more of a European way of thinking. San Pedro was just as clannish, if you will, as Wilmington

was. It was very much a pro San Pedro mindset as Wilmington was very much a pro Wilmington mindset. That began to change, as a matter of fact, in the very early [19]60s – it's probably a good guess – when Del Amo Mall opened up in Torrance. Because what that did was effectively have people leave these areas to shop out of town and move into Torrance. From that, I sincerely believe, it seemed to open up a lot of different avenues and get people out of town, down the Harbor Freeway, or over into Torrance and shop. Because Lomita was, as a matter of fact, I can tell you, Lomita was just as isolated and clannish in their thinking as was San Pedro and as was Wilmington.

MS: Any particular favorite high school stories you remember from San Pedro?

LW: Yes. You know, San Pedro High School was great. It was a lot of fun. I was there in 1968, which I guess you could say was, you know, the year that was the year in American history. I got to experience a lot of things. We had hippies. Then we had, you know, the excellent student group. Then you had the normal student group. Then you had low riders that were into cars and everything. Then you had the club kids. You had a lot of different parts working in San Pedro High School at that time. It was a banquet. I mean, I – all I did was just kind of look at everything and think this was fascinating, you know, particularly the hippie movement. Because, you know, you had a lot of people running around with flower power all over their – you know, their cars. There was a lot of pot and everything too. So, it was a very dynamic year in 1968, and our class was a very large one. It was interesting to see how people matured. A lot of people ended up working on the docks. Then, again, a lot of people didn't. All of us had very interesting lifestyles from that graduating class. It was not boring; I can assure you. Far from that.

MS: What group were you a part of?

LW: You know, I was really – I was in San Pedro High, and I was pretty much a watcher. Because I had come into San Pedro High at rather a late time in high school, and I didn't know a lot of kids. But I was quiet. You know, I enjoyed my English and creative writing classes and history classes and things like that. But I was really more of a watcher. Because I really, pretty much recorded things in my mind about what was happening in town, and, you know, what was happening with the kids and also, taking into consideration the introduction to politics in Sacramento and how that was changing, not only San Pedro and Wilmington, but the port and its dynamics as well. So, I had a good time just doing that. I could float from group to group and benefit from it in many, many ways.

MS: Now, how did you get involved professionally with the port, and what did you do there?

LW: Well, when I was – my first position in the maritime industry was in 1975, and I worked for a ship's chartering company in Long Beach on a temporary basis. The owners of the chartering service were in negotiations with Mr. Hatsu Chang, who owns Evergreen Marine Corporation, which was, at one time, the largest container company in the world. They were negotiating for an agency agreement in Long Beach. So, when the negotiations were completed, I was allowed to open the office quietly in Long Beach. I was the only one there, as a matter of fact, for the first two or three months. I worked in Long Beach at the office and set it up. I

worked directly with the group from New York, which were all mainland Chinese employees of Evergreen Marine Corporation, worked along with them. Then I worked along with the Israeli sea captains that had the agreement. So, I worked for Evergreen Marine Corporation, actually the agency, Evergreen United, for several years. It was fascinating. Because I started as receptionist and then when we knew our vessel was coming in, the *Everspring*, I think it was, the first vessel, in August of [19]76, I went to the booking department and took bookings for outbound cargo. Didn't have any idea what I was doing. Then equipment control, you know, to have the chassis lent out, so people could pick up the containers, stuff them, and return them to the terminal. Then I moved to the export declaration department, which was outbound, and cut what they call export decks or x-decks for cotton bills of lading. Every bale has twenty-four marks, and there might be 234 bales per export declaration, which becomes a bill of lading. So, that was very hard and good training. Then I moved to the inbound department and worked for import cargo, releasing and working with banks and, you know, importers. Then I worked along with customs and U.S. Department of Agriculture and various federal, local, and state agencies. Then I established their marine claims division, and I worked along with a very salty old captain, Captain Whitaker. He was a marine surveyor. So, he taught me about marine surveying and settling cargo claims, which was a lot of fun. So, I benefited from that. Plus, I worked with Israelis and Chinese, and that was a blast. Every day was a lot of fun; I can tell you that.

MS: Okay. We're going to go back over these jobs here. Why was it a big deal about Evergreen coming here?

LW: The reason that Evergreen was so important to the Port of Los Angeles is that it was a huge container company that was no doubt going to become number one worldwide. Evergreen was going to start their Pac Rim service from Los Angeles to Taipei and transship cargoes from mainland China in Singapore, which was not uncommon. Everybody did that at the time. So, Evergreen's introduction and entry into the Port of Los Angeles was a very important shot in the arm for the Port of Los Angeles. It heralded a whole new age for strictly containerized vessels that were coming in at that time. Prior to Evergreen's arrival, it was not uncommon to have vessels that had some breakbulk and some full containers. You had some Japanese lines that were containerized cargo. But to have a Taiwanese shipping company of that size – and they were huge. They got their start in the Gulf, the Red Sea, as a matter of fact, years back – was really something for the Port of Los Angeles. It put us on the map, truly, for Pac Rim trading. Evergreen's first clients, as a matter of fact, the big ones, besides export for practically all the cotton grown in Arizona and California, was Walmart. We started with Walmart. I remember dealing with people in Bentonville, Arkansas, and nice group of people. They had about maybe 10- or 20-foot containers on each vessel, which was considered pretty large. But there were other shippers. We had Kmart and Sears and one company called New York Merchandise, which was fascinating. They shipped everything. I mean, if you bought an Easter bunny or a lawn chair at Rite Aid, or at that time, Thrifty Drugs or whatever, New York Merchandise imported it. We had a lot of big companies. But Walmart was kind of interesting because that was a different group of people to deal with. They were from Arkansas. They were very polite and nice to work with, where most of the people from Sears and Kmart were dreadful to work with. I didn't care for them at all.

MS: Let's go back. You said you were working as an agent for – what does that agency do?

LW: If I may, let me explain what Evergreen Marine Corporation did. It was the agency that represented Evergreen Marine Corporation's interests here in the Port of Los Angeles. What we did is we worked – we made arrangements for their vessels to be worked by the stevedoring companies, which at that time was Marine Terminals, and that was at Berth 228, Terminal Island. What we did is we also handled all of the freight forwarding notices, advised all of the consignees on board the ship that their cargo was arriving, or we handled all of the inbound freight that was coming into the terminal. We handled all the bills of lading work. Because everything that was going to load the ship had to be documented, manifested for the port of destination, you know, overseas.

MS: What were you doing when you did that? Were you sitting there stamping things or working on a computer? Or what?

LW: When I started, there were no computers. We did everything by hand. In other words, for instance, if you were going to what cut, what they call an export declaration, or an ex dec, which really becomes the bill of lading in the process for the export cargo, you had to take all of the information about that, a certificate of origin, freight information, descriptions, whatever, everything that you could possibly think of, and put that on what they call an export declaration, all the marks and numbers that identified the cargo specifically for that particular bill of lading or booking number. So, that gave it the instructions about who would be the notify party, who would be the consignee, and who the shipper was. It was the exact opposite for inbound cargo. When cargo would arrive, you had to notify the consignee. Then you had to take payment, as a matter of fact, for the freight charges, the ocean freight charges, maybe any special charges, maybe special handling. That was normally done in the more – with the method of a bank guarantee, which was not uncommon. Then you had to deal with the international banks, normally in New York or Los Angeles. Because the bank guarantees, you know, we're just as important as money.

MS: Give me some details. All this paperwork that you were doing, how would you do that?

LW: When I worked at Evergreen, everything was done by hand. It had to be. We didn't have computers at that time. Aside from just working on the documentation, compiling all of the documentation, and then turning that into a legal and enforceable document that not only was entered in what they call a manifest, which is an accounting of all the cargo and vessel stores aboard each ship, it had to be cleared at the other end, you know, with their customs. The same thing at this end as well. So, what we would do is we would compile the manifest for export documentation and export vessels. Then when the vessels were coming in, we had to go over the manifest and check line for line to make sure that all of the information that was on the manifest coincided with the bill of lading information that we received, with marks and numbers for all cargo coming in. If there was one problem, then that would hold up clearing not only the entire vessel but may prevent the consignee from taking delivery of their cargo. So, it was a very exacting type of work. Aside from that, we had to file certain documents with U.S. Department of Agriculture if there were any foodstuffs on board. Also, with Customs, there was always the issue of contraband. They had special teams that would come in and mark special bills of lading of interest. Then we would monitor that. Then Customs would take over from a certain point,

and we normally knew if there was a bust or not.

MS: There's been a lot of changes since you grew up in Wilmington, but there's things that remain the same. How would you see how Wilmington has changed from the time you grew up? Good? Bad? Indifferent?

LW: When I was born and raised in Wilmington, at that time, had a more diverse demographic makeup. I believe, as I've mentioned before, we had Pacific Islander. We had everything. About the [19]60s, we had a large influx of Hispanics moving into Wilmington from Mexico. That changed the dynamics of Wilmington completely, to the point now, I would guess, that Wilmington is probably about a 96 percent Hispanic population. Of course, as a result, methods of shopping, eating, whatever, have changed dramatically. But Wilmington has a very, very vital and dynamic commercial corridor and always has, in spite of any demographic changes or not. I'm involved with Banning High School presently, through their International Trade Academy Program. I chair it. We work with Banning High School students now to help them along, once they graduate from high school, enter the transportation industry, either through international trading or actual maritime or whatever. It's been a very successful program. But I look at Wilmington as pretty much a town that has changed its demographics, but it's still a very solid and right community. I'm delighted of being from Wilmington. I delight in the community. I still have a lot of interaction with it, socially and also on a community basis. I think that the future of Wilmington is extremely, extremely positive. It's a dynamic force. When you travel overseas and you tell people, well, you are from Wilmington, California, eight times out of ten – and this includes South Africa or even India and Mumbai – they'll automatically identify it as the Port of Los Angeles. If you say something about Long Beach, they'll say, "Oh, that's the Queen Mary," which is pretty funny because Long Beach also has a viable port, but they identify Wilmington as the Port of Los Angeles because, quite frankly, it was. That was an extension, as well as Terminal Island. So, I think Wilmington's identity is very secure. Its future is extremely interesting. Wilmington community itself, their front yard is the Pacific Ocean. It's Pac Rim. How much better could it possibly be? So, I'm very, very much taken with Wilmington. I'm very convinced of a solid and remarkable future.

MS: Couldn't have a better ending.

LW: Is that all right?

MS: That's great.

LW: Well, it's true.

MS: Well, good.

Female Speaker: That's good. I'm glad to hear that.

LW: Good.

MS: Well, listen.

[end of transcript]