



ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

An interview with
Alfred G. Santos, 1906-2004

July 16, 1988

 [MP3 Audio File](#) [Length: 1:32:03] (42.1 MB)

This interview was conducted by: Robert G. Wright

Transcribed by: Shirley A. Brandes

Edited by: Thomas E. Walt

Final typed by: Polly Baker

Supervised by: Sarah B. West, Staff Coordinator

PREFACE

In this interview Mr. Santos provides a personal view of the beginning and decline of the fishing industry in California. He served as crew member, skipper, and bait-boat owner of fishing boats operating out of San Diego. He worked on purse seiners, but never owned or skippered this type of boat.

Alfred Santos began his career as a fisherman working on the *Sacramento*, a 111-foot ship, built and owned by his father, John Santos, and Manuel Souza. Al Santos worked on, and owned, other boats including the Julia _B, which he describes as "earning his bread and butter."

Fishing was good in the early days (starting in 1928) according to Santos. At first it was centered around the Coronado Islands, but gradually expanded southward as the demand for fish increased and the public seemed to be ready to eat "anything from the sea."

Santos, in this interview, discusses cannery payment for fish cargoes, the "share" system used by fishermen, boat ownerships, a fisherman's life, the introduction of "purse seining" and many other aspects of the industry. He also provides some interesting comments on San Diego's loss of the fishing industry.

Thomas E. Walt, Editor
June 1, 1993

INTERVIEWER'S NOTE

This is an oral history interview with Mr. Al Santos. The date is July 16, 1988. My name is Robert G. Wright.

ROBERT WRIGHT: What is your full name?

AL SANTOS: Alfred Gomes Santos. That middle name, Gomes, is a family line they have in the old country.

RW: Is that Italy?

AS: No, Portugal, Madeira Island. My folks came from Madeira Island.

RW: Excuse me, when were you born?

AS: November 18, 1906 in Monterey, California.

RW: Did your dad migrate to the States?

AS: No. He migrated to the Hawaiian Islands by way of the Cape of Good Hope - there was no canal (Panama) in those days. This was about 1870. He came on a sailing ship and he went to the Hawaiian Islands. That (was) to work his passage. He worked there for about three years.

RW: Did he do that to go fishing; was he a fisherman?

AS: He was a young man; he came over when he was about 15 years old. His father brought him over with his brother. They went to the Hawaiian Islands and they worked in the pineapple plantation until they paid their passage, and then three years later they came to the (United) States.

RW: Was his father a fisherman?

AS: His father was a fisherman and his grandfather was a fisherman. He was a fisherman all his life after he left *Sacramento*. Then we came down to San Diego.

RW: So it is in your family, this fishing?

AS: We've been fishing here in San Diego for about 60 years.

RW: When he immigrated over to Monterey was he still single then?

AS: Yeah, my dad was single then.

RW: Did he go to Monterey because it was good fishing there, or what?

AS: He went to Monterey on his honeymoon after he married my mother. He married my mother in *Sacramento*. Then he took a trip down there; I guess it was a honeymoon, or something. He stayed there until 1920 and then we left and went to *Sacramento*. We stayed in Sacramento about eight years. He had an apartment house there. Some of his buddies were fishing down here for albacore. They got in touch with him and said there was good fishing. He came on down and spent a couple of seasons going to Turtle Bay.

RW: What was your dad's name?

AS: John Santos.

RW: You were about 14 years old when you came to San Diego? You were born in 1906 and came here in 1920?

AS: We went to Sacramento in 1920. We left Monterey in 1920; went to *Sacramento*, and we came down here in 1928; that is (the reason for) the eight years difference.

RW: Did you have family or friends down here in San Diego that brought you down here?

AS: No. He came down on his own - through friends of his who wrote to him that fishing was good down here. He came down to give it a try. He tried it for a couple of years and he built this boat, the *Sacramento*, him and Manuel Souza.

RW: I see a picture of her; she is about ...

AS: It is a 111-foot boat. It would take a load of about 175 tons.

RW: She is a beauty.

AS: That was a big boat out there. There weren't too many big boats that size.

RW: Was he that well off, financially, to buy a big boat like that?

AS: You go through the cannery and you come up with a few dollars. The cannery carried the mortgage. You pay the cannery through the cargo of fish that you brought in. You brought in a load of fish ... In them days you were paid about \$120 a ton, versus now they pay about \$1300 or \$1400 a ton. Of course, a dollar was a dollar in them days.

RW: So the cannery would take out a percentage ...

AS: See, a boat in them days when you first started out it took seven shares. It didn't get anywheres [sic] with seven shares. Seven shares wasn't enough to pay insurance, bank payments, whatever. But, whatever the boat made after that, when all expenses were paid, that was ours. We paid the crew, we paid the provider and the fuel dock, the insurance and the mortgage; we paid. The cannery kept books and credited us for payments on the boat and the insurance.

RW: I think somebody listening to us wouldn't understand what "seven shares" means.

AS: There were 12 in a crew, each one gets a share, so there are 12 shares there and the boat owner only got seven shares. That didn't pay for the nets, so the cannery got to change it to 50 percent - half and half. You say the boat came in with a hundred ton and you got \$120 a ton. That would be \$12,000. It might have been in them days a couple of thousand dollars expense, so you had \$10,000 left. Half went to the crew and half went to the boat. The 12 into 50 would be four hundred and some odd dollars. The boat got 50 percent, or 50 times that much. Now, today, I think the percentage is much greater, much higher, maybe 60 percent, 65 percent. They can't make it, what with insurance, the liability insurance, and all of that. of course, these boats are huge now. This boat here, I think cost about \$72,000 when it was built. You couldn't build that boat today for \$500,000.

RW: What happened to the *Sacramento*?

AS: We sold it in 1941. That was when the war was going on. The government looked at it and we thought they were going to take it, then they weren't going to take it, we didn't know. We got tired of that and we sold it to the cannery. Then the cannery converted it into an all-brine boat with a raised deck. They fished with this man, Eddie Silva. He worked for the association. He ran it for a few years and he did good. Then he went on another boat on his own. They came into Manzanito (Mexico) and took on fuel and was coming home with a load of fish. The fuel capacity was kind of low, so they had to go in and get fuel. They picked up a lot of water in their fuel and when they were coming out of the harbor the engine died. They drifted around there. As you come out of the breakwater and make a turn - there is just a rocky shore there - they couldn't help themselves. The Mexican coast guard came out and put a cable on them, but I don't know what happened; she sank right there, right outside the Manzanito breakwater.

RW: It is probably still there?

AS: They've probably stripped everything. Divers go down and they take everything.

RW: Which cannery were you dealing with?

AS: Van Camp.

RW: There were a number of canneries here then, weren't there, in the 1920s and 1930s?

AS: In San Diego there was the California Pack - I don't know what happened to them; they went kaput. Then there was Westgate. Out at Point Loma there was a cannery there.

I think it was called Holt. Sun Harbor. But before Sun Harbor, it was Cohn and Hopkins It was right next to Van Camp.

RW: That is the one that was down where Solar is now, at Laurel, I think.

AS: It is right there where Van Camp is now. You see the old Van Camp was here - not the new one, you know; the new one is down by the foot of A Street. What used to be the old one was at the foot of Crosby. You came down there and then you made a left, you went over a block, and there was Sun Harbor. Sun Harbor turned into Westgate. I don't know who took it over.

But there were more canneries at San Pedro. We fished out of San Pedro in a small boat. It was albacore fishing. The boat went around Catalina (Island) and up around La Jolla. In them days a small boat, and this is a small boat, about 38 foot, fishing for albacore. We wouldn't go out of sight of land, only about 15 or 20 miles from land; we would fish up and down.

RW: Now was that before the *Sacramento*?

AS: Yeah, that was a couple of years before, maybe two or three years before that boat.

RW: That was sort of so you could get an idea what the fishing was like around here?

AS: Fishing was good in them days. You could go outside ... The Van Camp cannery down here, they used to have houses on piles. The Japanese used to live in there. The cannery would furnish them with quarters. They were kind of dingy, but that is how they lived there. They went out and fished. They would go outside here near Coronado, up and down where skipjack were running. Their boats would come in with four or five ton, six or eight ton. I don't know what they got for their fish.

When the season for albacore was over for us we went to Turtle Bay, maybe about September, October, November. We fished down there for three or four months in the small albacore boat. In them days we got \$50 a ton, delivered in Turtle Bay. These boats came down - they didn't have much capacity; they didn't have much capacity for water or fuel, or carrying capacity, but they could work in and out, close out of Turtle Bay, Point St. Baffle, Mirmosa, San Benitos, San Augustine, all around in there. That is off of Baja; that is off of Turtle Bay. (Showing Robert Wright on a map where the area is in Mexico.) We'd go out in that little boat; we'd chug out. We had a little bait tank of 40 scoops of bait. When we used that all up, we would come in. So we got \$50 a ton.

RW: From the Mexicans?

AS: No, it was an American buyer; John Heston was his name. They used to tow a demasted sailing schooner down there that they had for a refrigerator ship. It carried water and supplies for the little boats. The purse seiners (San) Pedro people would go down ... They would hire to go down and haul the fish. All the fish the little boat caught they would either unload them on the purse seiners when they were there. And when the purse seiners weren't there, they would unload them on the *Oceana Vance* - that was the name of the schooner. When the season was over we would come home. We made \$500 a share. There were five of us on the small boat.

RW: That was good money, but a lot of work.

AS: It was good money, but let me tell you something. We had a ten-gallon water tank and we had three cooking pots or pans on the stove. We had a coffee pot, a frying pan and a stew pot. That is all we had. We cooked with wood. We didn't have any coal and we didn't have any diesel in them days. I think that diesel was just starting to come in because we used to stock up on cut pieces of lumber from Hammond Lumber Company up at Terminal Island and stack it up in back of the stern.

We had this pot which was about the size of a six-gallon ... You know, when you see one of these plastic paint buckets, only it was metal. They had a hole cut in there to feed the wood in, and we had iron rods going across where we set the pot on top. That is what we cooked on. The little boat used to bounce around when it was rough and windy and the fire would go out. We would sit there and fan it, and blow on it, and cuss.

RW: Did you eat much fish?

AS: We ate a lot of fish. *Oceana Vance* used to have a freezer there and my dad would say, "Go over and get a couple of pounds of meat," and you'd saw off a chunk of meat for stews. There was a lot of seafood there, too: lobster, abalone. No problem. We'd just go ashore with the skiff and fill up with whatever you wanted. But the water shortage - we had a cup of water in the morning to wash our eyes out with. There was no big capacity. Like I say, we had a ten-gallon water tank. That was to cook and drink. Shaving? Forget about it.

We used to get (boils) on the neck and on the arms because we didn't have enough fresh water. You couldn't take a fresh water shower; they'd throw you overboard if they caught you taking a fresh water shower. We used to get the water from Cedros Island. It was bad tasting, alkali, but that is all we had. When the guys used to get these boils on the neck we used oilskins for the chafing. Fish slime would get into pores. Those things got huge. They would make a poultice of canned milk and bread, slap it on there, and tie it with a flour sack, or sugar sack. After two or three days that pore would loosen up and the stuff would come out. Then we had some kind of a black salve, an oil salve that worked real good. I got one or two. That was kind of miserable.

You didn't have too much change of clothes. I think we wore the same clothes, maybe for about a month before we would change. We'd go to bed with wet clothes and wake up with wet clothes - not all the time. When the weather was good we'd dry out.

We'd come in late in the evening, unload and then we would have to go and make bait. When we were at Turtle Bay there was a lot of bait in them days, so we would just go in and make a haul, fill up our little bait tank and then take off for where we had to go to the fishing ground.

RW: So it was almost 24 hour duty?

AS: It was almost as bad as this one here. We used to do the same thing here on the *Sacramento*. We'd use up our bait.

RW: You used a gasoline engine on the *Sacramento*?

AS: Yeah, it was a three cylinder Atlas Imperial engine, 45 horsepower.

RW: Do you remember the name of the boat you were on?

AS: The *Asia III*. It was a Japanese albacore boat, is what they were. They were all built about the same. They had number two, number three, number four. They had other Japanese boats. There were some Portuguese boats there. There was the *Elizabeth* - that was out of (San) Pedro; there was the Japanese *Marubu Natapa*. There was another little boat that a cousin of mine had. They were all small boats. RW. : Were these (boats) Japanese built, or were they Japanese manned?

AS: Japanese owned and manned.

RW: And you guys went with them?

AS: No, no, no. We went on our own. We went with Portuguese. We were friends with the Japanese and they were friends of ours. They helped us and we helped them.

RW: In other words you bought a Japanese boat?

AS: My dad bought her off of the Japanese. It was Japanese style. The decks were painted red, the bait tank was red; they were all like that. He bought the boat and kept it the same way.

RW: Was that because the fish bleed a lot?

AS: No. It was some kind of a bright red. one time my dad asked me to paint the deck while he went home. You see, my mother, brothers and sisters were in Sacramento for a couple of years until we got settled here and bought the home in Point Loma. He had me paint the deck. I just slopped it on with a brush. I painted all right, but there was too much paint and it blistered. When he came back he saw it; I did a heck of a job. I wanted to finish and get it done, so I slopped it on. We went to Turtle Bay I think for two years.

RW: Those two years, were they about 1923 or something like that? I know it is hard to come up with dates. It wasn't 1923; it must have been later because you guys didn't come down till 1928.

AS: The albacore kind of disappeared. There was a big fleet in San Pedro - there was a fleet down here, too. But the albacore disappeared. What they did, like they do now, they go further out offshore, 80 to 100 miles offshore. We wouldn't go out of sight of land; we would get lost. We had a compass, but we didn't have a navigator who knew. So we would go out and run this way and that way; you would chase the albacore; you would chase the birds. Nobody had a sextant; nobody knew what a sextant was. So you would run so many hours south, then we would switch and go west; then we came back east - you know, more or less. But you could always see land on a clear day. That is why you didn't need one. But the albacore kind of gave out and my dad decided to go back to Monterey and try for rock cod. He was a good, tough rock cod fisherman.

RW: I know they are a bottom fish.

AS: There was good fishing there. He never got much money for the fish. I think about four cents a pound was high. But he'd always come in with a thousand or two thousand pounds of rock cod. He would set out three or four baskets, or hooks. Every hook was a big red rock cod coming on.

RW: That was line fishing, wasn't it?

AS: Yeah, that was line fishing. That was a set line. There were 300 hooks on each basket and he had three or four baskets. So he had over a thousand hooks on them. And every hook would be a fish. We gave that up .. Well, we went back ... Now this was before we left, while we were living in Monterey, all this rock cod fishing going on. Then we left and went to Sacramento for eight years, then we came back down. We went back, but the fish was gone; it wasn't there.

RW: You mean the albacore?

AS: No, the rock fish, the bottom fish. The albacore in them days, nobody would buy them. They used to fish salmon and when they were gigging for salmon the albacore would take the hook so we would pull them in. Nobody wanted them; they didn't know what it was. No cannery wanted them; throw them overboard; they wanted the salmon. We had fished salmon before. In Monterey we'd go up to Shelter Cove, around Fort Bragg.

RW: Did you use the gig line for that?

AS: The gig line and silver spoons. We'd use bait sometimes. We had a little - we'd get lucky, we'd get sardines at night. They bite better on that. Certain times they would come in in schools. That was ten cents a pound. You could catch a thousand pounds, two thousand pounds. In Monterey sardines were \$10 a ton. But they were all "lompata" fishermen. They didn't have the purse seiners in about 1918, 1920, 1921 when the purse seiners went down. They used to work the "lompatas" by hand - the "lompata" is a net. It is small compared to these purse seiners now, but it was a big net in them days. There were about 12-14 men who pulled it by hand. It had a small mesh. The sack was small mesh, but the wings weren't.

When the net goes into the water at night, it creates phosphorus. It looks just like a solid fence around it. But there was so much fish in them days. They would come in 40 ton, 50 ton. They had these Navy shore boats, the big 50-footers. They built a hatch up on top, put a ... and they would fill those things up to the hatch. And they would tow them into the cannery.

The unloading system at the cannery was a cable from the scale down to the water, anchored to a rock underneath the water. The boats went underneath this cable and a bucket came down, skyline like. It was loaded by hand with a man on each side of the scoop with a rope in his hand and they just dipped that bucket full. That bucket went up and they weighed it and the bucket came down again. It took them quite a while to unload 40, 50 ton; it took a half a day.

RW: What were they unloading?

AS: Sardines. Then they would come along with a pump. They would unload the boat into this floating platform which had a pump. It would suck the sardines and water up to the scale house. That went fast, so they started getting modernized. The purse seiners came along. The first year they had a little accident. Somehow or other they got acid on the net. The paisanos of Monterey, they were the Italian sardine fisherman there, they didn't like that outside competition. So, somehow or other, some acid fell on the net so they lost that season of fishing. They went back down to San Pedro.

RW: That was your dad?

AS: No, no, no, no. These were Italian people who made a living fishing there at Monterey for sardines. These scab boats from San Pedro were going to go up there with a purse seiner. They worked a mechanical winch. In them days you worked it by hand; everything was done by hand - unloaded by hand, load the barge - up out of the net by hand. The purse seiners they had the boom with a big dip net. You'd go down, fill that thing up, pick it up. It was more like a comb that held two or three ton at a crack. They would set that hoop on the hatch, make it firm, then get ahold of the tail of the comb and lift it up. That thing slid down into the boat or slid into the unloading at the cannery. Before, it was all by bucket, maybe a ton at a time that went up to the hoist. That was slow.

But those pumps that pump the sardines into the cannery, that really speeded up things. Then they got them aboard the boat. After years - I don't know when - they were pumping out of the net into the boat. A big pump; they would pump water and sardines out of it. The water and the fish went down the chute to go into the hold. The water drained out of it and the fish went in. of course, a lot of water went in with the fish. They had the pump going all the time. You take to fill up those holds with sardines and water, it would go down like this here. There would be water on deck something like this. Sometimes it would be so heavy they couldn't put the skiff up on the stern; they would tow the skiff in to keep the extra weight off of the net.

RW: Then the cannery would process the sardines and sell them?

AS: They used to can the sardines in them days. Then before the war they started to make fish meal fertilizer and oil. Sardine oil is used in paint and a lot of uses. The fish fertilizer was wonderful fertilizer. They just went out and caught all they could and they dumped it for fertilizer. They had ships in Frisco bay, Monterey. When we left Monterey in 1920 I think they had about 13 or 14 fish camps. All they packed was sardines and salmon.

But then when the oil and fertilizer business started going, they abandoned the packing and went strictly into fertilizer. Evidently they must have cleaned out the sardine fish. I've got a book there, Cannery Row that tells all about the fishing industry. Maybe you'd like to read it. It shows you, like I've been telling you, how they unload and all of that.

RW: Cannery Row, that is a Steinbeck book?

AS: He wrote that thing in the fifties. He might have got it from different people, but he didn't get the real feel of the fishing industry there. The cannery would blow the whistle whenever the boats came in. The Chinamen and the Filipinos would get their little buckets and knives and go down and cut the head of the sardine and pull the head and guts out. That went into a washer. Then they packed them and cooked them. I don't think he mentioned that in there. They had their little wooden buckets and for each bucket they got two cents. He came there afterwards; he wasn't around there when I was there. I don't know where he got his information from. He didn't get the real down-to-grass-roots, how the people worked. He used to go there by the customs office pier. The dock went down; but it is still there.

Over there on the corner there used to be a little cafe there. They used to stop there and get coffee and donuts before they went down to board the fish boats. They fished mostly at night, the dark of the moon. They had these big army coats on; they had a knitted cap. One guy would be up on the bow of the boat and would see the phosphorus in the water. If he could see a big mass of phosphorus, he would tell the skipper that it looked good. "Get ready and we will make a circle around and let go." They would fill up their boat and if they ran out of space, they would flash somebody else. Maybe his friend, give him a certain flash, and he would come over and sometimes they would get enough to load up two boats.

RW: That brings up another problem. Sometimes that happened; sometimes it didn't.

AS: Oh, it didn't happen all the time. Just like these modern day seiners now. And it is like the bait boats. We used to go to enormous schools of fish, but they wouldn't want to bite. They would go by. They would eat the loose bait in the water, but they wouldn't take a lure or the bait on a hook when you are bait fishing.

RW: What I am driving at is that when you came across a school and they were biting, would you keep your mouth shut until you filled your boat up, and then let the other guys know? Or were you part of a corporation?

AS: No. In them days we had ... when we first went out we didn't have any wireless or radio. There were no CBs (citizen band-radio), as they call them now - short wave. They came during the war; a little before the war. We went to Galapagos on this boat, the *Sacramento*. I think it was about 1930 that we made our first trip there. It wasn't very profitable. We came back up and worked around the islands. The islands were Carrion Island, Sequorro, San Bernadicto - those were our main stopping grounds. We would work the banks at certain times of the year - fishing the local banks like Uncle Sam Bank, Lusitania Bank, Morgan Band.

RW: All off of Baja (Mexico)?

AS: They are on the ridge. Some of them are offshore. Like the rock that sticks out here: two monstrous rocks that look like two sails straight out of the ocean. You can almost go up to them and shake hands with them. That's how deep they are. Fishing is good around there. The best trip we ever

made was around the rock. We left Friday the 13th. We didn't believe in leaving on Friday the 13th, but somehow or other we left on Friday the 13th. We made a round trip in nine days. We made trips after that, but not like that one. We made two-weeks trips, 15 days, 21 days. But after that boat I had another boat. I was in partners with another group. It was the *Julia B*. It was built in 1946 and launched in 1946. It was all-brine, modern, two auxiliaries, three bait pumps, three ice machines. It was really what we called a local boat.

RW: In other words, with you and the *Julia B*, if one of you came across a school, then would he let the other one know?

AS: We had both boats; we had friends.

RW: So you would let each other know?

AS: Well, sometimes. There were some that would let you know, but some would let you know after they were half loaded. There was one time I told a guy - it wasn't on the air - but he gave me some bum dope and I was kind of mad at him, so I have him some bum dope. But mostly they would talk. We knew; we were all friends; we knew everybody in the fleet. We knew who they were and where they were from. But we had ... well, they weren't codes, but they were signs we could tell them. Like during the war they weren't allowed to use the radios. The only time you could use the radio was to give your position. You know there were certain groups who wouldn't talk to other groups. Well, they would give them the dope, but it was in such a roundabout way they would give it to them.

During the war they weren't supposed to communicate with their families, but the mileage that they gave to the Coast Guard, or whoever it was here, they had a code there so the families would know how much fish they had. It wasn't illegal. These boats kind of work like some kind of surveillance if they saw something strange, like a ship or something. They (might) have seen a submarine so they would report it to the government. The government was mostly interested in the mileage and I guess they also had a code in that if you saw anything.

We talked to one fellow here who said if you see something you mention a siren. "We saw a siren north of this position," or whatever, so they would probably figure it was a submarine or something, or a warship.

RW: Getting a little off the track here. Was there any rivalry between the Portuguese and the Italians at sea?

AS: No. Not that I know of.

RW: Were the crews mostly made up of either Portuguese or Italians, or were they mixed?

AS: In the early days there were one of each; you were either Italian or Portuguese. There were no Portuguese tuna fishing; they were Italians, quite a bit more. To get on a boat you had to be a family cousin or a distant relative. Jobs were kind of scarce. We made a fair living. But now it has really got big. No, I don't remember any rivalry. If we had extra bait we would give it to one of the other boats instead of dumping it. If we were loaded, we would give them the extra bait. We would give them fuel. We would pump fuel from one boat to another.

I remember one time giving one boat bread and some meat when we were on our way home. There was a little bit of ... Fishermen were ... They weren't very cooperative when it came to unionizing.

RW: I understand that was one of the problems. There was a union started, but the guys wouldn't support it.

AS: First they had a union. That was mostly boat owners. They had it down there at the foot of Fifth Street where the Tuna Boat Association is now.

RW: They have a museum there, too.

AS: No, that is over at Eighth Street or Tenth Street.

RW: That is all gone now.

AS: They are going to try to get it situated somewhere. They've got that statue there on Point Loma. That is the only thing I can remember that is left of it.

RW: You said the boat owners had a union. And you were part of it, weren't you, because you were a boat owner?

AS: Yes, in them days. Then there was a time there when it disbanded; nobody wanted to pay into it, the dues. Then it went up until after the war when they started it again. This guy came around - I can't think of his name. The fishermen were like the farmers - they always got it in the neck. The canneries dominated the industry, the price, the quality, the size and all that. There was a time when they would pay for a certain sized fish so much. If it was undersized, they would pay less. If it was oversized, the big fish, they actually didn't want them because they said it was black or blue when they canned it, but they took it. We used to lose so many pounds of fish, or tons of fish. The canneries had their own inspectors, the state had an inspector that I think was in collusion with the canneries. We lost some fish.

RW: The canneries aren't going to lose because if they are not turning it into food they are turning it into fertilizer. They don't lose.

AS: I don't know if they got paid for that or not, but I know Lawrence Oliver made a lot of money in fertilizer. His trucks used to go down and pick up the scraps, the skin and the bones and the heads, supposedly the bad fish. The canneries had different ways of telling you that the fish was bad. You go look at it. I didn't know what "honeycomb" was. It used to be kind of a fattish tissue in it when the fish got cooked. It didn't look too good; it looked like it was honeycombed. And they used to call the fish "honeycombed." Maybe you lost five tons; you lost three tons. Maybe you did lose it. That fish went into the can when your back was turned.

RW: Do you think one cannery was worse than the others?

AS: I don't want to mention any names, but there were one or two that would steal on the scale, rig the scale, short weight.

RW: One of the guys whom I interviewed told me that there was a whole family that was underdoing the scales.

AS: They would have to drill out. You drill a quarter of an ounce of weight on a 200 pound weight and you cover it up; you can't tell. In other words, it is marked 200, but it comes out 150 or 180. You have to put a lot more fish in there to bring it up. They used to hold a thousand, 1500, 2000 pounds on the scale. That would come up on a conveyer. The guy would flip the thing over, tap weights here and if it wasn't enough, he'd put another one on, but he had that much weight on the end of the arm, the balancer. They stole us blind. So ... we are still here and a lot of them are gone.

RW: Did superstition play any part in this business?

AS: Not with me it didn't. I am not superstitious.

RW: When I first met you a couple of months ago you said something about ...

AS: I put a horseshoe in the bow. That was for good luck. And I had good luck with that boat.

RW: You had it built right into the bow?

AS: It wasn't in the bow; it was in the stern. They were putting deck timbers on, covering it up. In fact, my mother-in-law gave me that. She gave me a set of steer horns. I put those up on the boat. It was good luck. I had good luck with that boat. That little boat, I paid off in a year and a half. That was the Julia B. That boat gave me my bread and butter. This boat here I worked hard on that, the *Sacramento*. That was an earlier boat. This boat (looking at pictures) when they built it, they put in a line shaft - it wasn't electric. It had a line shaft that must have been about 30 feet long. The anchor winch at one end and the bait pump on the other, an ice machine. They had jaw clutches, not these, what they call flex clutches like Campbell made. This boat was built in San Pedro. It is a purse seiner-style boat, with a stern and a bow.

RW: What is a line shaft?

AS: A line shaft is what your auxiliary power works off of: the generator, the bait pump, your ice machine. They put belts or chains. Old fashioned. But clutches were the ones of this type of clutch. We had to stop all operation to engage it. Take the diesel out of gear, put this clutch in, and then when you put it back in, that engine had all the load; it would take off right now - the ice machine, the pumps, the winch. I don't know how they would think it wouldn't fall apart. I forget now when we changed over from line shaft to electric. We put a four-cylinder Atlas generator in there and a ten inch vertical Campbell bait pump. And our luck changed. I paid this boat off. We borrowed money from different people.

RW: So you took the boat over from your father then?

AS: No, my brother. My father got killed down here when this boat was on the railways getting the bottom painted. We went down and painted the boat and we were going home. This was ... I can't remember when he died. He got killed in an accident at Main and Sampson Streets, there by what used to be the old ABC Brewery.

This must have been about 1933. Let's see, the earthquake in Long Beach was in 1934, so the accident must have happened in 1933 because he wasn't on the boat. We were at Galapagos and we heard about it from the "Chicken-of-the-Sea" Pop Morgan. He had a wireless aboard and he said that Long Beach was in ruins, a big tidal wave was coming towards San Diego. But nothing ever hit San Diego. We were worried, but we didn't have any way of knowing.

After that trip something happened aboard. There was a fire. We put it out and when we got home we said we were going to have a wireless. We put in a CW and a radio operator and we felt we were safe.

RW: You didn't feel so isolated then?

AS: You know, it's a long haul between here and Galapagos. It is about a 12-day run, chugging night and day, 24 hours. These boats are not very fast. This boat would make maybe nine knots, ten or eleven miles an hour.

RW: Did you find a difference between a wooden hull versus steel?

AS: The second boat I had, the *Julia B*, was wood. It was sturdy. These boats rotted, the worms got in - they were not termites, they were teredos. There are places where you can't get at them with a brush, like in the tail shaft. The tail shaft is supposed to have a lead sleeve. There is a bearing on one end and it is sealed off on the other, just a shaft in there. The teredos get in there somehow or other, then in the planking in the hold. They are just like termites in a house along the beach. Steel is more economical and I think the insurance rates are better.

RW: I am thinking about the handling characteristics.

AS: With the first steel boats, they weren't too ... Their buoyancy wasn't figured right. The first steel boat that came out of San Pedro, I think it was called the *Santa Cruz*. They had a nice model, the shape and everything, but it was a little bit too heavy. They didn't figure the buoyancy like they do with these big seiners now. They stay down pretty well in the water, but they've still got buoyancy. With a wooden boat something gets loose, a plank somewhere. You hear of some of these boats going down sometime and you don't know what happened. It could be a worm-eaten plank somewhere, or the strain of heavy weather.

For upkeep with the wooden boat you don't have that scraping and chipping and stuff. You wash it down and you paint over it. But they are stronger. For capacity, they have more buoyancy area. You get down to the rail like that they get waterlogged and they are likely to roll over - the old wooden ones.

RW: Like technology develops, you went along with it. You learned navigation, I guess, since you were a skipper. When did you start being a skipper from a crewman?

AS: My older brother died.

RW: What was his name?

AS: Dennis. He was the skipper. My dad was a fisherman. The questions they ask you - the lights, signals and what have you. You could go by dead reckoning. My brother went to navigation school in San Francisco. He got his skipper's license.

RW: How did he die?

AS: He died of pneumonia. He was in the hospital and died of pneumonia.

RW: From a trip?

AS: Yep. He was in the hospital and he got out. He felt pretty good and he went on vacation. Then he came back again fishing. When we first took the boat out we went to Panama. We got a nice load of bait going down.

RW: So then after he died you went and got your license? I guess you had an interest in the boat?

AS: The interest of my dad. He had half and this other fellow .. We had the whole boat with Souza and they parted ways and my dad took over the whole boat. We had mechanical troubles. We would lose our bait. These vertical Fairbanks pumps would suck air. You get air in the bait tank and the bait would die. Problems after problems. Something would break down. The packing gland on the pumps would make air so they would tighten them

up. They had a grease fitting so you would tighten them up, tighten them up. We broke a couple of shafts. They were all metal shafts. They got so hot. We lost the bait and had to come home. When we put the Atlas in there and took the bait wells out, that was a big mistake. But it worked out all right.

RW: Taking the bait wells out - I thought you had to have them.

AS: No. It made it easier, as I said, on the ice. We used to take 500 blocks of ice. Five hundred, 300-pound blocks of ice, out of Union Ice Works. , First, they used to grind it into chunks, then it would fill up the holds, a certain amount of bins. Some of them were empty, some of them were full. We would take the ice out of one, fill up a couple of bins and then we could fish.

To carry ice for the wells, it was extra work. If you took the wells out you had that much empty space. You would have to carry ice. You would just shovel back and forth. Where we had to put it in a bucket, hoist it up, dump it in the well. It was slow. That ice got hard. We didn't know.

We used to put ice aboard the boat, say, like we took fuel the day before and then the next day we took ice. With all the ice aboard and all the groceries and everything, we left that night. We wouldn't run the auxiliary all day and cool the hold down like we found out later. If you did that your ice wouldn't freeze. It was in a solid chunk, especially in the hatch.

The hatch was huge. All that ice in there, we filled it right up. To get down in there, we had to chip a hole where a person could slide down on each side and the fish would slide down. But that was like concrete, especially after the ice got wet from the fish blood and the slime; it got solid. The pick would bounce off of the ice, bend the teeth. But then we learned how - by word of mouth or something - to start the machine in the morning and bring the temperature down in the hold, bring it down to about maybe 30 degrees, or just below freezing. Then they had this grinder that would grind it like fine shavings. All you had to do was blow it in, hold the hose and you could direct the ice in whatever direction or bin you wanted it in. Whereas before, you would have to shovel and push it in. Little by little things got easier and easier.

RW: How did you like being skipper?

AS: Some skippers, it went to their heads, but it never bothered me. I got down with the crew; I passed fish with the crew; I passed bait; I worked with them. Some guys that is all they would do - go up to the wheel, go into the fish, but never put a pad on and boots on and gotten into the rack. A lot of them did, but there were a few of them that didn't. I worked hard all my life and it never bothered me; it never hurt me too much.

RW: Was your boat mostly Portuguese?

AS: At first it was, yeah, when my dad and my brother were on there, but then after I got it, mixed. I found out it was better having a mixed crew. We had two Japanese brothers - they were from San Diego; a couple of American guys, a couple of Italian guys. We got along all right.

RW: Did you ever have any discipline problems?

AS: One guy went ashore at Turtle Bay. There was a Norwegian there who had a little shack up at the point. He used to sell whiskey. Lee was his name. Crew members went ashore there one night. One of them came back drunk as a skunk and he fell overboard. He got close to the boat and he went to reach out and grab something. He got religious as hell and was spouting off. We just grabbed him by the seat of his pants and threw him into his bunk wringing wet. The next morning he woke up (and) he was fine. That was our only problem. That one we took care of real easy. We never had no problem. One crew member we had he would come up to the wheelhouse like an old gossip, "So-and-so did this, so-and-so did that." He was telling everything that happened, what the crew said. I bounced him when we got home.

I've got a real live fish story; it isn't no baloney. I have the photo over there somewhere. I shot one of these orca black fish. It is like a shamu (Shamu) only it is a little different type; they are more vicious. He was messing around our fishing operation and kind of scared the fish away. They would chase a tuna. I used to have a seven millimeter rifle up in the wheelhouse. We weren't catching much fish; we were catching one now and then with a bait pole, a two-pole. Every time this thing came around, the fish would move on, so I came back with the rifle and I watched for this dark shadow coming up and I had a bead on him. As soon as he popped out I hit him. I hit him somewhere in the neck or head area. He flopped aboard the boat.

We were fishing on the port side near the stern. I shot him on that side; he came underneath the boat. We used to put the boom down and we run a canvas over the deck down the side of the boat. That was to keep the sun off of the fish. This thing was about this high off the deck, about six feet high off the pipe awning with this canvas over it. He crushed that pipe awning down and fell into the rail. This is the port side; he was on the starboard side, flopping there. He was about 18 feet long. There was another fellow with me and we laid down alongside of it. It took three of us, so we measured him that way.

I put another slug in him and he died on board. "So what are we going to do with this thing? Maybe we will bring it in and give it to a museum or something." We didn't have the tackle in them days that they've got now. So we had to cut him up. But he laid there in the hot sun.

We were at Tuckerman Island, I'd say about 240 miles west of Manzanillo (Mexico). "How are we going to get him off the boat?" We had to cut him up in pieces, but we wanted to save the head. We started cutting around with a knife and all we were hitting was bone. One of the guys said, "You know, this thing must have a neck joint like a cow. Get the saw and we will saw a little further back." So we did and we found this joint there and cut around it. We brought the head home, but I split the jaws down. It had teeth on it like that. I've got a picture of it in there. That was the most exciting thing that happened.

Oh, another thing, I remember now. I was shot at up at Kino Bay in Mexico. We used to pay a big license. We could go into any port in Mexico and catch our bait. So we used to go up there because it was a sure thing. While we were there we had a sack full of bait, beautiful bait, the blue anchovetas. We were scooping them out of the net into the bait tank. Here comes this Mexican pungy - it is a dugout canoe. It was about 14 feet long; there were about seven guys in it. The guy in the back was a Mexican. He was the head honcho. The others were Indians. They came up alongside the boat. They were kind of mean looking; they had marks on, long hair, blue tattoo marks, I guess, and they had these long skirts.

They came up alongside the boat and somebody said, "Hey, these guys don't look very friendly." I went up on top and sat there and put the rifle by the door. I am sitting there and watching our guys scoop out the bait. I turned my head for a moment and this guy on the stern of the pungy was pointing a rifle at me. I grabbed the gun and rolled over backwards. I rolled out the starboard door and I came around the back. I went around by the stack. This was when I was on the *Sacramento*. They were on the port side and I rolled over backwards along with the gun and went around by the stack. This guy was still aiming, looking for something to shoot at.

RW: Why didn't he shoot at some of the crew members?

AS: They were kind of low; he wanted to get the skipper, I guess. But anyway I got him instead. When I got up I hollered at him. About that time he let go and I ran around the back over here and he was looking for me up here. I snap-fired and he went into the water. They picked him up by the seat of his pants and put him in the canoe.

RW: So he shot at you and missed and you shot at him. Did you kill him?

AS: It was him or me. I didn't stay around to argue; we took off. They were close to the beach and were heading for the beach. There was more than one gun showing and I figured if we stick around they were going to punch at us from the beach, so I took off.

RW: So you killed the rascal dead?

AS: I presumed he was dead the way they picked him up and plopped him in the pungy. "So what are we going to do now?" We ran down the gulf and I was thinking we would take a chance and try to evade the coast guard if somebody was going to report this. I thought about it all night and the next morning we got off at Guaymas and said we didn't start anything; they started it. We went to the broker and I told him the story and he took it to the Mexican coast guard. He was talking to the commander and he said, "We can't go up there with our boat - they were doing some overhauling - but I'll put a guard and two or three soldiers and you go back up there." I said, "I don't want to go back up there; I don't want no part of it." He said, "Okay, the Indians are not supposed to have rifles." But this guy in the back wasn't an Indian; this guy was a Mexican. So the problem was we'd go into their areas and catch bait and in this bait was "stucquava" (?).

They would go in there with a stick of dynamite, throw it in there and the "stucquava" would come belly up. All they had to do was go out and put them in the pungy. They didn't want the gringos - the outsiders - coming in and spoiling their fishing. But we had a bait license; we had paid the Mexican government. I think it was \$300 in them days. We had the privilege of going in there whenever we wanted to get bait. In later years we paid more. We used to pay about \$500 for this boat, the *Sacramento*. We had the privilege of buying bait or we could fish in their waters; no problem.

RW: During the war year the Navy didn't take your ship over, did it?

AS: No. They tried, but then they never did get to it.

RW: What ship did you have then?

AS: The *Sacramento*.

RW: They didn't draft you? You were too old for the draft?

AS: No, they didn't draft me, but I went down to the post office, the recruiting station. I wanted to join up. They asked me for information and I told him that I had been fishing; I'd been going to sea for years. I asked them what kind of a rating would I get. He wanted to give me third class. I told him I know guys that went in; they weren't skippers, they were just crew members and they got to be bosun mate or first class. I told them if you want me you are going to have to come and get me. I'm not about to go in as third class. I figured what experience I had was worth more than just an ordinary third class. I was about 35 years old then and I had a wife and a couple of kids. Maybe that had something to do with it.

They had the boat on dry dock, drilled some holes, and took samples of the beams and the ribs to see if there was any dry rot. They made a big mistake. That is the time that we started to make money.

RW: During the war years?

AS: Fish of any size, as long as it had eyes and a tail, you'd get top price. Some of the canneries were paying bonuses under the table; they wanted the fish bad.

RW: What do you think happened to the fishing industry around here? It has gone to pot as far as I can tell.

AS: Well, there are about three different subjects, I guess. The lack of fish for one thing. The fishing is not like it used to be. From the cannery on that letter there it says the boats can catch in excess of consumption, but that was in them days. But people now are eating fish like it is going out of style. They will eat anything from the sea.

RW: It is a health food thing now.

AS: Yeah, it is good. You never heard of people eating squid or octopus, eels. I say, anything that comes out of the ocean is edible, whether it is eels or snakes or whales, or what have you.

RW: Shark is good eating.

AS: Shark - I've tasted shark once; I never ate that much. It used to be grayfish during the war.

RW: Anthony's serves it down there as shark. I've had it; it is good.

AS: Now it is shark, but it used to be grayfish before.

RW: How come you guys aren't still in business?

AS: We had small boats and then they converted over into seiners. I never converted over to seiner although I've fished on several seiners.

RW: Why did the fishing fleet go from bait boats to seiners? I know they can bring in more fish. Was it faster, easier? Was it because of the competition with Japan or any other country?

AS: No. I'll tell you. We used to fish alongside of the Slavs - from San Pedro; we called them Slavs. They had purse seiners; they had nets. They were Czechoslovakians; we called them Slavs. They were fishermen. They had these smaller boats - 65, 70, 80 foot boats. They had cotton nets. They would come down and fish alongside of us and said, "You guys catch them one by one; we catch a whole sack full." Sometimes in one set they will load up their boat, 70, 80, 100 ton. They said, "You guys are foolish. You go over there, fish all day, you catch bait all night. At sundown we go to our bunks."

Some of our fellows, they got to seeing that. They used to work around us; we never went to where they were. But where we were fishing they used to get direction on the direction finder when you was talking. They could go out there and they would kind of hinder us. Sometime we might be on a school of fish and they would come right alongside. When you are on a bait boat and the fish come around, they will kind of settle down and stay around the boat. They will go with the wind a little bit and come around and in the meantime you are picking away. So they figure that while the fish are steady like that they will come around and circle the boat if you agree that they will give you half, or whatever. But we never did work with them.

RW: Now these Czechoslovakians were from San Pedro?

AS: Yeah. Mostly we called them Slavs. Most of them were from San Pedro; none of them were from here. They were all sardine fishermen up there. In them days bluefin fish used to come up around close to Seal Beach, Manhattan Beach. Outside of Coronado Island was a real good spot for bluefin.

They used to fish for bluefin and mackerel, sardines.

RW: So the Czechs would get you wised up to using the purse seiners?

AS: They kept saying, "you guys are crazy. You shove ice and you catch bait, and you catch the fish one by one." So this one guy, Lou Breeder, I think it was, he had a little bigger boat - he was very successful in that bait fishing. He had partners in his boat that had the shipyard in Seattle - Marco Brothers - who built these big seiners. They got together and they converted. It wasn't much to convert because his boat was an all-brine. He just had to put on a stronger mast, a powerful winch with a block. That is what started it mostly down here - that hydraulic power block.

RW: I thought that was developed here in San Diego?

AS: It was a Slavonian; he was a professor, or somebody. He thought of that. He let one of the fishermen in San Pedro try it out; Antone on the Ronny S. He tried it out and it worked fine, but then the net was cotton net. You get a big jag of fish in a cotton net it will pop open just like a wet paper bag. Everything that was in it just went swish. So then they built the nylon nets. He tried it out, too, Antone did. He liked it.

Of course, he had to get used to it. But before with the old type of net they had a deck winch, but they used to close it by hand with a rope or cable. They didn't have the power block. They used to swing to pick it up and then they had another swing here to let it down. Then they would have to hook up again, let it down. So it took three or four times to get the net up. With the deck winch with a three-quarter inch cable ... So they converted it and he did real good. Then these other guys saw that and said they could do it. So they converted over; put the power block, the big winch on deck; they had a big power skiff, invested in a big nylon net.

RW: That was a big investment for the nylon net, the skiff?

AS: The net was big then, but now it is really big. One of those skiffs cost \$40 or \$50 or \$60,000. The net probably half a million dollars. That's a lot of money. Those boats now cost \$7, \$8, \$10,000,000. I see where they are going to build two or three of them now down at Campbell... It isn't Campbell anymore; Marco bought that from Campbell and then they abandoned it. They sold it to some yard that had a dry dock where they used to repair boats like Campbell did.

RW: I don't know the name of it either, but I know the Star of India has been pulled in there for dry dock. But what about this porpoise business? As far as I know ...

AS: That's another hindrance. Porpoise follow fish and with a big mass of fish traveling, they don't stop. There may be a big long bunch of birds picking out there, fish jumping, porpoise jumping. So the guy at the mast comes up, says to the crew, "Okay, stand by." And he is telling the man at the wheel, "Pull a little bit right, slow down a little bit, a little bit more right, speed up a little bit, let her go!"

And when he says speed up, it means full throttle. That net just whistles out the back and the guy is circling around. It comes around and he gets up to the boat to get the end of the skiff head. The skiff is tied to the end of the net. When it comes around it picks up that end of the net - they've got a leader on there and they slap on a winch to get it up to the boat. Then they've got a big deck davit. They hang that end on there. The cable has gone around through the rings underneath and they have the other cable going around this way. It is one continuous cable the whole length of the net.

They kind of put the damper on this porpoise fishing. You see, we used to catch fish right up close to shore down below. There is not much porpoise fishing up here. The closest porpoise fishing up here I think was out of Cape San Lucas. Right in November there used to be a bunch of spotted

porpoises that would show up, but in a small amount. But you went further on down into the gulf, all the way down along the Mexican coast, all the way down to Panama, you could fish on porpoise. But they got trained, the porpoise got smart. All these people chasing them and these nets around them, you can't get anywhere near a porpoise now along the coast; they take off; they went out.

Some of these boats, they heard about the fishing down there; some of these guys who were in the Navy during the war, they saw fish. They caught fish on jakes. They were going to go on an exploration trip. A couple of boats went. They missed the spot out there. It is out there somewhere in the middle of the ocean, 1500 miles offshore. Then the boat came behind him and they found these porpoise. He loaded up within a few days. The other guys kept going. He came in and unloaded and went back out again and got another load before the other guys ever woke up as to what's happening.

But they found the spot out there. They all worked it out there. There was a tremendous amount of porpoise killed. The porpoise are gone and the porpoise are behind the fish. If the porpoise got to split up, then the fish split it for some reason. Maybe they will go over here; maybe you'll get just a piece of them. You might pick up 50 or 100 tons; you might pick up five, you might pick up nothing. But if you get them all; if they corral them, they get four-speed boats - one stays behind. These guys are going ahead to spot them and round them up. Then when you come over here, this guy, he goes around and churns up the water. Then they close it. Well, what's in the net? There could be five porpoise, or there could be 5,000.

RW: What gets me is, as far as I know, the American tuna fishermen were doing everything they could to save the porpoise and yet the Japanese, the Russians, and everybody else who is fishing off this coast don't do anything about it.

AS: Well, they talk a lot, but they won't do anything. Either change the net, or change the style... You see, we used to back down ... We had a sack full of fish with a lot of porpoise in there we would tie up the net and back up the boats. The nets would be here and the net would kind of come together like and a porpoise would wash over. A lot of fish would wash over, too, but when you saw that, the man at the wheel, the skipper, he would stop. I used to be at the wheel and start her up and go real slow.

RW: What I am curious about is the future of fishing as you can see it around here.

AS: It is just like the other fish. There used to be halibut, sea bass, barracuda, albacore, skipjack, bluefin out here. You don't find them any more. It used to be in big amounts. Now you might find a few scattered skipjack come in with the albacore, or yellowfin tuna.

RW: But what I am driving at is, is there a future for our American fishermen because, apparently, we buy our fish from overseas for less money?

AS: Not around here, no. I can't see. They haven't changed.

RW: The story, I understand, is that it is cheaper to have the cannery in Puerto Rico or some place like that. In other words, I hear you saying there is no way that there is going to be fishing off the States here because it is cheaper to buy offshore. So you don't see any future?

AS: Labor-wise, yeah. You take these canneries nowadays. They have interests in boats. They supply mortgage money to build boats. They've got a lien on these boats. They are down in the South Pacific - down in New Guinea, Papua, Australia. They bring that fish in to Samoa and they ship it up here. They buy it from the American boats that are down there. There are 35 or 40 boats down there doing real good. Those are the big ones. The ones that survived the crash - there are a lot of them who lost their boats; the boats were sold to Mexico and different places. The crash that was caused by this 200-mile limit. Boats being seized off of Peru and Ecuador, Panama, Costa Rica. The fish kind of disappeared. There wasn't too much of a future. So the bigger boats went south.

RW: I want to thank you for the interview. This is going into the Historical Society and the Maritime Museum. Thank you.

AS: I appreciate your coming by and getting the view of a fisherman.

END OF INTERVIEW
