



ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

An interview with
Edward Silva, 1925-2008

January 6, 1990



[MP3 Audio File](#) [Length: 1:00:08] (27.5 MB)

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PREFACE

In Lowell, Massachusetts, Ed Silva worked as a truck driver and mechanic for General Electric. But, in 1946 he was lured to the west coast by his brother Victor who told him he could make more money on the west coast. With this as the incentive, he moved to San Pedro and got a job at Douglas Aircraft. But the money was not that great in the aircraft business, so Ed followed his brother's example and went out to sea as a fisherman. The first trip nearly ended this career and he gives the reasons in this interview. However, he went back to fishing but it was as an engineer: first as assistant, then as chief, and then as port engineer. In this latter capacity he was able to visit fishing ports in many parts of the world. He was able to acquire a broad knowledge of the fishing industry.

In this interview Mr. Silva discusses:

- the reasons for changeover from the bait boats to purse seiners;
- the changes made in the fishing vocation as a result of the designing and building of large purse seiners;
- the reasons for the moving of the fishing industry to the south seas and other ocean areas;
- fish locating techniques and purse seining procedures;
- the fish canneries and their influence on the fishing industry;
- the porpoise problem.

The above problems and many others are discussed in this invaluable interview. It presents new information about the industry that will be helpful and essential to researchers and interested citizens.

Thomas E. Walt, Editor
November 5, 1994

INTERVIEWER'S NOTE

The date is January 6, 1990. This is an oral history interview with Ed Silva, tuna fisherman, at his home. My name is Robert G. Wright.

ROBERT WRIGHT: Mr. Silva, can you give me your full name?

ED SILVA: Edward Silva.

RW: Where were you born?

ES: I was born in Lowell, Massachusetts, in 1925.

RW: What was the date?

ES: March 9, 1925.

RW: How did you get from Lowell to San Diego? Did you go fishing?

ES: Well, I worked at General Electric as a truck driver and I worked as a gasoline mechanic. I also worked in garages, and my brother Victor moved to California.

RW: When?

ES: This was in 1946 and he asked me to come out. He said you made a lot more money out here than you did on the east coast because I didn't make that much money. So I moved to San Pedro, California, in 1946. When I first came out here I worked at Douglas Aircraft riveting the tail sections of airplanes.

RW: Which planes were they?

ES: I think they were the DC-6s, and my brother Vic was going out to sea as a fisherman and he was making money and I wasn't making that much money, so I thought I would go out to sea as a fisherman.

RW: Are you Portuguese, or Italian, or what?

ES: I'm Portuguese. My father was born in Portugal and my mother was born in Portugal and they came over here when they were young. And they both became American citizens and they wouldn't even speak Portuguese. They spoke English. That's why I can't speak Portuguese too much. They didn't want us to talk broken English, and, of course, my mother and father died. But, anyway, when I came to California the first boat that I fished on was the Sooboy in 1946 and we left San Diego and went to Costa Rica.

RW: She was a wooden boat, wasn't she?

ES: It was a wooden boat; it held about, I think about 180 tons of fish. And the first trip I got very seasick. We were pole fishing then. We used bait boats, and we were out for about 60 days, and we loaded up, and when we came home I thought, "I'm not going fishing anymore; this is the end of fishing for me. These people are animals; they work day and night; they work Saturdays and Sundays, Christmases." And I thought, "I'm not going to take this life; it's too hard."

RW: That pulling a fish in by pole was a tough, tough job.

ES: It was a tough job and I loved it. I loved that part, but I didn't like the idea of fishing for 15 hours, getting up at daylight and going to bed at dark, and then after you've fished all day, ice the fish down for three hours, and then stand a three-hour watch at night. So I thought that that was a little bit too much. I just wasn't used to that life. I was used to working eight hours a day and going home and that was it. And no play either. So all you did was just work all the time. But anyway after making the trip I got my first check. Instead of getting a quarter share, the boat owner gave me a half a share and he says, "You're so good in the engine room, you're going to go out as assistant engineer. The next trip you're going to get a full share."

RW: How does a share break down?

ES: Well, when you first went fishing you got a quarter share for four trips, then you got a half share for three trips, and you got three-quarters share for three trips; then you got a full share and it took you two years to get a share.

RW: In other words, the load would come in, it would be worth \$100,000, right?

ES: Yes.

RW: Then the boat took half of that or something like that?

ES: Yes, they took about half.

RW: Did they get \$50,000, and then the rest was divided equally, or ...?

ES: No. They had to pay for the shares. I mean they had to pay for expenses which would be food and ... and then what was left you got the money from that, a percentage. And then at the time I made \$1200 and that was a lot of money in 1946. So I decided to go back to fishing.

RW: But as an engineer?

ES: Well, as an assistant engineer, too, and I wouldn't have to wait for two years to get a share, so I went back as assistant engineer.

RW: Same boat?

ES: Yes, on the same boat and I worked on there for about a year; then I went on the Santa Margarita which was in the forties, maybe 1948. And then I made one trip on the Shamrock; and then I went on the Mauritania. On all these boats I was assistant engineer. I went up and I got my license. Then I was on the Mauritania as assistant engineer. That was in 1949. And then, of course, I went on. I was on the Courageous, and then I went on the Mary S as chief engineer.

RW: Yeah. I remember that one.

ES: And that was the old Mary S, not the new one.

RW: The wooden one?

ES: The wooden Mary S, and then, of course, I was on there for about five years and we hit a rock off of San Quintin and the boat sank. Then I went on the Southern Pacific as chief engineer and that was in the fifties. And then from the Southern Pacific I went on the first superseiner which was the Conquest. And I worked for Joe Madruga and from the Conquest I went on the Aquarius as chief engineer and I made a lot of money. In fact, I made a lot of money on the Conquest and the Aquarius. And then I made a trip to Africa on the Aquarius. And then I became port engineer for the CM Corporation.

RW: What port?

ES: In San Diego, out of San Diego. And I was port engineer for Joe Madruga; and then I brought boats down from Tacoma. I brought the Montana down, the Frontier, and then he built the new Conquest at Campbell Machine. Then he had the Madrugador and he had the old Saratoga and he had the new Saratoga. He had 11 boats all told, and I was port engineer. And then I would hire the engineers and, of course, hire and fire the engineers; and go overseas every time a boat went to a port overseas, and then I traveled all over the world. I used to go to the Philippines and South Africa, Hong Kong, talking to the shipyards, and also taking the boats to the shipyards overseas.

RW: Let's not jump ahead too far now. What was your job as a port engineer?

ES: As port engineer I would hire the engineers and also I would supervise all the work done on the boats, pick the shipyards that they went to; would make up the work items that had to be done for the boats, whether it was here or Singapore or the Philippines or Samoa, or wherever.

RW: You essentially got the boat ready to go to sea then?

ES: Yes, I did.

RW: Including provisions?

ES: Well, the engine provisions. I had nothing to do with the deck provisions.

RW: How about nets?

ES: I had nothing to do with nets. I couldn't even sew a net.

RW: So you were involved mostly with the mechanical end of the ship from the hull to the ...?

ES: All of the mechanical, and a lot of times, if the boats broke down I would fly down and repair the engines for them, or help them repair.

RW: You had a natural mechanical aptitude then?

ES: That's all I've done all my life; I've been a mechanic all my life - worked around machinery.

RW: Yeah. You know, it's quite a transition period between the pole fishing and the seiners. You were involved with that change, weren't you?

ES: Yes, I was.

RW: Why did they make the change?

ES: The reason that we made the change was because they were importing fish from Japan then and they were lowering the price of the fish so low that we had to find ways of catching fish cheaper. And that's how we caught fish with nets. The Japanese were putting us out of business.

RW: Were they using nets themselves?

ES: No, they weren't using nets, but they had cheap labor. We were the ones that started the seiners. Really, the Slavonians started the seiners. They had seiners when we had bait poles, but they had cloth nets. They had cotton nets.

RW: The Slavonians? You lost me.

ES: The Slavs. They had the first small purse seiners in San Pedro.

RW: Oh, that's a name, the name of a ...?

ES: A Slav is a person; they come from Yugoslavia and they called them Slavs. They had all the small purse seiners in San Pedro, but the reason they never could do much with the seiners, they had cotton net. And they'd get 30/40 tons of fish and the net would rip. So when they came out with nylon they could catch 150, 250 tons of fish. We made a set 280 tons and saved all the fish. But the nets wouldn't rip. And, like when you said we made the change from the bait boats, it was actually altogether a different life. You lived like a human being. On the old bait boats you didn't have air conditioning. You had old fans. You didn't have fresh water to take a shower. You had to take a shower with saltwater. On the newest superseiners, when we went over to net boats, we had air-conditioned rooms; we had carpeted floors. We had no problem with water because we made fresh water from saltwater. We'd made 5,600 gallons of water a day out of the saltwater, so we had no problem. But, of course, the boats cost more to operate, but

then they caught more fish. So instead of a boat traveling at eight knots, it was a boat that did 15 knots, so you could go, travel twice as far in the ocean and find twice as much fish. And a lot of these big superseiners carried 250,000 gallons of fuel, diesel fuel; the bait boats carried about 40,000. The superseiners carried enough fuel to heat the average house over 500 years. You made enough fresh water to supply a motel and you made that out of saltwater. You had the equivalent refrigerant of 2000 deep freezers, and you could go out and you could stay out for two or three months. I mean it was altogether a different ball game. You had an engine like - the old seiners had an engine that burned 600/700 gallons of fuel in 24 hours. The new superseiners burned 6000 gallons of fuel in 24 hours.

RW: Did they have two engineers, or one?

ES: On which boats? Okay, on the old fishing boats we had two auxiliaries that generated the power, and on the superseiners we had three generators. We could make enough electricity to light a little town. And we also had one big engine that ran all the hydraulics.

RW: What turned the shaft, the prop?

ES: Now, the shaft, we had a big main engine, one big diesel engine that was 3600 horsepower, burned 3.2 gallons of fuel per minute at top speed, whereas the older boats had an 800 horsepower engine that burned 600 gallons of fuel in 24 hours.

RW: How many guys were on board these larger seiners then?

ES: Practically the same. On the older seiners there were 12 people. On the newer ones there were 15.

RW: Wait a minute. Twelve on the .

ES: On the older boats, yes. On the bait boats and the seiners.

RW: Well, you know one thing, I want to put in a ... in case somebody isn't very knowledgeable. We talk about bait boats, same as pole fishing. In other words you would have bait on the boat and it would be chummed in the water and then the guys would get in the racks and then the fish would come up close. They would be hooked in and then thrown into the well. When you talk about bait boats, you mean, really, the pole-fishing boat?

ES: Yes, and you have the old seiner which was the bait boats converted.

RW: Let's see, you were really in the transition between one type of fishing to the other? Economically, I can understand why, but what started going offshore so far? Like you said you went down to Tahiti, Samoa, the South Pacific area. Why did you start going out that far?

ES: The reason we went to the South Pacific was the government put restrictions on us. They put a line, an imaginary line, and they said you can't fish inside this line.

RW: Where was the line?

ES: It was all off of Costa Rica, Panama. It was only to the American fishing boats. They were putting us out of business.

RW: Why?

ES: I don't really know why. But if we went inside that line, the government would send planes out there to watch us to make sure we didn't fish inside this line. They said we were depleting the fish. So anyway, we started; we went to the South Pacific. There were about five of us, the Conquest - I forgot the other boats. Sully's was one of the boats. But, anyway on the way to the South Pacific we found all the fish way outside the line where nobody thought there was any fish. And when we were on the Conquest, we loaded up outside the line and we unloaded in Samoa, so all six boats that were going, were going to go from there to the Palau Islands because we had spotted fish out there with airplanes. Well, Joe Madruga spotted them, not us. He spotted. Of course he was the boat owner that owned the Conquest and he was going to fly out there and tell us where the fish was when we got there. Well, when we went to the Palau Islands ... In fact, no, Bill Magellan was on the Southern Pacific then. But anyway, when we went to the Palau Islands we found all kinds of fish. You dropped the net around them and the fish would go under the net, and all the time everybody had their eye on that fish outside the line. So somebody wired back and told Bill Magellan about it. He went out there and he loaded up and then all the boats came back but two of us. We stayed out there and we tried and tried. Finally, we got one school off the Palau Islands, and then we came back. And we made a lot of trips outside the line. We made - got a lot of fish out there. But it was very, very rough.

RW: When you talk about the line, you meant you would find a school of fish and before you could make a set on them they would move in beyond where legally you could fish?

ES: That's right. They had a line on the chart where the government said you can't fish inside this line, and they didn't figure there were any fish outside that line.

RW: That line, from the west coast, was about 50 miles or 100 miles, something like that?

ES: I don't know. I'm not much of a navigator, but it would probably be 50 or 60 or 100 miles off our coast.

RW: You could fish off the Hawaiian Islands then and no problem?

ES: Oh, yeah, but nobody got any fish. That's when we found the fish outside the line. That was outside the line, way outside of Hawaii.

RW: Well, fish move around quite a bit, so I guess you're just plain lucky if you come across a school of fish. Is that it, or did they have a certain time of year they're here and another time they're somewhere else?

ES: Certain time of the year because outside the line there's a season for fishing out there. I don't know what it is. I was an engineer, but there was a season out there and we just happened to hit the right season and there was a lot of big fish out there.

RW: I notice you got some logs out here. Do you think that's one way of spotting fish?

ES: Well, anytime we'd see a log we'd always go look around the log because the logs would, all the little bitty small fish probably an inch long, two inches long, would hang around the log. They were afraid the big fish would eat them like bait. So we would always look around them because .. And also the sharks would try and get the fish, and the fish, the little bait would stay close to the log. In that way the tuna would go around there and try to get that bait and they would stay around logs. So that's why we started fishing logs. If we'd see a log, a dead whale, or one time we fished on a dead cow, or anything that was floating that the little fish would stay close to, a sunken part of a boat ... One time we found a wing of an aeroplane.

RW: You've got a canoe out here, too, that you found?

ES: The canoe, yes, we got about 500 tons of fish off of that canoe in Africa. It was a sunken dugout canoe. I'm not kidding. Sometimes a little bitty stick that was about three feet long, they would get fish on. At a certain time of the day you would see the big schools of fish would come up and then they'd go down.

RW: Then you would make a set around them, then?

ES: Did we make a set around the log and close the net underneath? And then we always pushed the log out so it would accumulate more fish. Sometimes there were more fish down deep and then we'd get that fish and we'd wait till we saw more fish, and we would wrap the log again.

RW: How deep did the nets go down then?

ES: They'd go down about 80 feet, I mean 80 fathoms.

RW: Eighty fathoms? That's 400 feet.

ES: Yeah, now they have real deep, deep ones. I don't know. That's what we found out when we were overseas and we were wrapping all these schools of fish. They would go under the net. Well they built deeper nets that would go down deeper, then they started catching the fish. A lot of times they would check the thermocline of the water. They would find cold depths in the water and it seemed like you would get down to this cold depth. If you could have a net go down that deep, the fish wouldn't go down in that cold water. And they always checked the thermocline. If you had a high thermocline you usually caught fish good. They were always checking water temperatures with thermocline.

RW: I see. In other words, he threw his sensor over the side and checked where the cold water was? I never heard that before. What was your first impression when you had to go overseas? You said you left a load off in Samoa. Do you have a cannery there?

ES: Yes. When we first went overseas it made me sick. I didn't want to go overseas. There was a cannery. I knew the trips were going to be long. In other words, we unloaded in Samoa. Both Starkist and Van Camp have a cannery there, and then when we went to the Palau Islands, which is close to Guam, Van Camp had a little bitty cannery there, and they freeze the fish and put them on a big steamer.

RW: You said it made you sick. Is that because you realized that the fishing industry of San Diego was going to lose because the fishing was offshore like this, and the canneries were offshore?

ES: That's right, and that's because the fishing boats were going to leave San Diego. We had the biggest and most beautiful fishing fleet in the world and we have nothing now because nobody helped us. And it wasn't that the government helped us. They didn't help us. They took it away from us. Also the greedy canneries such as Starkist, they were helping the foreigners build up their fishing fleet. And we lost the biggest and most beautiful fishing fleet in the world. No other world we had. And now we have the junky boats and they have the beautiful boats.

RW: In defense of the canneries, this is their business. It's cheaper for them to go fishing in the Pacific and have cheaper ones do the canning, and then have the cans sent back to the States for sale.

ES: Yes, that's right, but it backfired on them.

RW: How did that happen?

ES: Because now the foreigners are building canneries. They have their own canneries and they are going to can fish and it backfired on them. That's right. Business is business, but I really think, of course, I really think the fishing fleet should have been subsidized. We weren't helped. Nobody helped us. Everything we did, we did on our own and the thing that we did that was wrong, was very wrong. We let the canneries give us the money to go out and make the trips, in other words to pay for expenses which cost \$25,000/\$30,000/\$40,000, and more, especially when the price of fuel went up. And then we depended on them, and you could say it was our fault, too. It wasn't only their fault.

RW: I understand the canneries weren't above cheating you either on your loads, saying that some of the load was not usable.

ES: I think they did do some of this, and, too, a lot of the fish was bad. And then the boat owners would try to blame the cannery - you know, what's right is right. They were making all kinds of money. And, like I said, the thing that they did they helped us gear the boats and then they helped take them away from us. And they figured that they would fish so many years overseas, they would get more than their money back. And, in fact, I had been offered jobs to go out as a port engineer and I was sick over this and I won't do it because of this. And I don't even want to go down and look at the fishing fleet. Go down and you look at our waterfront that had all those beautiful boats, there's nothing there. And they can thank Mr. McDonovitch for that.

RW: Who was McDonovitch? I never heard of that guy.

ES: Well, that's one of the owners, the big owner in Starkist, because they didn't help us. They started this, helping the foreign boats. of course, we're all to blame, like I say. We shouldn't have depended on them. And I'm very upset about this. of course, I'm not in the fishing business. I don't have to depend on fishing boats any more because I invested out here in property and I'm all right. But there's a lot of young kids, young Americans, that should be running these boats. And they should be docking down here in San Diego, not having to be dependent on Guam and all these different countries.

RW: I haven't priced a can of tuna lately, but it's not cheap.

ES: No, it's not cheap. And what the canners are doing, they hire these foreigners to go out there and, of course, they work for cheap prices at first, and then they could lower the price of their fish down \$50 or \$100 a ton. Then the poor American would have to go down under that. They would literally put him out of business. But the Japanese were smart. They got all their fish and they used a lot of it instead of selling to foreign markets. So they didn't depend on the cannery. So if the cannery bought fish from them (I'm going to just give a price off the top of my head) say \$500 a ton, then they would take the American and give them \$150 a ton, and with their low price, the government in America would subsidize the Japanese.

RW: Yeah, and also they can fish anywhere they want to.

ES: That is right. of course I'm not in the fishing business and it shows them out here killing porpoise. That's not American fishing boats because they're not here fishing on this coast.

RW: I wanted to bring that up this side of this tape here. Now let me roll this tape over. Tape 1, Side B: As an outsider, reading the papers, I thought you guys were shot down because of the porpoise because they said you could kill only so many porpoise. I understand you tried not to kill porpoises.

ES: When we were a deficiency, believe me, we didn't want to kill porpoises. At first we did kill a lot, but I mean the nets. We didn't have the equipment. Because we depended on the porpoise to (help us) catch the fish and we built smaller nets so we could (get) the porpoise out of the nets, you know, so we wouldn't kill them. But the foreign boats did nothing. They were the ones who were killing them. Of course a lot of the porpoise, you

couldn't even get near them with a fishing boat. If you were to go out in the ocean ... Now I'm talking as a seaman and I'm off to the side now. Of course I wouldn't want to do this. But if you went out and just tried to kill all the porpoise you could kill, in other words, wrap nets around them and try to get them all ... Say you were going to use them for soup, then shoot every one that you could see, there's no way you could wipe them out because the porpoise get smart. Pretty soon they hear a boat and they run; you can't get near them. They had some of them (porpoise) out from Mexico they called "the untouchables." You couldn't get near them. We really didn't try to do this because we needed the porpoise, because the fish would set on them. The fish would follow the porpoise; they would be underneath the porpoise, so we tried to save every one. We even put men in the water pushing them over the side, the ones (porpoise) that got stuck in the net. We lost a few. But then when we started losing the fishing fleet like we had, owners that came in were from Spain - most of them were from Spain. Even some boats came from Africa. They didn't care about the porpoise; they killed every one that they could get. Nobody would watch them. Environmentalists didn't go after them. They went after the Americans and they put us out of business. They helped put us out of business, too. The government said, "You know, you've got to fish outside this line." You were only allowed so many porpoise that you could kill. And, of course, we didn't want to kill porpoise. I don't want to kill porpoise, I love them. And it had nothing to do with the fishing fleet. Not too long ago I saw some pictures that showed them killing all these porpoise. Those are not American boats. Those are foreign owned.

RW: Can you eat a porpoise? Is it a good fish?

ES: The Japanese use them. I imagine you could eat them. Yeah, they're mammals. I wouldn't want to eat them.

RW: Keep the porpoises for fertilizer, or food, or - or just discard them?

ES: Probably the Japanese keep them, I don't know. But some of the other ones - no, they just discard them. They didn't use them for fertilizer or anything. of course the tuna was worth more money. They filled their holds with tuna and they would forget about the porpoise. Anyway, seeing a lot of this, I got really down on these environmentalists and I shouldn't because environmentalists are good. We don't want to pollute our air and we don't want to kill all our animals on this earth. Then a lot of times you get some little guy that really got a big name. Why don't they check on some of the salaries that those guys are getting - the head of the Sierra Club and these guys, what their salary is? Nobody ever checks that. They got a backing and they got a big mouth, that's right, and they got a cause. And another thing - they built a "peace boat" and when I was out there they had a crew that were five men and there were seven women. That's a pretty good crew. (Laughter) That's a pretty good crew. Which reminds me, I cannot understand any woman that would be willing to go out on a purse seiner, one woman and 12 guys. She is crazy. And the courts are saying you've got to take these women. Crazy. Well, I understand they were taking them when I was a chief engineer and had a private room. (Laughter) But I don't think that it's right that they send these people out. Must they put them on all the boats? Put them on the Mexican boats and the Panamanian boats, just like everybody else's boat. or, when some of these environmentalists or these people are going down there they should have a policeman sitting in the back seat to see if they go over 55 miles an hour in the 55 mile an hour zones which I break the law in going over the speed limit, and they do, too, but they should have a policeman sitting in the back seat to check when they go over the limit, give them a ticket. I'm with you in all this because it just seems like - it boils down essentially to, I won't say "greed," because it gives them a voice that they wouldn't have otherwise. It gives them status they wouldn't have otherwise. But what are they doing? They're destroying industries, destroying things that are very good in the end. Well, they destroyed the fishing fleet that we had and we were, you know, we were feeding a lot of people. And of course by running us out, they got the foreigners who came in and they started killing all the porpoise. They didn't have that Medina panel in the net to roll the porpoise out ...

RW: The Medina panel was sort of a flat panel that would skim along and let the net go down?

ES: It was a small net, a real small mesh net. You couldn't make the whole net out of all that small mesh. If you did, it would sink. But they had a whole panel of it so when they backed the boat down you could roll the porpoise out. The foreign boats didn't go to the expense of putting them in. But regardless, the foreign boats would not wipe out all the porpoise because there are too many of them out there. Pretty soon you won't be able to get near them. And, not only that, before that the ocean had too many porpoise. The porpoise were eating the little bitty fish that the tuna fish would eat. There were just too many of them. Of course the American fishing boats don't fish over here any more. Maybe there's a couple of them that do. But they're all overseas where there's no porpoise. And I don't think they'll ever wipe the porpoise out because when I was out you couldn't get near them with speedboats. There are some out there they call They hear a boat coming and they run the other way, which is a good thing. They will survive when we're gone.

RW: Getting back to the first trip you went over, you said you flew out of the islands looking for fish and then you could send the boats out.

ES: Yes, the first trip that we made over there Joe Madruga flew in an aeroplane, in fact, we were off of Samboanga, Philippines. There must have been one school that had 10,000 tons of it and we couldn't catch one fish. And that's of course when we came back. And then after that, when I had become port engineer, I went overseas with Joe Madruga and we came out over the ocean off of Chicata and off of New Caledonia. Joe Madruga is the one that found all the fish over there, and then, of course, that's when they put the deeper nets. He wasn't the first one to put the deeper nets, but he was the one that found all the fish over there and never got credit for it. I was with him. I was the port engineer and I couldn't see fish like he could. And when we flew out there in some of those little small planes, I said, "Joe, we're going to die over here. We're miles out over the ocean with a little plane, just one engine." And I said, "Joe, we're going to die here." And that's when he hired a DC-3 and we went all over; we went all over Australia, and I was with him.

RW: Did he fly himself, or did he have a pilot?

ES: No. He hired a pilot. In New Caledonia (it) was a French pilot. When we were coming back we went through what was like a typhoon. We come up over a mountain and we went through a storm you can't believe. We didn't know whether we were up there, down ... The thing that scared me, we were below the mountains. We were coming into New Caledonia. The pilot was very smart. He just went around in a circle; he just kept on climbing, climbing, until he got higher than the mountains, then he flew and then he came over the big cliff at the end of the mountain. Then the storm left and we landed. And, boy, I was afraid. I thought that was it.

RW: Wow, I can well imagine, especially in a small plane, or even a DC-3.

ES: Yes, he was the one, and we flew all over the South Pacific. We were in Jakarta; we were in Bali; we were in New Caledonia; Australia - we flew all out there. We spotted a lot of fish.

RW: Were the natives friendly?

ES: Where we were, they were. of course, in Bali they were very friendly. I don't even think they knew what we were doing over there. We would just hire a plane and we'd fly out over the ocean.

RW: Did some of these places, like the Australians, know they could make money off of you guys?

ES: The Australians were very, very good. When we had the Frontier, they let us go in around their country. We had a letter painted on the side of the boat, like, we could go into any port like an American port. They were very, very good to us, and we met a company over there that helped us with the

government. Australia was good. New Zealand was problems. They got so that they learned from us and then they just wanted to boot us out of there.

RW: I hear that New Zealanders are really neat people. If you want to enjoy yourself, go there.

ES: Oh, yeah, the people are nice, but then they started charging us so much money for fishing licenses and then they didn't want the American fishing boats over there.

RW: Because they were going to do their own fishing?

ES: That's right, and also their shipyards. We went to a shipyard there one time and then they charged us so much money. They tripled the price on everything. In fact a man came from the shipyard to talk to me and he asked me why we didn't go back to the shipyard and I told him because we can't afford you. You're too expensive.

RW: Do you think it was based on the unions, or just gouging?

ES: Just gouging. It wasn't unions.

RW: We took a question I was going to ask earlier. Here in the States unions are really strong. Do you think they screwed themselves by overcharging?

ES: Well, I think a lot of why we lost the fishing, I mean why they lost the work on the fishing boats here was because you go to the shipyard and there'd be, say, four men working and six sitting down and you were paying for them, and we couldn't afford that. We had to go to places where the price was lower, you know, to repair the fishing boats, because the canners were lowering the price on the fish to us and we couldn't afford to take them to the shipyards, or we would lose the boats. Nobody was helping us, you know, to pay our bills, and that's why we had to go to the foreign countries.

RW: You were pointing out a certain area something about a boat that the shipyard took it over just to pay the bills.

ES: That was the old Victoria. They owed so much money the boat had ... They got water in the main engine and there was a lot of work done on the boat and the boat owner couldn't pay the bills. Campbell Machine took over the Victoria. They owned it. Now it's parked down there in the bay. Somebody bought it for little or nothing, probably \$2.00.

RW: That's the one that's down in south bay?

ES: It's down in south bay - the old steel boat.

RW: Yeah. That brings up another thing that I've asked before. Did you notice the handling characteristics of the wooden boat versus a steel boat, even though it was the same tonnage? Was the wooden boat sluggish, or was it a better boat, the steel boat, or ...?

ES: Oh, no. The steel boats were much better. The thing about a wooden boat, of course you would get barnacles on them faster, but that isn't the only thing. A steel boat, you had to build steel tanks to hold your fuel and, of course, you had to trim those boats. In other words, you would pump fuel to one side to fill one tank on the other side to keep it on an even keel, and a steel boat you had inner bottoms. You had in the bottoms below your fish

wells, you had port and starboard in the bottom so you could pump fuel from side to side in the boat to trim the ship, so they were much better. Not only that, you could carry tremendous amounts of fuel in your inner bottoms so that you could go a long ways from home and come back.

RW: So those inner bottoms were used as fuel tanks?

ES: Oh, yes. They carried fuel, and you'd, say, have the port Number One empty and the starboard Number one full, and then you'd have a fish well full on the opposite side so you could trim the boat. You couldn't do that with wooden boats. Not only that, wooden boats did not have the range. You couldn't go to Samoa and come back; you couldn't carry the fuel. You would have to make stops, where a steel boat could go all the way.

RW: So, essentially, a steel boat was a floating gas tank?

ES: Oh, yeah, and not only that, it carried water. That's why you carried a lot of water, plus you made water.

RW: Tell me about your friendship with Captain Ken Reynard.

ES: The first time that I met Ken Reynard was in the 1950s; I don't know whether it was 1952, but I was assistant engineer on the Mauritania and Ken Reynard owned a sail loft in San Diego and he wanted to go fishing. So he went out on the Mauritania as paper captain, and we left San Diego and went straight to the Galapagos Islands. And he was a real nice, good man.

RW: He was tough physically, wasn't he?

ES: Oh, yeah. He was very tough. One time he went to shore in the Galapagos Islands. He was like an explorer, and I was really close to him. One time he went to shore in the Galapagos Islands and he says, "Ed, I found a cave; it's huge, and it's as big as a big auditorium." He said, "Come on to the beach with me." So I went to the beach with him. I had a .45; I was a young kid then. I strapped on my .45 and I went to the beach. There was a little cave and I think the thing was probably up about four foot high, or three foot high, and it was probably three foot wide. And there was sand up to the door; it was close to the water.

RW: Well, he said it was the size of an auditorium, you're talking about a little small thing.

ES: Well, I haven't finished yet. That was the opening. He did, he told me it was the size of an auditorium. But anyway, he says crawl in there and I crawled in about, oh, I would say, eight foot. No, no flashlight. It was like a tunnel. And when I crawled in about six or seven foot, there was a great big huge room, you couldn't believe. I mean it was huge, like a great big cave. It looked like an auditorium and up at the top there was a little light. So we got inside and he says, "Boy, didn't I tell you?" I said, "Yeah, I can't believe it." It was just huge, and I walked way to one side. You could see in there because of the light coming through the roof, but not really that good. And he said, "You know, Ed, the last time I was in here there was a big seal in here." I says, "Oh, no. Where was it?" And he says, "Over there." I grabbed a handful of sand and threw it over in the corner and there was this great big old bull seal, got right out in front of our opening to get out. And I said, "Ken, you're crazy." So we threw sand at him and he wouldn't even move. He was just huge. So I pulled out that .45 and I shot him. We drug him to the side and we got out of there. Anyway, this was around, I think it was Santa Maria Island where the cave was. We went out fishing because we got the bait. You know we would set nets around. We went out fishing and came back in and couldn't find the cave anymore; it was all covered over with sand. The opening was covered over. The tide and the water had filled the opening with sand.

RW: So this cave system was down by the shore, not out in the back country?

ES: Yeah. It was right by the shoreline, but (where) the rocks were. You know, you get better water surging in the rocks from up probably 300 feet straight up in the air. So it was a really big cave. And then the other time Ken and I were diving in the Galapagos Islands. We used these hard hat helmets, you know, hardtop helmets. They have a piece of lead in the front and back of them that would hold you down for weight. And it was the first time that he dared ... Well he dared quite a bit, but I mean he was new at diving.

RW: What were you diving for?

ES: We would set the net around the little small bait which was fish, and then we would go down with helmets and pick the net up over the rocks and would close it from the skiff. We would hold it together so that the bait wouldn't go underneath the net.

RW: Like a purse seiner purse?

ES: No, we would tie it as it went up. It was like a seiner. The net hung down and we would pick it up over the rocks and as we led it up to the skiff we would tie it together with these little hooks. And then if they got it up in the skiff, they would open it up. In that way it kept it closed. We were standing on a big rock. And a lot of times, you know if you would see a big shark in the net we would put our helmets together and tell one another, "Hey, watch out, there's a shark in the net, or a Moray eel." Anyway, we were standing up on a big rock and the surge was just pushing us back and forth. And on one side of the rock you could look down and it was so deep I couldn't see the bottom. It was real, real deep. And the surge came along and pushed Ken off and he went down in that hole. And his tender up on top would see his hose was going out, so he just kept on giving him more hose. He was falling down in that hole. Then where I was, it was so deep it was hurting my ears. You know, these were shallow diving helmets where you didn't go in depths. You would go down about 25, 30 feet. But anyway, I pulled my hose for the tender to pull me up and he pulled me up and I told him - I said, "Hey, you better start pulling Ken up because he fell down in a hole; he's way down there, and when I came up all I could see was bubbles coming up." I said, "Man, he must be, that guy, he might die." So they started pulling him up a little bit at a time and they finally got him up and I was leaning over the skiff. When they pulled the helmet off he looked over at me and says, "Where the hell were you? It was nice down there." But anyway, he went down where I never could have gone down. And he was really a strong guy and he was a good fisherman. I taught him how to fish. He poled fish with me. He was always interested in old boats and he was a wonderful sailmaker. I mean, he could design sails and make them. He was a real knowledgeable man.

RW: He took photographs, and he was a drawer, too, wasn't he?

ES: Yeah, but he would draw more like plans and things. He didn't draw fishing boats. He was a very good navigator, and he loved those islands. He really did, because I was with him quite a few trips after that, too.

RW: Did he go on to something else, his own boat, or what?

ES: Well, when he got off the Mauritania, I don't remember whether he got on another boat, or what had happened to him.

RW: Running the Westgate?

ES: Yeah, he did, that's right, too. He was on the Westgate.

RW: He worked for Smith?

ES: Yes, he did. I remember all that. But then, you know, I have kind of got away from ... The last time that I did talk to him he was working on the Star of India. In fact, he said, "Come on over there, I want to show you something." He went on board and showed me the ribs down below. He said, "Look, they're like brand new. This thing's made of wrought iron." He showed me how they had cleaned between the ribs and everything.

RW: Years before, had poured concrete in there and they jackhammered it open to where it was clean as a rag. Since then they have put the concrete back in again.

ES: He showed me that and he did show me the Berkeley when it first came in. He showed me the steam engines down here.

RW: That's how you met Pearl?

ES: I'm quite sure I met Pearl when Ken married her, or was going with her.

RW: Yeah, I don't know when they got married.

ES: When I was on the Mauritania, that's the first time that I met her.

RW: I understand you are still in contact with her.

ES: Yes. I was really surprised she called me. In fact, I was working in my garage. I have an extension phone out there. And she says, "Are you the Ed Silva that was assistant engineer on the Mauritania?" I said, "Yeah, that's been a lot of years ago." And she said, "Well, I'm Pearl." And she said Ken had died, and at first it didn't ring a bell, you know. She said Ken had died. She said he was a ... And she said, "I have some pictures and was wondering if you know anything about them." And she wanted to give them to a museum. And I said, "Ken Reynard!" And she said, "Yeah, you know because I'm kind of hard of hearing now." And I said, "Oh, do I remember? Yeah, I remember him." And I told her to send me the pictures and when I had them I got copies of them and checked them to see. My brother had taken the pictures, took pictures of Ken when he was on the Mauritania.

RW: You showed me some pictures here, but no face of him.

ES: Oh, yes, I have some with the face of him. I have. I've got them out in my truck. I was showing them to somebody. But I have them with the penguin. He grew a beard that trip.

RW: Because they could use them down at the ship, in the museum, those photographs, copies of those photographs.

ES: Well, I'm quite sure, I'm going to talk to Pearl and she does want them to have the pictures of him and I think that they should be there.

RW: They would like to have a nice memorial, also have his history on board. You know the photographs might (supplement this) interview with him.

ES: That's good, because when I talked to him he loved that ship. He loved the Star of India; he really did.

RW: See, I first met him in 1962 on the restoration and I (served) on board as a volunteer for seven years. And later I lived on board the Star for seven more years as ticket taker at night and worked at General Dynamics during the day. I got married on board in 1981. In the meantime Ken had

left the ship. He moved up to Friday Harbor. Say, listen, thanks a lot. This is going to go to the Maritime Museum. A copy is going to go to the San Diego Historical Society in their research library, and I appreciate it.

ES: Well, the only thing that I've got to say is if I've said something here to offend somebody, I'm sorry. But what I said on the tape I told you like you could read my mind and I'm glad to have told you what I know.

RW: Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW
