



## ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

An interview with  
Robert (Bert) Israel, 1888-1980

1969

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### PREFACE

This interview was conducted by Edward S. Barr in 1969 onto a reel-to-reel tape. In August 1998 it was reformatted onto a cassette tape from which this transcription was taken.

After buying a new reel-to-reel TEAC tape recording machine, this was the first oral history attempt by Edward Barr to record the early days of San Diego's waterfront life by one who lived it -- Robert (Bert) Israel -- in 1969 in his home in Point Loma, San Diego, California.

To those who have an historical maritime interest from the view of one who was immersed in it his entire life, this interview is recommended.

Another oral history including Robert (Bert) Israel was conducted by Edward S. Barr in 1973.

This second oral history focused on the San Diego Yacht Club's history from 1886-1973.

Edward S. Barr, Historian  
October 1998

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**EDWARD S. BARR:** To start with, Bert when did you actually begin to have a yachting activity or affiliation as a youngster?

**ROBERT ISRAEL:** I was about 16 (1904) when I first started having a sailboat. At first I owned a boat, she was a little skipjack, 21 feet long, called *The Kid*. She was built by Harry Sly who was a foreman at the Russ Lumber Company. He sold her to me and I raced her. A bunch of us youngsters couldn't afford to join the San Diego Yacht Club. I think the fee was 75 or 100 dollars, something like that. So we broke away from that club and with the help of one of the councilmen we got permission to use an old pier down at the foot of 32nd Street.

**EB:** What year was this, do you recall?

**RI:** It was about 1904. In order to help us out, Dr. Ganns who owned the *Trilby* joined the San Diego Yacht Club. All of his crew were from the juniors. John Hawley joined the club, too, at that time. We created such a drain on the San Diego Yacht Club membership with our little dues and so forth. About the time that Bill Phillips was commodore they offered to take all the juniors back into the San Diego Yacht Club provided we would give up the 32nd Street pier.

[Editor's note: Phillips was commodore in 1940; likely he meant Frank Spaulding, 1911.]

**EB:** Was your membership exclusively for juniors? You didn't have any of the senior members invited in to participate?

**RI:** For juniors. Not at first, no. Because we needed their financial support we did get several big fellows in, older men.

**EB:** How did the two clubs compare in terms of facilities.

**RI:** The San Diego club had been knocking around from the foot of Hawthorn Street and moored off of the Coronado pipeline sign for a while. Then she finally moved to Glorietta Bay and used the old Silvergate as a clubhouse. They towed her from one place to another.

**EB:** What did they call your club?

**RI:** The Junior Yacht Club. The burgee was just a blue and white, with a white center and a blue J or a red J on it, I've forgotten which. We had no facilities except what was left from the old pier. We re-floored it and scratched together enough lumber to build a little two-room shack on it. We had an old fellow on there to look after the boats and so forth. It was just an open mooring space, you know.

We used to have lots of interesting races, like a seamanship race for instance. The boats would be out at the different moorings, or moored in a line with their sails furled. You were on the dock and at the firing of a gun they would all jump in their skiffs and go out and board their boat, hoist the sails and start the windward leg. On the windward leg up we had to put in a reef and after we rounded the upper mark we had to take it out again, round the lower mark and land on the windward side of a float. I won that one year.

**EB:** What type of a fleet would you have? A 20-boat fleet?

**RI:** There was a mixture. Herman Halcomb owned a seabird sloop, and I had a skipjack, Walter Trepte had a little half-round bilge boat that he called the *Mudhen*, Cecil Burwell had a somner class type boat.

**EB:** Back in those days, did the junior members own their own boats outright, or was it like today that you borrowed your parents' boat and you more or less have use of their boat?

**RI:** No, they all owned boats that they had either built or bought and fixed up. For instance, at one time Dick Jessop and I owned a swallow. That was a scull-type, about 30 feet long. She was just a floating sidewalk. There were three of them in the bay at that time, one owned in Chula Vista called the *Phantom*. Alonzo Jessop and a fellow by the name of Ledger owned the *Meteor*. Dick and I owned the *Sudanic*, Dick happened to know the fellow who owned her. When she went on the beach during one of those southeasters it broke the centerboard off and the rudder. Dick and I bought her for ten dollars, sails and everything.

**EB:** Were navigating conditions in that end of the bay back then concerned with a lot of mud flats? Did you have any deep water down there?

**RI:** No. They were all shallow-draft boats. In fact, Chula Vista Yacht Club had Jensen build them a fleet of about 12 shallow-draft boats for use around the Chula Vista Yacht Club. You had to know where you were going. You keep your centerboard on a breaking string. We had a heavy line as a pennant and a bunch of grocery string between that and the horn on the centerboard, so if we hit the mud the grocery string would break but it wouldn't break the centerboard off.

**EB:** Was the *Trilby* down in that same area?

**RI:** Yeah. Dr. Ganns built the *Trilby*. He built the *Yankee Girl* and the *Junior* about the same time. He was in the habit of pyramiding his boats. You know the law about a boat builder owning a boat, he owns it until he turns it over to the owner. He doesn't have to account to him for the amount of money he spent on it. So Jensen was in the habit of building one boat on speculation and pyramiding the others off of the boat he was building, instead of financing each boat. He built the *Trilby* practically out of scrap lumber.

**EB:** When was she built, do you recall offhand? It is hard to determine time but it seems that that boat has been prominent in the archives of the yacht club for so many years. What actually was her beginning point, do you know?

**RI:** That I don't know, but I raced in her on the Lipton Cup two or three times. That must have been before Faith and I were married in 1909. She was a somner type boat, flat as a sidewalk.

**EB:** Did she race against boats that came down from up north for the Lipton Cup races like they do today, they come down from Santa Barbara and Los Angeles? The *Trilby* was flat-bottomed. Was she racing against the traditional type, the displacement type sailboat at all?

**RI:** Yes.

**EB:** That was quite a shock to find the *Trilby* racing, being so unusual in her design. Wasn't she considered to be an ocean-going freak?

**RI:** She was a somner class boat. The only difference between her and the ten meter *Sally*, was that the *Trilby* didn't have a hollow keel. She had a keel and a centerboard inside of that, just a sheet of boiler plate. *Sally* had a hollow keel. Before a race when she was measured, they used to put birdshot in that keel. Then after the race was over -- it made her much more stable, you know -- they would pour some water in there, use a bilge pump and pump all the lead shot out and store it someplace. Of course in those days, they were betting on races.

**EB:** Did you get pretty good bets going, big money bets?

**RI:** I think they bet as much as a thousand dollars. That is peanuts now, of course, but back in those days it was a lot of money.

**EB:** You were essentially racing for the price of the boat.

**RI:** Yes, because the *Trilby* only cost a little over 600 dollars.

**EB:** That would be like going out and racing and betting on the title of the boat each time you'd race. Prior to active yachting, and what have you, who was born in the lighthouse?

**RI:** I was.

**EB:** That was in what year?

**RI:** In 1888, October 24th.

**EB:** Was the lighthouse being used as a navigational aid at that time?

**RI:** Yes. My grandfather was the lighthouse keeper out there for 21 years.

**EB:** That would date back to the original construction, wouldn't it?

**RI:** Practically, yes. I have it here in the book the exact dates. At that time, you see, it was rather difficult to get a bachelor as an assistant lighthouse keeper. There were quarters there for a bachelor, but not for a married couple. It finally got so bad that the lighthouse board hired my grandmother as an assistant lighthouse keeper. They thought they'd get along better. I think my grandfather got 800 dollars a year and grandmother 600 dollars. They weren't able to do much in the way of garden or flowers because they had to save all the rainwater. The place had a copper roof. The front yard was all cemented and drained into a cistern.

**EB:** So there was no supply of water other than what you caught or dragged out there? Was there a road leading out there?

**RI:** There was a road leading out there, just a country dirt road. But there was a well over there out where the cement pipe factory used to be. They would haul water from there in carts and barrels.

**EB:** How long did you actually live there? You were born there?

**RI:** I lived there three years.

**EB:** Then I guess it got to the point where they just ceased taking care of the lighthouse because of the schooling for you?

**RI:** At that time they built a new lighthouse down on the end of the point that was below the fog line. The difficulty was, we have so many low-lying fogs here that once in a while a steamer came down from up north grandfather would see her top mast up above the clouds and she was heading for the point all right, but too close in. He would walk out on where the telescope is now at that point and fire a shotgun. Pretty soon there would be a sailor come up to the top of the mast to see where they were. They were under a slow bell, of course. In order to avoid that difficulty, they built the lighthouse down on the point. My grandfather was there about a year or so. Originally, he had been on Ballast Point before he went up on top.

**EB:** So he was the lighthouse keeper for a good number of years.

**RI:** Twenty-one years. He quit because he said it wasn't a steady job. (That's a joke!)

**EB:** At Ballast Point, then, he must have been there when they were actually using Ballast Point for sailing ship ballast.

**RI:** Oh, yes.

**EB:** What type of a procedure was involved? Today, looking at Ballast Point, it doesn't look like anything other than just a spit of sand. But in those days, they actually used the ballast?

**RI:** They used those round boulders. They rowed those out to the ship's hold and used them. The method that they used in those days ... they took all the hides and doubled them over, folded them once. Then they would stack them along the sides of the ship and when they couldn't shove any more hides in then they would go to work and take a wedge and drive all hides in and pack the sides of the ship tight with hides. That is what they called their "book making"! Then in order to make the ship seaworthy, they would ferry out boulders off Ballast Point. There used to be more of it there than there is now.

**EB:** Were these boulders naturally there?

**RI:** Yeah, and they are still there all along the windward side.

**EB:** I assume the ships coming in sometimes would discharge boulders there. It was a two-way thing.

**RI:** No, they would throw them overboard if there was any case like that. But a lot of them when they went back to, say Boston, where they sold most of the hides, they then used the boulders for paving stones. There are several streets in Boston still paved with those San Diego cobblestones.

**EB:** So from your standpoint, it was up on the top of the point that you first got acquainted with San Diego. Now this is at the time when there were still sailing ships coming into San Diego harbor. Having the lighthouse so far up on the point, were there any responsibilities of a lighthouse keeper back in the days of sailing, any signals or any particular responsibilities?

**RI:** Yes. When the lighthouse keeper would spot a sailing vessel coming in and she was flying a pilot flag, grandfather would go out toward the cemetery, just a short distance, and fire a shotgun, usually twice. The pilot would board the pilot boat, usually right in that little cove in the neck of the bight at Ballast Point. Pretty soon there would be a man come out on deck and he would see that grandfather was signaling that there was a ship

offshore. Then he would get the pilot boat, a rowboat, just a wide-hulled skiff about 18 feet long. They then would row out to the ship and bring her in. Usually he would get some payment for that.

**EB:** Back in those days there was no tug of any kind to pull these ships in. So they literally sailed these ships into the harbor. Would they go directly down the entire harbor length to downtown San Diego?

**RI:** They would go down to about the foot of Fifth Street. Most of the stuff was landed there where there were wharves. There was the Santa Fe Wharf and what they called the Oriental Wharf.

**EB:** Our prevailing wind direction can vary back and forth and sometimes would you find wind conditions such where a square-rigged sailing ship couldn't come into the harbor? What would they do? Just wait until the wind was right?

**RI:** Just wait until the wind was right.

**EB:** And if the tide got too strong they would just drop anchor? Is that how it worked?

**RI:** Once in a while if it was perfectly calm and they had the tide with them and no wind, they would put a bunch of men into their pulling boat and tow the ship into the dock.

**EB:** You mentioned the cemetery. Was there actually a cemetery on the point back in those days?

**RI:** Yes.

**EB:** You referred to your grandfather, was it he you stayed with in the lighthouse or was it your parents?

**RI:** The way it happened was, in those days, there weren't any doctors in San Diego. My folks owned a ranch out in Escondido. It was called "Heart's Garden". They were raising apples, hay and grain and honey. There were an awful lot of oak trees on it. They would cut that wood and haul it in by way of Poway. Using a six-horse team they figured they would reach the bottom of the Poway grade at night time. Then they would rest there and start out early in the morning with a fresh team because it was really a stretch to pull several cords of wood over that road. I think they got three and a half dollars a cord for it, cut and stacked on the owner's lot. They didn't make very much money. So when the women in town got ready to have their babies they would come in to Old Town to someone who knew how to help them. In this case my mother went to the lighthouse. I was born there. In the meantime, while they were waiting, the house at the ranch burned down. Instead of going out there and living under a thing called a ramada, in those days, just a shelter made of brush. It took them three years to rebuild the house so I stayed with my grandmother there at the lighthouse.

**EB:** When did your first relatives come to San Diego? How far back was that?

**RI:** In 1849.

**EB:** Did they arrive by ship or across the Panama Isthmus?

**RI:** My grandfather was a veteran of the Mexican War. He belonged to the Pennsylvania Rifles, a bunch of Dutchmen from Pittsburgh. Most of them were country boys and there wasn't a man in the regiment hardly who couldn't knock a squirrel out of a tree with a rifle. They made quite a reputation

for themselves. When the end of the war came, the government didn't have enough money to pay the soldiers off, so they gave them land script. You could pick out 640 acres, I believe it was, anyplace in the United States of government owned land.

There were two brothers who came from Jacksonville to California. The brother named Joe went to Los Angeles and my grandfather Robert never got any further than San Diego. He was a chair maker by trade. During the winter, he spent most of his time around the different farmhouses making chairs and things of that sort that the women folk wanted. He generally slept in the barn, or if they had room enough, he slept in the house in order to keep warm.

He tells some great stories about the amount of applejack that he drank. When he decided to come to California as a hunter for a wagon train, he sent his tools around the Horn in a sailing ship. He started across the country from Jacksonville with this wagon train, hunting meat for them, deer or buffalo, whatever it was. He was about six months or so on the trip. They got in several skirmishes with the Indians. When he arrived in San Diego, his tools hadn't come yet. He took various sorts of jobs. He was a blacksmith for a while; he was a justice of the peace and I don't know what all. The main attraction here of course, he met my grandmother. Her last name was Machado. Her father was one of the sergeants in that group of Spaniards who came up along the edge of the coast from Baja California. They founded the line of missions on the Pacific Coast. I think she was 16 and he was 22 years old when they got married. My grandmother's house is still in Old Town. It is called the Casa de Machado. It is that little chapel right southwest of the park.

**EB:** That was their house when they lived here in Old Town?

**RI:** Yes. That was my great-grandmother's house. By the way, I am giving your wife Betty a fig tree that came from that place. It is out there in the yard.

**EB:** Definitely, it has been slipped and transplanted over the years. That is amazing.

**RI:** It is a Mission fig.

**EB:** In order to bridge the gap between your first interest in boating, we can pickup from when you spent three years in the lighthouse. Then you went back to your parents who had rebuilt the house that burned down. Where was this that they had their home?

**RI:** It was in a place called Hard Scrabble. I've been back there once or twice. It is on the road to Rancho Santa Fe from Escondido. I probably couldn't find the place again now, but I understand that someone has started a tourist camp out there. They call it Israel's Camp.

**EB:** Now was this a town or was it just a locality? It wasn't a formal city or town?

**RI:** No, just a locality. There were a number of ranches around in the different little valleys. There was a family by the name of Davis out there.

**EB:** Where did you go to school out in an area like that? Was it a formal school?

**RI:** Yes, it was a regular school, but it couldn't have been very far away, two or three miles, something like that, because we rode a horse.

**EB:** I guess the big event was when you met your wife? How did that happen and where was that?

**RI:** [Talking to his wife Faith, who was present at the interview.] Now you correct me if I'm wrong, sweetheart. There used to be a pilot here on the bay by the name of Johnson. He had a youngster by the name of Hilton who later became a pilot. Hilton and I used to go sailing together. At that time, I owned a double-ended Monterey. She was yawl-rigged. Both of us were reaching the age where we began to watch for girls.

**EB:** On the waterfront, were there very many around?

**RI:** No.

**EB:** It is hard to find a good crew mate that was a girl.

**RI:** Hilton used to like to sail a little but he didn't care about working on the boat. I enjoyed that as much as sailing, so that very often Hilton would invite a party to go out on the boat. He would get in touch with me -- we only lived a couple of blocks away -- and say "Come on, go along."

**EB:** At this point, were you now living down in the San Diego area, you weren't commuting up to the ranch? Was this as a teenager?

**RI:** No, I lived in Coronado then. Yeah.

**EB:** You were off on your own in other words very early in life.

**RI:** Yes. You see my mother died when I was eight years old and my grandmother took us four kids in. We lived at 12th and K Streets in Coronado. The ranch went kaput. With grandfather's pension, we managed to make out somehow.

**EB:** So when you moved to Coronado, that is when you began to find out about boating as such.

**RI:** Of course I had heard all these stories from my father and my grandfather and my uncles. At one time, my uncles had a little schooner, which carried about five tons. They would go up and down the Baja California coast and bring back seal fins, dried fish, seagull eggs and guano and things of that sort. And had a fairly good time, according to their stories. So there was salt in my blood from the time I started, I guess. Hilton had invited a girl to go sailing. We were to meet at the San Diego Rowing Club at the wharf there.

**EB:** At the same place where it is now? That location hasn't changed over the years.

**RI:** And it hasn't improved much either. I invited a girl who lived close by and Hilton invited Faith. They had met each other at a dance, or something. When I saw her, I wanted her and didn't want the one I had invited.

**EB:** I'll tell you one thing: nothing much has changed over the years.

**RI:** The *Junior* Yacht Club was giving a dance over here on Point Loma at the landing for the Point Loma ferry [at the foot of Talbot St.]. They had begun to have gasoline engines then. The Fortuna was running. You could rent her and come over and dance in the old yacht club building until you got ready to go home when they would pick you up and take you and the orchestra back. I asked Hilton if it was all right if I took Faith out. It seemed to me that Hilton just dropped her, I guess. She was going with another fellow at the same time. We went together about a year and a half and her folks began to think we were serious and told us not to go together again. I was learning the painting trade then and had just completed my five years. I worked for a couple of uncles over in Coronado and then worked at Hotel Del Coronado for about a year. Lyman Gage was building his house up



there at the head of Gage Lane on top of Point Loma. As soon as we had done our work over on Coronado he asked us to come out here and do that Point Loma house. That happened just about the time Faith and I were getting married. Faith and I skipped out one Saturday, got our license and got married. Then we told the folks. It was 1909.

**EB:** Was it a surprise to both sides of the family? Did her parents know that this was going to be happening very shortly, or was it a surprise on both sides?

**RI:** I told my folks of course, because they didn't object. I had already taken her to my home and had gotten an okay. But her folks didn't expect that we were going to run away and get married. We got Rev. Spaulding over in Coronado. I had been going to his church occasionally. We got him to come over to the Nurses' Club at First and Beech Streets that was run by Dr. Ganns. He gave us a room there for as long as we wanted it as a wedding present.

**EB:** How old were the two of you at that time?

**RI:** I was 21 the day after I got married and she was a little bit older.

**EB:** I guess you never had a problem in remembering your anniversary then, did you? You didn't have it planned that way, did you?

**RI:** At that time, I owned two boats when I got married.

**EB:** Incidentally, was Faith a devoted boating enthusiast, or was this something at the time you had to cultivate?

**RI:** I had to teach her, but she was a willing student. Anything in the camping line she goes for, because her father had always gone camping.

**EB:** Had she been brought up in San Diego?

**RI:** No, in Pasadena and the Old Ojai Valley.

**EB:** Just before you met her then, they may have moved down to San Diego.

**RI:** Yeah. She had been in Honolulu, too. She was down there for a number of years. Her father was the manager of a rice plantation down there. They came to San Diego and she was going to Kelsey Jenney College. I was going there, too. You see, I was working as a painter during the day and I had saved up enough money at a dollar a day so that I could pay my tuition at Kelsey Jenney. I did the janitor work there after I got through school, filled ink bottles, swept up and things like that. I was taking a bookkeeping course and she was taking the stenographer's course. We didn't meet each other there, but we did go on a picnic to Coronado; just a college picnic. We have a picture around here someplace of her passing me sandwiches when I didn't know her.

**EB:** You are referring to the Coronado Islands, next to the Mexican Islands? Back in those days, could you go ashore?

**RI:** Yes, we used to go ashore there and we'd land in a great big net skiff, with 15 or 20 kids.

**EB:** Is that where the current hotel is, where the lighthouse people are? Was that cove empty; there were no buildings there?

**RI:** No, there was no building there.

**EB:** During your early years, was San Diego harbor quite populated with sailing craft, like big sailing ships, or was it already in transition to steam?

**RI:** You see they had to bring all the lumber in to build the town in sailing schooners, or square-rigged sailing boats. They had to bring all the coal in. That usually came from England. It took six months or so. Then they would move the cargo by hand or by tackle into barges. A lot of the food had to be shipped in.

**EB:** The residents of Coronado today have a retired Navy-type reputation. What was Coronado like in those days?

**RI:** They had a lumberyard there and a coal yard. The people were mostly working people who worked for Coronado Beach and the Land Corporation.

**EB:** Would people commute across on the ferry very frequently like they do today?

**RI:** No. When you had to go to town [San Diego] it meant quite an expedition. You didn't go to town unless you had to. There were a few grocery stores but nothing in the way of a restaurant or that sort of thing. If you wanted anything you had to go to the hotel [Hotel Del Coronado]. The hotel corporation ran the city council and the water company.

**EB:** It actually was in all essence a separate island. Was the Strand used for anything at all?

**RI:** They had a railroad on it because they built a railroad to bring the lumber around and different supplies they needed. They hired Chinese carpenters to build it. The Coronado Beach Company established a strip of land all the way around the island that they wouldn't sell like putting a street across it. So they had the population throttled as far as expanding was concerned.

**EB:** Wasn't it about this time that the San Diego Yacht Club was housed in that ferry boat and wasn't that kept at Coronado?

**RI:** Yep.

**EB:** And you say it was moved around. Did they very frequently move the yacht club? It sounds strange that they would do that.

**RI:** First the club was at the foot of Hawthorn Street. Then they wanted to build that big fill where the county administration building is on the waterfront. They had to eliminate a lot of that stuff in there. You see, that all used to be part of what they called Dutch Flats.

**EB:** So the yacht club was on a ferry boat moored more or less alongside the area.

**RI:** Yeah, they just drove piles down and fastened the ferry boat in there. Then they had to get out of there on account of that improvement, and they moved it over in front of that old anchor pipeline sign [in Coronado]. So they were there. But in the meantime, Faith and I had gone back to Honolulu.

**EB:** What prompted that? You were all set up in Coronado and you had built up a painting trade and were skilled in that line.

**RI:** It was the Depression. There wasn't anything to do. That was in 1913. There were so many people out of work, or doing any work.

**EB:** Was that Depression almost as bad as the one in 1929-1930?

**RI:** I think it was worse in San Diego. I had a friend who was a telephone lineman. They were laying off men all the time. He told me he just had to have a job to support his family. They offered him a job painting the telephone poles dark green at 25 cents apiece. He would put on his spurs, take his bucket of paint and go up and paint the pole down to where his wife could reach it from the ground. Then she would paint the bottom part of it. We were trading work for groceries or anything we could. I got a chance one time to work at Rudder's Restaurant over on Fourth and Plaza. They couldn't get any mussels and they offered me a dollar a sack for mussels. Vernon and I took our Monterey boat and sailed out around the jetty. When we went ashore, we got six or seven bags of mussels. They had to be sorted too; they wouldn't take them as they came. We landed at the foot of Market Street and got an express van for two bits to haul those six bags of mussels up to Rudder's. About once a month we had an order.

**EB:** That really helped out, didn't it?

**RI:** It really helped out. About the time our first baby was born a year and a half after we were married, they were building the San Diego Gas and Electric Company's power plant where it is now, the foot of Broadway. There used to be a bathhouse in there called Los Banos. They tore the bathhouse down and built the power plant.

**EB:** Was there very much of a demand for a bathhouse back in those days?

**RI:** Yes, because many people didn't have a bathtub in their house.

**EB:** So this was, in other words, a combination of having fun and a necessity.

**RI:** When you couldn't stand yourself anymore, you went swimming.

**EB:** So when you walked in nobody knew whether you had to go there or for camaraderie. Was it for recreational purposes, too, or was it strictly a glorified bathtub? Did people go there like they do today for recreational purposes, a public swimming pool?

**RI:** Yeah. They had pool games there. Vernon happened to be down there one day and he noticed that they were putting up structural steel. He knew it had to be painted, so he struck up for a job. Then he didn't know how to figure it. He got a hold of me and we figured how many days it would take to do it. It had to be done, practically all of it out of bosun chairs. We were putting on a black locomotive enamel. I was working on that when the baby was born. There wasn't any doctor on Coronado. The doctor that we had hired was away on a vacation when Faith begun having trouble. We called his substitute -- there were telephones there. He came across on the ferry, leaving his car on the San Diego side. Then about 3 o'clock in the morning, after the baby arrived, he and I got in the skiff and I rowed him across the bay and landed him there where the restaurant is, the Harbor House, next to the ferry station. He took his car from there. Occasionally, he would come over and see if Faith was all right. He charged me 25 dollars.

**EB:** As a result of the economic problems, that led you to decide to go to Honolulu. That must have been kind of a big decision to make, and I assume this was with a young child, also.

**RI:** Mr. Shellhammer thought it would be a good move as there wasn't anything to do here. We owned our own house there in Coronado. We had bought the lot for 400 dollars. We paid ten dollars down and ten dollars a month. I went over and approached a fellow by the name of Lynch who owned the Benson Lumber Company. I told him my situation that I was just starting out and I needed some lumber. I got a promise that my father-in-law would build it for us. My uncle was going to give us the paint to paint it with. I could do my own plumbing but I needed some lumber. He looked

over the list and said, "All right, son, you go ahead and your lumber will be there tomorrow." So we paid Benson off for about ten dollars a month. When we got ready to leave for Honolulu, I sold the house for 1,200 dollars cash, house and lot. We were only about a half a block from the Jessops. Of course, I had gone to school with the Jessops. Dick Jessop and I had owned a boat together so we were pretty close. We sold both the boats and with some of the extra money that I had, I bought a vacant lot up on Fourth and Palm Streets.

**EB:** This was before you went to Honolulu?

**RI:** Yeah.

**EB:** Was Dick Jessop then in the jewelry business with his family?

**RI:** He was in the jewelry business. Each one of the Jessop boys had to learn a branch of the trade. Joe was the bookkeeper, Dick is the personnel man, George was diamonds and so forth. Jim used to be in engraving and Alonzo was general overseer of some sort. Art of course was the decorator. When we were going to school together, along about half past eleven o'clock, Dick would get up from his seat in school, get on his bicycle, go down to the house and pick up a lunch basket for the rest of the family which was in a little two-by-four store over on B Street, between Fourth and Fifth. I think there is a shoe shine stand there now. They had a big covered basket with a lid that flops up. Then he would get back to school along about half past 1 o'clock.

On Saturdays, his job was to deliver packages around town on his bicycle. Also, he was learning the clock end of the business. They started him in first with the old grandfather's clock with a pan of kerosene and a chicken feather out in the backyard cleaning the clock works. For that he used to get two dollars and a half a week. He used to have to pay for his own stockings and shirts out of that. Later on when he began working regularly in the store he got 15 dollars per week. He had to buy all his own clothes and pay his mother board. While the Jessops made a lot of money, they also knew that money just doesn't grow on trees.

**EB:** It is interesting that the two of you found a common interest in boating, so recreation was that you both spent your time in boating. Was that true?

**RI:** Yeah. The only difference was that when I had any time off, sometimes work was scarce, my uncle would tell me, "Well, kid, I guess you better go fishing." Just joking, you know. I finally took him up on it. I went over to the Union Fish Company and found out that a man by the name of Hacker was running it. He would pay me a cent and a half a pound for dried rock cod or sheepshead. So I loaded up with a few groceries, took my cocker spaniel and away I went out to Coronado Islands. I anchored in what they call the saddle. There were one or two other fellows fishing there. We would go fishing at night, because the sheepshead got better.

**EB:** I imagine the fishing out there in those days was pretty good.

**RI:** It was good. You could catch a hundred pounds of fish in an evening.

**EB:** Were there any people living on the island?

**RI:** No, no one at all. It was barren.

**EB:** You had no power in your boat, was that right?

**RI:** Yes, it was strictly a sailboat.

**EB:** Wasn't it considered somewhat of an adventure in a small boat to go out to the Coronado Islands back in those days? Did people think you were foolhardy to do all that?

**RI:** They thought anybody who went to sea was a chump, anyway, and they still do you know. What we would do in the mornings we would take a hand axe and a big block of wood and we'd split the sheepshead down the back, take the entrails out and leave the head on. Then we would pack a layer of fish and a layer of salt and as the fish compressed, we would have to bail the boat out every day from the salt water. We'd get maybe a ton or a ton and a half, or sometimes two tons, of fish and stay out there for a month. Do our fishing and then start home.

**EB:** So you'd stay there for a whole month to load the boat up?

**RI:** Sure, there was no use coming home, there wasn't anything to do here.

**EB:** There was no refrigeration so there was no fresh fish at all?

**RI:** Not too much. Of course, there were fresh fishermen in the bay. The Italian [Portuguese?] fishermen had 18 to 20-foot oars and they were all moored down there at La Playa.

Then at 2 o'clock in the morning, they would start out rowing and they could scull those boats pretty fast. They got nigger fish in the kelp until the breeze came up. Then they would put the sails up and troll with jigs. The market at that time couldn't take more than a small amount of fish because it all had to be handled fresh. Later on the gang using barracuda dried, the fishermen would bring them in to La Playa and then the Portuguese women would spread them out on the racks, after they cleaned and dried and salted them. They were made up into 100-pound bundles and tied with bailing wire. Then they were shipped to Imperial Valley for use of the Filipinos and Chinese and other nationalities that used fish in their diet.

**EB:** The process you were doing, salting down those fish, you didn't dry them, did you?

**RI:** They were practically dried.

**EB:** You were selling your fish as dried fish?

**RI:** Salted fish. They were more moist than the barracuda.

**EB:** If you were selling somebody a salted fish, what would they do with it?

**RI:** They would soak it in fresh water, maybe twice, and then they would use very little fish, but a lot of potatoes or rice, something like that.

**EB:** But just as a straight dish of fish, it would still be very, very salty.

**RI:** It was something added to the meal, mixed in. It would just be a taster. They still eat that way in Hawaii where they will eat canned whale or something of that sort. They will have a big chunk of rice to go along with it. There would be four or five little pieces of canned whale, maybe an inch or so long, in there just as a little fish taster.

**EB:** So you went off to Honolulu. Was this on a steamship or a sail ship?

**RI:** We went down on the Lurline.

**EB:** So to set the time, when approximately was this?

**RI:** In 1913. I had a brother-in-law there who was manager of the Liberty House there. It was an American factory. In fact, it was about the size of Marston's here. He kept writing to me that they were having some drawings to acquire government owned land. You see the law in Hawaii was that any government land that is leased can be acquired if a number of citizens get together and petition the government they can have it drawn up in homestead lots for a future drawing. Elmer wrote and said that he had a proposition on with the governor that a certain number of white folks could go into the homestead with certain restrictions. They had to build a house, they had to fence it, they had to plant a certain number of trees within a certain number of years, and they had to plow 50 percent of it. At the end of three years, they had to dig a well to develop a water supply. He would give them their choice before the regular drawing would come on. All he wanted was a sampling of American farmers to go in there and show the native Hawaiians and Puerto Ricans and others how farming ought to be done. He thought he had a inside track on it.

Instead of that, after I got down there, he had a job for me with Lord & Young. I went to work for them out at Pearl Harbor for six months. Then they sent me over to Kauai where the drawing was to take place in a new courthouse they were building over there. I was over there for two months. I think that was the only time in our married life that we were separated. So I got a chance to look over the homesteads. Through some mix-up, we got our homestead lots all right. Then afterwards, someone brought a suit and the land commissioner ruled that it was illegal, but still it took a long time before we managed to get it straightened out and had to do so with a moratorium to Congress to legalize our drawing. There were three sisters and we chose 175 acres all together. The lots all cornered on each other so we built our three houses on the corner of each lot. I had 60 acres, my sister-in-law had 40 and my brother-in-law had 76 acres. It depended upon the size of the lots. We were there 15 years. We built a little 20-by-20-foot house. That was on the island of Kauai where Peggy Slater has her house. We were a mile from the Waimea River. There was lots of dove shooting, wild ducks, pheasants.

**EB:** You mentioned your child born in Coronado, did you have more children born in the Hawaiian Islands?

**RI:** Yes, I had a boy born down there 12 years afterwards. The lighthouse sent a man down here, an historian. We went through the same rigmarole as you are doing.

**EB:** My interest is centered around boating activities more than anything else. By the way, when they closed out the *Junior* Yacht Club and that was merged into and combined with the San Diego Yacht Club. Was it the Corinthian Yacht Club and the San Diego Yacht Club that merged?

**RI:** It was known as the Corinthian, yes.

**EB:** When you first knew it, was it known as the Corinthian Yacht Club?

**RI:** No, it was the San Diego Yacht Club.

**EB:** So it had already changed over.

**RI:** I think the first one that was developed was the Corinthian. It was at the foot of Broadway. [Editor's note: SDYC founded 1886; Corinthian 1902; merged 1905.]

**EB:** Actually, then, the San Diego Yacht Club has merged one more time which wasn't too long ago and that is with the *Junior* Yacht Club.

**RI:** The Junior Yacht Club and the Southwestern Yacht Club. [Editor's note: SWYC founded 1925.]

**EB:** They merged with the Southwestern also? [Editor's note: *Junior* YC merged with SDYC in 1911.]

**RI:** They did it in this way. Southwestern was going to have to move and they were financially broke.

**EB:** Where was the Southwestern?

**RI:** That was about where the *Star of India* is moored now, along that waterfront there, as I remember it. I didn't have anything to do with it. Bill Phillips was commodore at that time [he was in 1933] and it sounded like a good deal to be offered the San Diego Yacht Club membership. There were a few diehards, like Graham Shand and some of those fellows who didn't want anything to do with the San Diego Yacht Club. They wanted to run their own little show, and so they did. Eventually, they survived and came over to Point Loma [La Playa].

[Editor's note: In 1934, SDYC offered to merge with SWYC. By one vote, SWYC turned down the offer!]

**EB:** So the Southwestern Yacht Club did continue with just a very few members, but finally built themselves back up again. You mentioned that there used to be dances over here, 1903 and beyond on the point when they had the ferry boat. There was a yacht club out on Point Loma that we called the Point Loma Outstation. Did that yacht club survive? What happened to it?

**RI:** The building is still there. It is down next to Elmer Small's, that little green up and down board house there with wire screens on it, screened in from the port. It used to be our auxiliary clubhouse for the San Diego Yacht Club [an outstation]. It was a part of the San Diego Yacht Club. Someone either gave it to them, or wished it on them, or something, I don't know which. But of course you couldn't come up into the slough where the present yacht club is, except there was a little channel where you'd go outside. [Editor's note: That clubhouse was built in 1903 for SDYC.]

**EB:** Back in those days there wasn't what we have today like slips. All the boats were moored on anchors or on a mooring can. From the standpoint of winter storms with the entire bay expanse, you didn't have any protection.

**RI:** No, not at all.

**EB:** Was it very frequent that these boats got washed ashore?

**RI:** Usually every storm.

**EB:** When you mentioned that the San Diego Yacht Club was along the San Diego harbor side of the bay, not over at Coronado, that meant that a south windstorm would develop and come right down on all those boats ... [ran out of tape].

***END OF INTERVIEW***

