

Port of Los Angeles Centennial Oral History Project
Jayme Wilson Oral History
Date of Interview: Unknown
Location: Los Angeles, California
Length of Interview: 00:52:25
Interviewer: MS – Unknown
Transcriber: NCC

Male Speaker: Please say your name and spell it.

Jayme Wilson: Jayme Wilson, J-A-Y-M-E, Wilson, W-I-L-S-O-N.

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

JW: I was born in 1952. I was born in Long Beach.

MS: Great. So, you're a harbor guy. You grew up in this area. Tell us about your family. Did they have any connection to the ports? Particularly, we're talking about San Pedro. But was there any family connections to the port?

JW: No. The family connection is really to the water. I grew up in Long Beach. I grew up around the water. Learned to sail when I was five. My brothers learned to sail very young, involved in Sea Scouts, and we migrated into the boat business on our own.

MS: Tell me how that happened.

JW: Well, when I graduated from law school, I bought a 38-foot sailboat as a present for me. The dock that we rented to keep the boat was here in San Pedro. So, from 1979 on, we've had a boat here in San Pedro. During those first three years of this boat, we really enjoyed sailing. We enjoyed the working harbor. We enjoyed seeing the ships so much; we decided we wanted to get into the charter boat business. So, we started looking for a larger boat. We started talking to naval architects. We met with the Coast Guard. We ended up hiring an architect from Wilmington who designed our 90-foot sailboat. We had it built here in San Pedro at 20th and Mesa. The yard is now a house. We started our boat business in 1982, doing harbor cruises at Ports O' Call.

MS: So, what was it initially that gave you the idea that people would want to see this port? What was it about the port that you thought was going to be worthy of tours?

JW: Well, it was really my fascination with seeing all the different ships every time you went out. Some people, when they go sailing, they want to sail to Catalina. That's what they want to do. We really enjoyed sailing in the harbor. The outer part of the harbor here in San Pedro is called Hurricane Gulch. So, it's always windy. You always get ships coming in. We really enjoyed that process. When we were taking friends out for sale, they would say, "Hey, you guys know everything about the harbor. You should get into the business." There were a lot of changes going on here in San Pedro in the [19]80s. It just got to the point where more and more people said, "You should do it." So, we said, "Fine. We'll do it on one condition." We, when I say, myself and my brother, Marcus. We said, yeah, we'll do it for a few years, but we really want to sail around the world at some point. Well, we've never done that. We ended up just building more boats and expanding our operation at Ports O' Call and expanding our operation in Long Beach.

MS: Since this is a world port, you've done it vicariously.

JW: Correct. We've probably sailed around the world, just not enough miles to do that. Yes.

MS: Were the Spirit Cruises the first harbor cruises? Or is there a history here that we need?

JW: No. There was a history here. There were a couple – two different companies that operated in Ports O' Call. There was a company called the Village Boathouse, which did basically the short sightseeing cruises. They had been there since the village opened in the early [19]60s. Then there was another company called Buccaneer Cruises that had a black pirate ship-type sailboat and a ferry-type boat, paddle river boat. They started in the late [19]60s and left in the mid-[19]80s.

MS: But before that, nobody was giving cruises in the [19]50s, [19]40s, [19]30s?

JW: Well, in that time frame, remember, the port had – the Vincent Thomas Bridge hadn't been built yet. So, since the [19]20s, the port had been operating a ferry service across from – down at Sixth Street, where the Maritime Museum is, over to Terminal Island, so the workers could get to fish harbor for the canneries and things like that. So, there were always boats available to do things like that. But really, when the port granted the lease to build Ports O' Call in the early [19]60s, it was when they really brought tourism to the water. Before, the port had been mainly working port only. They had the fishing fleet. They had the longshore jobs. But tourism wasn't really a part of it. When they designed Ports O' Call to have the restaurants and the shops and the boat docks and sport fishing landing, it really started to change. That's now continuing with the waterfront development here in San Pedro.

MS: Good. That was terrific. I've done the tour on your boat. I've obviously enjoyed it and is fascinated by it. I've actually done it more than once. What does a tourist see when they take your tour that's so fascinating to you, both when you were starting and now? What are the things that they see and learn about on these tours?

JW: Well, things have changed in the last twenty-five years. When we started our boat business, there were still the old timber wharfs and the old warehouses. There were the smaller ships that sat at the dock for weeks at a time while the longshoremen unloaded them using ropes and – not cranes, I don't even know what they're called – booms to load the cargo. So, at that point, when we were doing the tours, we basically would stop at a ship and watch for a while what was going on. Because it took a lot longer to unload and load. Things have migrated to these large, mega ships, where they only import a day or two at a time. When we cruise by, there might be four crane operators moving cargo every 30 or 40 seconds. So, it's changed more into looking at the big, modern ships and looking at the old, almost derelict-looking boats that you wondered what was going on. There's a lot more diverse cargo now. Because we're seeing a lot of these big ships are coming from China, which we weren't even exporting or dealing with China, you know, in the [19]80s when we started this. Then, also there's a big change now with more security. There's now, we're seeing the Coast Guard boats, the police boats, and things like that. One of the things that we are missing now, though, is the ship building. Because we used to have Todd Shipyard, Southwest Marine, where we were able to go and talk about a ship, a frigate being built or launching of a ship. That was really a real highlight. Those are gone now. But again, there's enough cargo activity with Pier 400, Pier 300 that the guests on the boat get to see

a diverse port at this point. Other thing that's really changed in the port is the water is so clean. When we started our boat business, you never had to have the bottom of the boat cleaned. There was so much mercury and other debris in the water that nothing grew in the harbor. The water wasn't clear. It was brown. The water smelled, basically. Now, we have the cleanest harbor in the world. Now, in fact, if you go out by the breakwater, the water is so clear you can see garibaldi, which is the – what's it called – the goldfish-looking fishes. When you go out to the breakwater, the water is so clear you'll see garibaldi, which is a goldfish-like fish that's almost a foot long. Normally, you'd only see those in Catalina and tropical places. But our water has become so clear, we also have so many sea lions now. It's not even an unusual day when you have a pot of porpoise swimming in the outer part of the harbor. Because, again, it's been cleaned up so much. Of course, now, we have to have our bottoms clean because there's so much growth in the harbor. So, there's a little side issue.

MS: You wish for the good old days.

JW: No, I do not. I do not. I love the clean and the starfish and everything else.

MS: Right. Now, is part of this tour the contemporary port, and part of it is history? Do you give a little background of the port? If so, what do you tell people as they're going along?

JW: Well, you know, we really try. We don't use tape machines. We use real voices. So, we really try to adjust the narration to who the guests are on board and what's going on in the harbor. We know we have this hour window. So, if there's several ships in or they're unloading some unusual cargo, that's where we'll really focus. If it's one of these days where there's not too many ships in and it's a beautiful day, we may spend more time in the outer harbor near Hurricane Gulch, talking about the building of the harbor, when the first breakwater is built, the first lighthouse is built, go into when Cabrillo discovered it, and all that stuff. So, it really changes based on what's going on in the harbor. Days are cruise ships in port, then it's a little different cruise too. I mean, we have a lot of repeat business where people come back on different days. Because once they've been here a while, they seem to know, well, on Sunday, we'll have these two cruise ships. On Monday, we get this. We can really adjust the tour around to what the guests want to see and what's available to show.

MS: Is there something that's most impressive overall to guests that they really remember most from these trips?

JW: Nowadays, the thing that is most impressive is the size of the ships. The channel is only about 900 feet wide. Our boat's only about 90 feet long. Then this 900-foot ship is going right by you. You see the people, the new people that I don't think have been on a boat before, they look up, and they see these containers. You see them trying to think, what is all this going on? Then by the time they're into the cruise and we've explained to them that the cargo comes in in a container, it's unloaded, put on a ship, then they'll start coming up and asking questions. So, that's what I see on the freeway. Then when you start explaining, well, there might be 10,000 DVD players in one container, that's, I think, what gets so impressed. Because I don't think most of the lay public understand how much importing and exporting goes on.

MS: On a practical sense, you have more than one boat.

JW: Yes.

MS: Talk about what the company consists of now, how many boats they are and the names and the sizes and all that.

JW: Okay. We have four different boats that we operate. Our first one is the 90-foot sailing ship, which is now used primarily for weddings and private events and family events. It does some sightseeing cruises during the summer, but its primary focus is private. We then have a 50-foot, 50-passenger excursion boat that was built up in Washington, and it's used primarily for weekday excursions when there's not as much traffic around. We have a 90-foot motor yacht that holds 150 people that's used on weekends for harbor cruises. It's used for a public dinner cruise we do on Saturday evenings. It also does a lot of corporate entertaining. Then we have a 65-foot boat called the *Pacific Spirit*, which holds 145 people, which is basically a smaller version of the other boat I just talked about. It is also used for harbor cruises, things like that. Normally, depending on the season, the *Pacific Spirit* is kept in our Long Beach operation at Shoreline Village, and the other three boats are over here in San Pedro.

MS: New York, I know, has the Circle Line and all that. How does San Pedro and the harbor here, Port of Los Angeles, compare to other tourist boat operations in ports around the country?

JW: Well, I would say that we are totally underserving our region. I am a boat nut. So, when I go on vacation or go anywhere, I go to harbors. What do I do? I go on harbor cruises. If you've been on Circle Line in New York or you've been on the cruises in Seattle or San Francisco, it's basically a dominant part of the tourist destination. It's not like everyone that goes to San Francisco is on a boat ride, but almost everyone does. One of the challenges that we have here in the Los Angeles harbor is downtown is 25 miles away. Then 10 miles past that is Hollywood. Then if you go over to Disneyland, you know, it's another distance. I mean, we have a large metropolitan region, but our water is really unknown. Just like I was saying earlier, the guests in the boat don't really understand shipping. A lot of people that come to Southern California don't think that we're the world's busiest harbor. They think of Hollywood. They think of Beverly Hills. They think of Disneyland or maybe Venice Beach. So, one of the things that we're working on in our company is to become more of a regional attraction. The port is starting to assist because of the Green Port Initiatives and talking about the port now, where in the past, I think the port didn't want to talk about how they were growing because they didn't want the public to understand or know or be afraid of it. So, I think that that is helping us. We're also active in the LA Convention Bureau now. We're doing a lot of regional advertising. In fact, we're involved with a program called the Go Card LA, where if you buy an admission to Universal, you get an admission on my boat. So, we're getting a lot more people coming out of LA this summer than we did before. We think it's – if you compare it to almost any other city, it's the most underutilized harbor business. We'll never compete with Hollywood. We'll never compete with Disneyland. But maybe on their third or fourth day, they can decide whether they'll go to Venice Beach, or they'll come down here. If they come down here to go on a boat ride, they can see the town. They can see the water. They can see some of the attractions, like, you know, the aquarium or the Korean Bell, things like that. So, that's the direction we're

working on right now.

MS: I know you operate in both places, but could you be the father who decides between the children and say, if you had to take one cruise, would you do the Long Beach or the San Pedro?

JW: We actually have some longer cruises that go through both Long Beach and Los Angeles Harbor. A few years ago, we did a cruise similar to the Circle Line cruise, where people could get on in Long Beach, and they could go around the harbor, get off in San Pedro, get back on the boat. So, they could have lunch at either location. It's called our Circle Cruise, our original name. We had to change it because the way the geography is, the boat would leave San Pedro, cruise in the Outer Harbor by the lighthouse, go down to the Long Beach lighthouse, into the Queen Mary area, then cruise back through the Inner Harbor, around Turtle Island, under the lift bridges, and get here, get back to San Pedro. That would take about an hour and 45 minutes. But with the growth of cargo over the last three or four years and a lot more train-related cargo where they're using on-dock rail, the drawbridge for the train doesn't go up like it used to it. So, we end up having times where the guests were delayed a half hour waiting for the bridge to lift because there was so much cargo on the trains that they could not lift the bridge. So, it just got to the point where it was a real problem. We then decided, well, the people still like it, so we'll switch. We'll just do the cruise. We'll go into the Outer Harbor, down to Long Beach, and we'll go in the Outer Harbor back. People did not like that. So, the trains' schedule changes, we have a difficult time doing that cruise because of that.

MS: Is this the Cerritos Channel?

JW: Yes, the Badger Avenue Bridge.

MS: You're going to see us because we're going to be doing your tour cruises. We're going to be shooting some stuff. I'm sure we'll be talking to you if it's possible to do some shooting from the boat. Another responsibility that you've picked up a few years back is Ports O' Call itself and your involvement in that. Give us a sense of, first of all, the history of Ports O' Call. What is it? Then give us a sense of your involvement now and what the future holds for that.

JW: Okay. Well, I think Ports O' Call is a real interesting issue that most people don't understand. In the early [19]60s, in fact, 1961 the lease was granted to a company called Specialty Restaurants to develop about a mile of the waterfront, basically from the Maritime Museum down at the fishing (slop?). It was a mudflat, and there was some fuel docks and things like that. It was really the first time this harbor did anything to bring recreation to the harbor. There were several restaurants, maybe 100,000 square feet of retail. In the [19]60s and early [19]70s, it was the only thing. There was no other waterfront center. There was a shoreline village. There wasn't the issues going on in Marina Del Rey. The pier at Redondo Beach wasn't developed the way it was. There was free parking. A couple of other things happened at the exact same time. The Vincent Thomas Bridge was built, connecting Long Beach to San Pedro. The 110 Harbor Freeway was continued all the way down here to San Pedro. So, it was really a boom time, and Ports O' Call became a model for a lot of places up and down this coast. But it became a model for, in fact, Baltimore's Inner Harbor. We met with the people from Baltimore, five or six years ago, on the waterfront development plan. The people that started that effort,

said the first place they went to when they looked at redoing the Inner Harbor in Baltimore, which is world known as the best waterfront, they said they came to Ports O' Call and used that as the model. We met with people from Rouse Development, who's big on waterfront and warehouses and all the stuff, and that has been turned into recreation. Their model, they had come to San Pedro and saw how it worked. It's hard for people to understand that now because the center is almost 50 years old, and it has not been updated like it should have been.

MS: I know there was some discussion when it was built. The irony is that, at that time, San Pedro, the port, was the number one fishing place in the United States, maybe the world.

JW: That's correct.

MS: They decided to bring a New England fishing village to the largest fishing facility. Was there any irony in that? Or do you see any reasoning behind that? Because here it was, a hundred-year-old port but still a major port, fishing, shipbuilding, all that stuff, and yet they brought a New England model to it. Did you see any irony in that?

JW: It's unusual the way – how they picked it. I'm not aware of why they did it. But if you really look at the village, even back in those days, it really wasn't New England. The New England part was added in 1967 when Whaler's Wharf was done. The architect that had designed that section, six years later, had done a lot of work at Disneyland. So, that southern part, which is called the Whaler's Wharf Village, was the New England village, and it's never been successful. That was the part of the village that never was able to have full retail. They had different hours in the business because the others – the village in the center, the original Ports O' Call Village is more of a Mexican or Mediterranean flavor, with some tile roofs and stucco. Then in the late [19]70s, they built a fishing village at the at the north end, which was like Cannery Row, which was not successful and lasted only about ten years. They converted that into the Asian Village. So, there's been changes over the last few years, but they haven't been the changes that allowed some larger retailers to come in. Basically, all the spaces are 500 or 600 square feet, very low ceilings, irregular shaped, where current retail is more rectangular-oriented with a higher ceiling, so one clerk can watch the entire store. So, that's really where they have not kept pace in the last twenty years.

MS: Going back to the history, who were the cast of characters behind the creation of Ports O' Call?

JW: The gentleman with the vision to do this was Dave Tallichet. He created Ports O' Call. He then created a waterfront village, Jack London, in Oakland. He did one in Clearwater, Florida. He ended up operating the Queen Mary for like ten years. So, during that time of the [19]60s and early [19]70s, his genius worked. But then when competition came, things changed.

MS: Who was Tallichet?

JW: Dave Tallichet was a pilot during World War Two. He had a restaurant called The Reef in Long Beach, which was his first restaurant. When he came to San Pedro, he built the Ports O' Call restaurant, which I now operate. He built it similar to The Reef in a Polynesian fashion and

was Polynesian for the first twenty years of its operation. It was so crowded and so busy, he just kept adding shops on either side of it and then adding additional restaurants. He's still alive and has about 30 restaurants around the country but no more villages or retail.

MS: So, what's happened to it now? We've been here, and clearly, the place has deteriorated physically. But we've been here on Saturdays. You couldn't park your car.

JW: Well, that's the unusual thing about waterfronts, and it's difficult, I think, for most people to understand. On the weekends, it's packed. On a weekday, it's empty. So, if you go there on a Tuesday, you'll see two thousand empty parking spaces. You say, "Wow, this place needs to be torn down and redone." You go there on a Saturday or Sunday, and you can't get in. In fact, this summer, we've been so busy that a lot of times, by noon, the port closes the parking lot. Because the traffic on Harbor Boulevard is already backed up to the freeway. So, the challenge is, yes, it's old, and yes, it needs to be changed. When the port obtained the lease rights from the previous developer, they operated it for a few years, and they decided that they were into containers. They couldn't operate. I was selected to give it a lease to take over the village. Part of that lease was agreements to make some changes, do some demolitions, open up some more view areas, plant some grass, and rent out the stores. We've made those efforts and all that stuff. But with a short-term lease that expires next year, you can't go out and spend a million dollars on bringing some new retail. I mean, I've had large retailers like West Marine, which is a marine hardware store, who've asked for 10,000 square feet, but the largest space in the center is like 800 square feet. So, until the port figures out what they're going to do on the waterfront, there isn't a long-term lease. So, it's not viable to make these changes. The port is looking into it, wants to continue the promenade, which is fantastic. So, it's going to happen eventually. But one of the things that has also happened in the last couple of years, I took over the operation of the Ports O' Call restaurant. That was one of those things where we couldn't wait, even if it was just a short-term lease. We had to make dramatic changes, roof, air conditioning, kitchen, and all that stuff. We've done that over the last two and a half years. The business is up 50 percent. We're getting a lot of positive things. We have a lot more work to do, of course. Because when you have a 50-year-old building that had a short-term lease, you can't do everything at once. But we made dramatic changes. I think one of the things that I've seen in operating that restaurant now is like on the harbor cruise, if you're in that restaurant and a big ship goes by, usually, all conversation stops, and everyone just looks at it. So, one of the things that we did when we redid the lobby – Gil Mares is a local artist, photographer who takes a lot of pictures of ships from here in San Pedro, over across the way, maybe at one of the loading docks or something. But he doesn't take pictures of the entire ship. He takes pictures of just one small part of the ship, like the Plimsoll line, the load lines, in the ship. So, we have these prints now in the lobby. When people walk in, they look at them, and they're not sure. They think it might be modern art. They might think it's just real colorful. But when they leave after watching the ship go by, they go back up to the artwork, and they say, "I know what that is. That's an anchor. That's the load line. That's the bow. That's the rudder." It really has made that experience good. We're now having people come back, and when they walk into the lobby with a friend, they'll say, "Look at this. You'll see this. If we're lucky, a ship will go by." So, I think really celebrating the harbor, letting the guests really enjoy it and get more connected with it, I think we'll just be able to continue to build the business. How do we solve all the issues at San Pedro and Ports O' Call? For us operators there, the best thing that could happen is that the port would put in either shuttle

or more parking. Because weekends, we have a lot of local people that won't get down there because they can't find parking. On the other hand, we need to figure out what to do on a weekday to drive more business. We may be getting another couple hundred people a day out of LA through the Go Card or our participation in the visitors guides and things like that, but two- or three hundred people a day is not enough to give that energy in the center. But we're having the same problems in Long Beach Shoreline Village. You know, we operate there during the week. It's slow. On the weekends, it's packed. So, we just need to figure out how to make it work best for the community and for all the businesses there. Because there are thirty separate businesses at Ports O' Call. There are probably six hundred employees, and a lot of them are long-term employees. I know at the San Peter Fish Market, they have three hundred employees, and their average employee has been there ten years. At the Ports O' Call Restaurant, we have 125 employees. We have employees that have been there thirty years. We have employees whose parents were there, and we have the grandchildren that are now asking for jobs as a hostess and things like that. So, it's really been part of the fabric of this community for almost fifty years.

MS: Do you support a lunch and dinner menu at the Ports O' Call these days?

JW: Yes.

MS: Was there a period that you didn't do that?

JW: Well, since we took over, everything is normal. When we took over the restaurant, it's been open seven days a week for the last two and a half years. We had to close for three hours, with the Health Department, to get things transferred over. We have a very good lunch business, and we have a very good dinner business. During the week, to encourage locals to come in, we have an early bird special that's only available from like 5:00 a.m. to 6:30 a.m. to encourage the locals to come in. So, the locals have been very good. Our Friday and Saturday night business were packed like any other restaurant. Our Sunday brunch is – we have between five hundred and a thousand people every Sunday coming down for brunch. One of the things that we did when we took over the restaurant is we threw in, if you have brunch, you get a free cruise. So, anyone that has brunch, they get a free ticket to go on a harbor cruise. So, it's that cross marketing that we're continuing to do.

MS: Count on me to do that.

JW: Okay.

MS: Quite recently, we went to the 22nd Street Landing because we couldn't find a parking spot.

JW: Well, I've had several people, several friends, who say, "Jayme, I just won't go down there on Sunday. There's no parking." I said, "No. Just come down at 10:00 a.m. or 11:00 a.m. Don't come down at 12:00 p.m."

MS: Talk about, what is the promenade project, the bridge to the breakers. What is that? I mean, it's clearly just an idea now, but what is the concept? How is that going to affect, do you

think, the harbor?

JW: Well, I don't look at it as just an idea. Okay. I look at the Bridge-to-Breakwater as a process that really started when Ports O' Call was opened up in 1961. I have not been involved. I was born in 1952 so – but I did come over with my family to Ports O' Call in the early [19]60s, when I was in middle school. I came over as a high school – as a kid, to have fun. But there's been an ongoing opening of this harbor for the recreation business again for almost fifty years. In the [19]80s was really when I started my business here, where I got more involved in what was going on. At that time, the Councilwoman, Joan Mielke Flores, was pushing a walkway from the bridge to the beach. If you walk out there on the sidewalks, you'll notice that there's some stones that have been cut and put in the sidewalks. This actually started in the early [19]80s. It goes all the way from the Vincent Thomas Bridge all the way up to Paseo del Mar, up to Western. So, this process of opening up the water has been going on for a long time. Also in the [19]80s, the Port of Los Angeles opened up the Cabrillo Marina, which is another big effort with putting the Doubletree Hotel there, several restaurants down there. So, I mean, this process is continuing. In the mid-[19]90s, with a different councilperson and a different mayor, there was a project the mayor appointed, what was called the Futures Task Force. They basically looked at what to do to the waterfront in the future. One of the things they came up with – the port has a string of pearls. They have some wonderful, wonderful things, the Maritime Museum, the *Lane Victory*, the Cabrillo Aquarium, and things like that. But they're so far apart. They need to put some more things in closer together. Because people really won't walk a half mile or a mile, but they'll walk 500 feet. If they like something at 500 feet, they'll walk the next 500 feet. So, the port has been working on this long before it's been called Bridge-to-Breakwater. Now, about seven years ago, the Bridge-to-Breakwater project was being pushed by John Papadakis. The Economic Development Corporation and the outgoing mayor and the new incoming mayor all thought it was great. We've been working on, again, opening up more of the waterfront. The first phase of the promenade, which stretches about a mile from the bridge down to Fifth Street, has been great. It's allowed the cruise passengers to walk into downtown if they want to. There still needs to be something done about halfway there. Because people don't like walking that far, you know. A lot of things I've read and the different waterfront cities I've been to, it's the popsicle rule. You've got to have something every – so they can finish a popsicle. By that time, they have to have something else they were to be distracted by. Recently, I've been to a lot of waterfront cities. Basically, they're all set up that way. There'll be something. Whether it's a statue or a fountain or a telescope or a maritime museum, there's something about every five or 600 feet. I think we're making progress that way. I think we're going to get there. I think the vision is right. I think the mayor has basically said he wants to continue this. In my mind, it's real positive. They're doing it in Wilmington too. So, I think it's going to transform what's going on in the harbor, and I think it's going to – once the community, regional, statewide, sees the port, sees the ships, have a better understanding of international trade, I think the port will have an easier time expanding, especially as they're doing it clean.

MS: The one thing you failed to answer, which is, for a real history buff like me, is the Red Car running along the – talk about that.

JW: The Red Car is fantastic. I was born in the [19]50s. My father worked in downtown Los Angeles, on Spring Street, in the financial district. He bought the home that my mom still lives

in, down in Long Beach, because it was a block from the Red Car stop. He was able to take the Red Car from down to LA in the [19]50s and get off a block from his house. So, the Red Car disappeared in the early [19]50s, like everyone knows. So, I'm very aware of it. The Red Car is a fantastic step forward, but it needs to take another step. Because the challenge that I see with my guests trying to get them on the red car and all that stuff is it forces a multi-mode of transportation. Because the Red Car stops are not where the people are or not where the attractions are. I know that when – Bob Henry did a fantastic job getting this thing moving. It's a freight line. So, therefore, there's a lot of different restrictions you don't have in San Diego, and you don't have in Bilbao, where I was on the car in Bilbao. Now that they're moving west ways in some of the other freight operations, I'm very, very hopeful that the Red Car is going to actually be able to be put in – the stops are going to be put in locations, so it's easy for the guests to use. Because right now, when Ports O' Call gets packed on Sunday, and the port police detour the people down to 22nd Street, that Red Car is packed. On several days, they've had to change the route and just go from 22nd Street to the stop at Utro's, because it's standing room only. So, I mean, it's going to be very, very good in the future as we expand the cruise business. If we can get the (Spirit?) into downtown and then eventually over to Wilmington, it's going to be an outstanding addition to our area.

MS: So, tell me the background of the revival or the rebirth of the Red Car in San Pedro.

JW: I don't have all the specifics of the Red Car revival here, but there has been a push for at least ten years in San Pedro. I think it came out of the Futures Task Force report of having a connection to link the waterfront to several other cities. San Diego has done it. Seattle has done it. Bob Henry, who is the port staff member that was really the father of the Red Car, helped put together a team of people looking into the Red Car. About six years ago, when the funding became available, and two replica Red Cars were built. They have one original, restored Red Car, which, in fact, before it was restored, we used in our parades here in San Pedro on the streets, because it was owned by, I believe, the gentleman from Fellows that owned Fellows & Stewart, the shipyard. It was on tires and had a Chrysler engine in it. I remember seeing it at a Christmas parade, and that's when the interest in the community just took off to get this Red Car back. A lot of the historic pictures of Downtown San Pedro, you see the Red Car station right at Sixth Street, right in front of the Maritime Museum, which used to be the ferry terminal. So, it was one of those things where they did it right fifty years ago, where they had the ferry terminal and the train station right next to each other. Regrettably, they took them out. If you look at some of the walkways that we have over by 22nd Street, they were the original Red Car tracks that used to take the Red Car up to up to Point Ferman and things like that. So, it was very good. The tracks were still here. We had this replica car. Then we were able to find a firm up in Seattle to build the two replica cars. So, we're rolling, and we're looking forward to be expanded.

MS: Now, I'm not sure whether you were involved in it or not, but there were these dinner cruise boats in the late [19]80s that couldn't make it here. Is that the same phenomenon of trying to get people to come down here? Or were you involved with those folks?

JW: Yes. It was a difficult issue for me. So, I'll give you some of the background. In the late [19]80s, there was an interest by a couple companies to come into San Pedro to get a toehold in

here. One of the companies was Hornblower dining yachts, and one was Spirit Cruises out of Norfolk, Virginia. The port put a proposal, an RFP, out, and the companies were selected to do this. I submitted a proposal to expand my business. Because this was going to be near the cruise center right underneath the Vincent Thomas Bridge. At the same time, I notified the port that I own the rights to the name Spirit in California, and I notified the other company that I own the rights to Spirit in California. Well, the port went ahead and gave them a contract, and they started operating here. For me, it was good for my business and bad for my business. It was good for my business because they really expanded the market by doing a lot of regional advertising, which really helped me. But it was bad for my business because of the confusion to the public under the name. I regrettably had to go to court and go to federal court for trademark infringement. I won, and they were required to change their name. They changed their name to Pride of Los Angeles instead of Spirit Los Angeles. They stayed around for another year or so, but they were not able to get the amount of people here to make a large operation that carries six hundred people viable. You know, my largest boat holds 150 people. So, if I have seventy-five people on, that's my break-even. I'm doing fine. But when you have a boat that holds six hundred people, and you need three hundred people on it seven days a week, it's very, very difficult. One of the things that we don't have in San Pedro is what they have in San Francisco or even in Long Beach. We don't have five thousand hotel rooms. There's something amazing about when you stay in a hotel, what you want to do is you want to leave the hotel. You want to go out and have dinner. You want to go out and see some sites. We only have about five hundred hotel rooms in our town. So, I think there probably will not be market demand for that kind of large-scale operation in San Pedro until the hotel market changes and things like that.

MS: What about these condos? Are they going to affect you, these people buying million-dollar condos here?

JW: I think the condos are fantastic. I think it's going to help the revitalization of San Pedro. Obviously, everyone that lives has to eat. So, my boat business and my restaurant business are going to prosper from this. But I think we need to look at it at a longer-term thing. They started putting condos in downtown Long Beach in the [19]60s. Now, forty-five years later, everyone's, "God, it's great. They've allowed the condos." Well, the people that first moved in there and started their business, trying to cater to the people from the [19]60s, have gone out of business several times since then. I think San Pedro is going to do very well because it's not going to have as much of the speculation and building that happened in Long Beach and some other cities, or San Diego right now is going through. Because the projects are smaller, and they're bringing them online on a slower basis. But we have entitled about a thousand units downtown. So, I think that's really going to help downtown. I think it's going to eventually lead to a lot more improvements. Because when new people move in, other people fix up their houses. I think that is going on in San Pedro. It's very, very good.

MS: Some people we've interviewed here are local San Pedrans, described this history – that's a hundred years we're talking about – as the hundred years war between the town and the port. Have you been in the crossfire, or you've been on one side or the other? Or do you see this relationship between the town and the port, whether it's the commercial part of it, or whether it's the kind of business that you do? Are there any conflicts there?

JW: I think there are conflicts in the port – definitely with the community and the port. I don't use the term a hundred-year war. I think there's clearly been a struggle, and there are different interests. If you grew up in the fishing business and you lived here, there was no war. You were made wealthy based on the fishing and canning industry. If you were in the shipbuilding industry, as long as you were building ships, you bought homes and – the way things work in San Pedro, which is different than some other places, your first home is near the harbor, but it didn't smell very nice. You had to smell the canneries every night. So, as you became more successful and wealthy and your family, you moved further up the hill, away from the water. Now, things are changing. People are moving back down to the water, which is really good. There has been a big conflict, I think, though, with the community and the port, since the early [19]60s. Because at the time they were building Ports O' Call and doing things like that on the real positive recreation and entertainment side, containerization was taking over the harbor. So, the ships weren't staying here as long. Even though longshore get great pay and do a good job and all that stuff, there aren't as many jobs when you're thinking in terms of it because of the mechanization of what's going on. So, as the port has grown, there's become more traffic, more population. As San Pedro has grown, it's become more of a (bedroom?) community. There are a significant number of people working in the harbor. There's no doubt about it. Without the harbor, this town wouldn't exist. But there's a lot of people that moved into the town in the last fifteen and twenty years, who don't work in the harbor. Their livelihood does not depend on the shipping industry. They're the ones who have become more critical of some of the inconveniences caused by the traffic and things like that. The port, I think, is really trying. They have been. But they look at things in a different perspective. They don't see it from the perspective of the homeowner or the mother that may have a sick child with asthma, thinking, is it the port that's causing it? But I think with the new administration and switching to the commitment to the green port, I'm very hopeful that the port can grow, and the community can grow. We won't have some of those issues, and people won't be talking about a 125-year war. I'm also the chair of the Ports Community Advisory Committee. So, I try not to get on either side of these issues. I try to be the neutral chair. I don't vote on the issues unless there's a tie. I think the fact that the port created the Port Community Advisory Committee seven years ago is really an effort that the port is trying to figure out what's going on. It's all difficult, but they're trying.

MS: Many old-timers talk about, which I found fascinating, is this very special ethnic component of this port, Italian, Slavs, Danes, Scandinavians, Latinos, Mexicans, this mix. It's five generations going back, a very tight-knit kind of community. Is there a reason to try to preserve that even though the population is going to be shifting? Is that a quality of this place that you'd want to preserve as you begin to build new buildings and add new restaurants and all that? Or is it something you say, "Gee, that was the past. This is a different place." How do you see this legacy, this ethnic legacy of the port? What role is it going to play in the future? Is it just, by history, going to pass away, or is it something that maybe needs to be preserved in some way with all these new changes and developments that are going on?

JW: Well, I am very hopeful that the diversity of our town will continue and be celebrated. One of the things that is amazing about this town, when you talk to a lot of the different people from the different cultures that have come here, they came here because it was a port town. They came here because they were fishermen. The people that came here were basically for the

Mediterranean. We basically have a Mediterranean climate here. Whichever generation came, whatever time they came, they basically came here to work and to improve their life. They still live that way. This is one of the towns where, when you get married, you don't move to Orange County. You stay here and buy a home near your mom. This is a town that doesn't have chain restaurants. We have only a couple. Because mom cooks so well, you don't need to – want to go eat at a chain restaurant. The great ethnic restaurants we have, the Italian restaurants, the Greek restaurants, are famous. So, I think that helps keep this town together. We have some great organizations here, some great ethnic churches. We have the Croatian Hall. We have all these different things that allow this to continue. The other thing that happens in like my employees, they go back to Croatia. They go back to Ischia. They go back on a regular basis. So, they continue this process. My son was in Italy this summer or this spring. My son was in Italy this spring, and he was walking around with a San Pedro shirt on. People said to him, "Oh, I know this person. I know that person. Do you know that person?" Because everyone's very familiar with us. Because they've had uncles and grandfathers have come back and forth. I think the port recognizes in the waterfront development that we need to have districts. We need to have different things. We recognize that the fishing fleet, even though it's not successful like it used to be, they're not going to take it out and put a marina in there. So, I'm very confident that we're going to be able to maintain that balance. This town, for a hundred years, has been a mix of different cultures. There's been some issues. There's been some fights. But basically, everyone gets along pretty well. My father was Portuguese. The Italians that have been here, the Croatians, the Serbs, the Mexicans, it's just amazing the mix of people that live here. It's great.

MS: Will there be a – Dalmatian is the term now – will there be a Dalmatian restaurant and shop? Will there be an Italian shop reflecting the community? Because I think it's pretty unique here. Will that be lost? Will you get a New England village, or you get a generic village? Do you see what I'm saying?

JW: Oh, I understand completely. I'm very happy to respond. I think one of the things that is going on in this town, whether it's the waterfront development or the development in town and the redevelopment which area – which I happen to chair the community redevelopment agencies, Community Advisory Committee also – is the town has basically said, we want to grow, we want to improve, but we don't want to lose our identity. We don't want to be like Orange County. I don't mean to be attacking Orange County. But we want to be different. That's one of the challenges, though. When you get larger developers that look at doing something, they don't want to deal with mom-and-pops. They want to deal with the national chain that's going to mail – electronically deposit the rent on the second of the month in New York and not worry about it. I think as we've gone forward with ideas – and one of the projects in downtown San Pedro, the Center Street Lofts, is a project that has about 25,000 square feet of retail on the ground floor. Now, what the community said is, "We would like an ethnic market. We would like a European-style market. We would like a lot of different things." But so far, the building's been done only a few months, but they have no takers for that. Some of us are concerned that it may end up being Starbucks and all these other things, which we need that sort of thing in our community, but do we really need it in the historic downtown? I think the same thing goes true for the waterfront. There's some people that talk about, oh, how great Long Beach is and Rainbow Harbor. They have the chain restaurants around the water. They're so busy and Bubba Gump Shrimp and PF Chang's. But no one that I'm aware of in San Pedro has ever said that's what we

want on our waterfront. We want the unique, different things. If you go to the waterfronts in the cities that I love, San Francisco and Seattle, there isn't chain restaurants in the water. It's Anthony's, and it's these restaurants that have been there – Alioto's – for a hundred years. I mean, those are the sort of things that I feel – that has been expressed at all the public meetings I go to. We want to maintain our individual characteristic. We don't want to be a cookie-cutter. We don't want a mall. We want to be who we have been but allow it to grow and prosper, so our children can benefit from it.

MS: To me, that suddenly makes you a unique market. You're marketable because you're unique. Don't you think that would make it more successful? You're saying these other places are not attracting those kinds of business.

JW: But I think one of the things that you have to look at is when you go to your favorite restaurant – and I know I'm probably biased because of restaurants now. But when you go to your favorite restaurant, I very rarely run into a person that says their favorite restaurant is one of the chains. They have a favorite restaurant, and they may eat at one of the chains. But their favorite restaurant is always something unique. When I go out of town on business or for pleasure, I don't go to a chain restaurant. If I can eat it in Victorville, why would I want to eat it when I'm in Seattle and things like that? But I think the people that have made these businesses successful are usually family businesses, where they work eighty hours a week, and their wife comes in and helps out during the busy times. Their children are working before they're legal because the kids want to be involved with it. Those are changing a little bit. So, it's going to be a little more difficult to do that. Dealing with cities and large corporations that are doing development, they don't want to deal with mom-and-pops. They want to deal with someone that, you know, they can sit across in a boardroom and all that stuff. So, we have a real challenge ahead of us. But I think if we keep reminding our city fathers – our Councilmember Janice Hahn has done a wonderful job in the port – that their favorite place is like our favorite places. We need to make sure that we can work this out, so we can maintain that heritage. A few years ago, when I first started getting involved in the Long Beach or Los Angeles Convention Bureau, I got involved because they were doing a thing called cultural tourism. I was president the Chamber of Commerce at that point. We rented buses. We brought people down here to San Pedro. We did a tour of the weird, different things in San Pedro that you can't see anywhere else, like the Korean Bell. I mean, anyone that goes to the site of the Korean Bell, especially on a clear day when you can see Catalina, and you go up and see the bell, and you can look out and see 270 degrees of Malibu down to San Diego and Catalina, that's a special thing they will never forget. But the Korean Bell doesn't advertise. No one knows what it is. They shoot a lot of commercials up there. If you've been there, then you recognize the commercial. I think there's Nike commercials been shot up there and things like that. But I think that's the real challenge of getting back to the string of pearls idea. We have a bunch of neat, unique things, but none of them have advertising budgets. So, what we're trying to do is, through the LA Convention Bureau, through the stuff in the Chamber of Commerce, is link these things together so then people outside the region understand it. If you live here and you have visitors, you come and do the tour of San Pedro. Then you take them to Disneyland. Everyone else, though, goes to Disneyland first. Then we need to get them down here. I think one of the wonderful things about tourism is that, generally speaking, they're here during the week because they travel on the weekend. So, at a time when our regular customers are not filling the places, if we can get these

people to come here and visit and celebrate some of the treasures we have, it's just a win-win for everyone. Because the wonderful cities of the world that have the best museums are all the tourist cities. All these things have been built and funded by the tourists. But the tourists don't go to school. They don't burden the community with all the necessities. They just provide the stuff. So, I mean, I'm really pro getting people down here, Monday through Friday.

MS: We can go on forever. Obviously, you hit something with me too, which is really the representation of Los Angeles at large, but let alone this unique place you get down here. I mean, you talk about the mom-and-pops, but you don't need an Ante's on the Promenade. But you need Ante-like place. You just flex Ante. You don't need the Tranis necessarily, on the – Tranis that reflects Trani. That's what I'm saying, the flavor of, even if it's new and it's run by, you know, federated restaurants, or whatever, it does reflect.

JW: Well, see, I'll disagree with you.

MS: Okay. Go ahead.

JJW: The chain restaurants are wonderful. I eat at them all. But they're never going to be the same because they have someone in Chicago making the decision. They won't have the same employees. They won't have the same feel. They may have this new glitz and all that stuff, but it's just not going to work. An example that I will use is a restaurant that I like that's part of a chain now, and it's called the Yard House that started in Long Beach. When Steele Platt opened that restaurant about ten years ago, right next to my business, it was all by itself. It was its only restaurant. It's still fantastic, and it's still very good. But now, he has ten other Yard Houses. I've been to the other Yard Houses. It doesn't have the same flavor, you know. It's a different thing. I'm not sure you can replicate that feeling you get when you walk into a place. I think that's the challenge. Now, there's been some great restaurant companies that have been able to expand and do that very well. Most of them do not do it. There's a restaurant chain. I don't want to call it chain. I can't remember his last name. But on Olvera Street, and they built Liberty Grill now in downtown, near Staples. They're doing a great job. No complaints. But it's not the same as the restaurant in Olvera Street.

MS: Well, we could go on forever about this. I will say a little bit about my sense of history and not a lot of it, my taste in food, but it's gone now, in Long Beach, is the old Colonial Buffet.

JW: I know.

MS: What happened to that place?

JW: I do not know. That was there forever.

MS: It was there forever. Also, it was great. Because everyone came there on Sunday after church, in all their finery. There were the black church members, and there were the Italians. There were Asians. It was just an incredible place. Of course, they had that less than great food, but it was this wonderful atmosphere.

JW: Right. I think that's –

MS: The irony, of course, it was Williamsburg, which was just great.

JW: But you know, one of the things about – since you're the history buff, and I've been looking into some different items – it may not be the building that is historical for whatever reason, but it's what's occurred in that place that makes it so special. Now, if you can get the building to be very special and what's occurred there to be very special, then you really have that history and that feel. I think that talk about the Colonial and some other places, there's a lot of – I think, like Ports O' Call Restaurant, I mean, there's been things there, marriages, weddings, press conferences. There's probably been ten thousand people proposed there. It's won an award in the Daily Breeze last week or last year for the best place for a first date. It's sort of hard to believe that a restaurant that has been around forty-five or forty-six years is the best place for a first date. At the same time, it's doing all these other things. But there's been so much activity going on here in San Pedro. There's such a rich history. I think the work you're doing right now to memorialize it will help for the next generation to see what's going on.

MS: Terrific. Hopefully, they'll benefit from it all. Well, we've got to bring it to an end. I really appreciate your help.

[end of transcript]