



ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

An interview with
Lawrence (Larry) D. Canepa, 1910-1996

June 11, 1988



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PREFACE

LARRY CANEPA came to San Diego in 1923. At that time he was the thirteen-year-old son in a fisherman family that had migrated from Italy. The family had settled down in San Francisco, where Larry was born, but decided to move southward to San Diego.

Larry left school after completion of the eight grade and started fishing with his father. At that time fishing was based in local coastal waters for halibut, sea bass, and barracuda. This was sold to the local markets - Chesapeake Fish Company, Union Fish Company, Peoples Fish Company and others. There was no sports fishing industry or tuna fleet.

Mr. Canepa is able to describe the changes that occurred in the fishing industry for the next half century because he was personally involved. He presents an interesting story and makes a valuable contribution to local historical knowledge.

Thomas E. Walt, Editor
February 9, 1993

INTERVIEWER'S NOTE

This is an oral interview with Mr. Larry Canepa. He goes back to the early fishing in 1923 out of San Diego.

BOB WRIGHT: Mr. Canepa, you also go by a nickname, Cujo?

LARRY CANEPA: Right. In Italian that's cousin. The old timers, they're all gone now, that I knew as a boy that came from the old country. They all fished here in San Diego for years. And a lot of them called one another that back and forth.

BW: Now your formal name is ...

LC: Lawrence Canepa.

BW: And where were you born?

LC: I was born in Frisco.

BW: When?

LC: 1910, February the 18th.

BW: Are you of Italian extraction?

LC: Yes. Both my dad and mom came from the old country. They fished out of Frisco and they used to gill net in Frisco Bay for ...

BW: That goes way back. That's illegal now, of course.

LC: Oh, yeah. They used to fish for striped bass and stuff like that and they used to, if I'm not mistaken, from the stories my dad told me, they used to get ducks that way, too, and sell them.

BW: Why did they come to the States?

LC: Why? Because, well in those days, more than it is today I think, Italy wasn't a very rich country. They were very poor people, you know. They weren't wealthy. And they all came here and all started in the commercial fishing. And in those days, my friend, you never saw no strikes or no (requests to) the government for help or this or that. They all came over here and in a few years they all had their own boats, paid for them, went out

and worked, and you never heard a word from them. That's the way the foreign people were in those days. They were glad to be over here to work and they all managed to make a living.

BW: That's more than what the people that are born here do

LC: Oh, you ain't kidding. The people are -- it's hard to describe them. They were, in other words, each one of them was a character in himself. They were so different from the average person you meet today. In other words, they come from a foreign country and they lived here in San Diego on the waterfront. They had their own little community.

BW: Where was the community at?

LC: Right down here at the waterfront just a little bit over from the Administration building on the Embarcadero. Just off the side there. All they had in those days were little docks built on railroad rails, you know, the steel rails, little wooden docks where they'd tie up their boats and things.

BW: When did you folks come down from San Francisco?

LC: Well, I was born in 1910. I must have been six or seven years old. It had to be around 1917, 1916, something like that, because I was just a little guy, you know.

BW: Your father didn't get drafted or anything?

LC: No.

BW: World War I was on.

LC: No, he never did that I know of. I was just a boy. In other words, I was -- let's see, the last war started in 1917, was it?

BW: Well, it started earlier, but the Americans didn't get into it until 1917.

LC: Well, of course, dad by that time had -- what, two or three kids, I guess.

BW: So when did they come to San Diego?

LC: I can't remember the day exactly because ...

BW: Why?

LC: Well, they -- I think they figured this was a better place to make a living commercially.

BW: Did they know somebody down here?

LC: Oh, they may have. I couldn't tell you that because like I said I was just a little kid at the time. I just wondered if they talked about it later on.

LC: They had some old stories they used to tell about when they were kids in the old country, you know, and all that, but I don't remember too many of them. Dad used -- they were wonderful people, in other words, they never, they -- you know what those people did? They raised a family; they worked for their family; this was all that counted to them was their kids and their family. Not like today where everybody wants to drink and party all the time. They didn't have any of that. All they did was work and spend the time with their kids and stuff and everything. They were a different type of people than you have today.

BW: Well, if your father went fishing out of here, what kind of fishing did he do, do you know?

LC: Well, we fished for halibut, sea bass, nice big white sea bass, and barracuda. All gill netting.

BW: Gill netting out of here?

LC: Yeah, out of San Diego, sure. In those days, all you had to do was go around Point Loma towards the Coronado, outside Coronado hotel there and down towards Imperial Beach, and all over. And, of course, you went up to La Jolla and all over up and down the coast, but in those days fish was abundant around here. All you wanted. Not like today.

BW: And did you sell your fish to the canneries?

LC: To the fish markets. That was all fresh fish. Now you see, it's all gone. There's not much of it. There's some around. Most of it is being used by the sport fisherman. You have a big sport fishing boat fleet here, a big one.

BW: Do you remember the names of some of the fish markets that you sold the fish to?

LC: Yes. I would say Chesapeake Fish Company, Union Fish Company -- just a minute.

BW: Peoples Fish Company.

LC: Peoples Fish Company owned by -- was that Bregante or -- I think it was Begante or Ghio. Ghio was still -- the one that has all the big beautiful fish eating places here in San Diego. [Interviewer's note: Peoples Fish Company was not owned by either Ghio or Bregante. Bregante Seafood was owned by Anthony Bregante, Catherine Ghio's brother. The Ghios later bought Star Seafood after the restaurants were successful (circa 1950s-1960s).]

BW: Yeah, I interviewed Mrs. Ghio. She was telling me about her father having his fish company and she'd work there selling the fish and then she started understanding the structure of fish, so she could cook it.

LC: She's quite a woman, isn't she?

BW: Oh, a fantastic woman.

LC: She was always real friends with my folks 'cause they were all around that same area at that time, you know.

BW: Yeah. As soon as you were able to, you went fishing with your dad then?

LC: Oh, yeah. I was born right into it because, in other words, when you're a boy 15 or 16 years old or even younger, 13 or 14 and your dad's got -- see they had boats from 38, 40 to 50 footers in those days; those were the biggest boats you had in the bay and they were commercial all for fresh fish, strictly all fresh fish.

BW: Fresh saltwater fish.

LC: Yes. All gill netting. And the fish in those days was abundant around here.

BW: Was there a name of the type of boats -- I know there was -- a Monterey was a type of boat?

LC: Well, course it's too bad they don't have old pictures. Boy, that would be nice to have, but they were, they weren't Monterey boats. They were regular -- they were beautiful boats. These fellows took pride in their boats. They were clean, spotless, and taken beautiful care of. Those boats had what you would call the main engine, the driving engine, and the boat had a hole, a fish hole 'cause they went on extended trips down into Mexico, too, in those days, for gill netting down there. And they carried crushed ice with 'em. Not refrigeration -- crushed ice where they'd pack the fish in the bins and the crushed ice and about once -- they'd make trips down there from say a week to almost two weeks if it was slow fishing. When it was good they'd be back in a week and bring in 15 to 20 thousand pounds of fresh fish. All packed in the ice.

BW: I assume you went to school.

LC: Washington School. Maybe you've heard of it?

BW: Oh, yeah.

LC: The big beautiful -- looked like the Capitol building with those big pillars and everything. Yeah, all us kids went to Washington School there on State Street.

BW: I assume you graduated from there?

LC: Yeah, we graduated and went to Roosevelt Junior High School from there. But I only went one year through the 8th grade cause I was already working with my dad, see. In those days the type of people that we were, they -- you know, we weren't wealthy people. We made a good living; we lived, we didn't go hungry, but we were strictly on the waterfront and we knew what was going on in our community there. But we didn't know too much of what was going on further in town or different parts of the country or anything 'bause we were busy working making a living. That's all we did in those days.

BW: What was it like at the waterfront? Was the Civic Center there?

LC: Oh, no. You know all your Civic Center and all of Ryan, the whole waterfront beginning from the Broadway pier north into this curve up here out towards Point Loma, there was nothing. There was sand dunes. You know, it's hard to picture.

BW: There were sand bars there?

LC: Well, the sand bars were out in the water. But sand dunes also all the way up to Santa Fe Railroad tracks where they still are today. From there down there was nothing. Just sand dunes. There was a few scattered, one or two houses down there, but believe me, it was very few.

BW: Any shipyards down there too?

LC: Well, there was not shipyards along there at all. There was one or two little yards where my dad and the rest of all took care of their boats in there -- little docks built on railroad rails. And that's where they had little drydocks. Of course, the boats in those days were all 4550 footers (and they) were the biggest ones. There was nothing like you see today in a tuna fleet or anything like that. Just all small boats.

BW: So you could haul them and work on them then?

LC: Right. Just little yards, pull them up on rails, you know, out of the water and work on them. In other words, it's such a different picture it's hard (for) people that have never lived through it to visualize it at all, you just can't. Just a few of the little old rail docks, you know, wood and all that and the picture was almost like an antique picture down around the waterfront. And us kids used to borrow our dads' row boats and stuff and roam around the bay there and everything and chase ducks with them. We learned to row at an early age you know with these.

BW: You learned to swim at an early age?

LC: Oh, yeah. We learned to swim in the bay. I got to be a regular fish. I was exceptionally good, really. I was terrific in the water. I could do any damn thing in the water. I was like a darn fish.

BW: Can you remember when they brought in the Star of India then, too?

LC: Oh well, that's -- the Star of India -- we never seen it around here until they brought it down here as a museum piece or whatever you want to call it. That was years later. It was sailing out of Frisco, matter of fact.

BW: In other words, you were around the bay before the Star of India came in which was 1926, I'm thinking about that area before that was B Street pier there?

LC: No, that was built, not at that time. I forget exactly what year that was, but all you had was the Broadway pier. There was no Navy pier, no -- none of that extended mole that they have there now, where the Tuna Boat Association is and all that. There was a coal bunker there, a big old wooden dock where the ship used to go in and take coal.

BW: Was that south of the Broadway pier?

LC: Yes, that's south of Broadway pier.

BW: Down where G Street mole was?

LC: Right, right around there, yeah. In fact ...

BW: I understand that what changed the waterfront, the city or the port authority, or whoever it was, put a sea wall in down towards where Solar is now.

LC: Yeah, right.

BW: They put a sea wall ...

LC: All along the whole front there. The only thing that was there at the time, all through the years since I was a boy, was the Embarcadero. Although it's been repaired and rebuilt, but that's been there all the time from Broadway all the way up to the very north end of ...

BW: The Coast Guard, isn't it?

LC: Well, don't -- not quite that far. It ended the old pier there, it ended just off the north end of the Administration building, or whatever you want to call it there. The north end there.

BW: I've seen pictures of a sea wall put in there and I think they dredged the bay behind it.

LC: Yeah, right.

BW: That's what made what we call the Embarcadero now. But before that you could come in off the railroad tracks and go swimming.

LC: Oh, yeah. We used to swim all over here around the bay. In those days you could 'cause it wasn't polluted; it was just like out in the ocean. See, there was nothing. There was no factories, no anything. We used to fish sharks off the Embarcadero and get five, six foot sharks and great big stingrays and stuff just for the fun of it, we'd fish 'em. Sinkers on our line and we swing it around and cast it way out there and believe me there was a lot of them. We used to catch a lot of them in the bay at that time.

BW: They didn't bother you when you went swimming?

LC: No, they never did

BW: I understand that the cannery -- there was a cannery down there.

LC: Right at the north end from the Administration building now. Used to curve to go around there. There used to be four canneries years ago. Talking about way back, you know. When I was a kid.

BW: Now this was back in the mid-twenties

LC: Mid-twenties? Maybe the canneries were even -- let's see they were there when I was -- that would be when I was seven or eight years old, I guess. The canneries were already there then. They used to pack sardines. Canned sardines. They used to get a lot of them out here. The big ovals and the small little square cans in oil and stuff. They used to pack all those sardines and things.

BW: Was that the -- the name of that cannery?

LC: The first cannery here to the north, the very first one was the Neptune. Then there was the Pompeii. That was changed over later on -- it was -- it had gone out of business and it was replaced by the name of Del Monte had it, then later on, but it had a different name.

BW: Sunkist?

LC: No, it wasn't Sunkist. Oh, my God. Then there was the Steele ...

BW: Steel?

LC: Steele -- S T E E L E if I remember right.

BW: That was the name of the cannery, huh?

LC: Yeah, Steele Cannery. When I was a kid or young boy at the time, already it was shut down. It wasn't operating, but the very last one to the west of that corner there that goes around where they've got all the yachting boats and everything in that corner, was the Westgate Cannery. The original Westgate. That one stayed there for quite a few years. A long time after when I grew up and everything, they were still operating.

BW: When I came to San Diego.

LC: Old man Ambrose.

BW: Ambrose. When I came to San Diego in 1941, I can remember that cannery down there.

LC: Yeah, they were still there, if I remember right, at that time. Yeah, 1941. Yeah, they were still around there. Then, as San Diego developed and everything, you tore down one place and built in another one and changed it around you know. You got to remember that in those days the whole waterfront around there it stopped at the end of the Embarcadero there. And the Embarcadero still ends in the same place, but then you got all the rest built up here.

BW: You mean like'in the Laurel Street where that anchor is?

LC: Yeah, right. Used to have a little anchorage there for all the little boats you had in those days. They were anywhere from 30 to 40 to 50 foot boats. There were no big ones. And this whole corner going all the way out to Point Loma, the whole north end of the bay was nothing but mud flats and tules. There was no Shelter Island, no Coast Guard, no Harbor Island.

BW: No airport?

LC: No airport, no nothing. All it was, was shallow water and at high tide it would fill up and be maybe four, five, six foot of water and then at low tide there for yards and miles all the way out to Point Loma in that corner it was all mud flats. And you had just south of the Marine Base was a big tule. You know, these tules that grow in the salt water? A big area, I don't know how many acres. Us kids used to row out there and there was two or three channels through the tules where we'd row through with our dads' row boats that they had for commercial fishing used them. And we used to go out there and row through these channels and stuff and we'd get more clams than we ever wanted in those channels. And we'd wade in them. They were about this deep at low water.

BW: About 18 inches?

LC: Yeah. And we'd wade in them and just reach down and pick up the clams. Get all the darn clams that we wanted in those days. But in other words, all of Lindbergh Field, all of it was mud flats. They dug out the channel in the harbor and made it wider and bigger for bigger ships and dumped all the dredging mud and stuff out and filled all -- Lindbergh Field's all filling. Water used to go clear up to the old Marine Base. Can you imagine that. That's why I tell you it's so hard to picture those things. They might have some old pictures down in ...

BW: The Historical Society.

LC: Historical, or down maybe at the ...

BW: Maritime Museum?

LC: Well, those places, too, but down at the administration part of San Diego. Ancient pictures, you know.

BW: Most of them are at the Historical Society. They've got a tremendous photo lab place there.

LC: I'd like to see some of those myself 'cause they bring back memories to me. See, 'cause I lived here, you got to remember that's talking about 65-70 years ago. Not a day.

BW: When you went fishing with your dad, did he own the boat?

LC: Yes. That was his boat at the time.

BW: Usually fellas -- families had their boats didn't they?

LC: Yeah, well, it was dad's boat. Belonged to the family in other words, but there was maybe -- might have been maybe a dozen of 35, 40, 50 foot boats. All these gentlemen came from the old country and gradually made enough to build their own -- have their boats built and everything. They used to go out and do a lot of gillnetting all with gill nets. On the bottom for halibut, in the kelp beds for the white sea bass, and outside a little ways for the barracuda and stuff like that. But in those days when you set the barracuda nets you came in every morning with a whole side full of barracuda, mackerel, bonita, and an occasional sea bass would get caught in the nets out there.

BW: Barracuda was a tough fish to handle, wasn't it?

LC: No, really wasn't. This type of barracuda is different from the barracuda you read about -- you know, like in Florida, those are -- will attack. That's a different type of barracuda altogether.

BW: Did you get paid very much for these fish?

LC: Well, we used to get in those days the price range would go as high as 20 cents a pound sometimes.

BW: That was big money.

LC: Oh, that's when you made money, but it'd go down to two or three cents a pound when you brought in an abundance of it. There was a lot of it; the markets would cut the price way down. See, in those days all the fish was taken care of and gutted and fileted and everything here in the markets. Now they get 90% of all their seafood all packaged and frozen ready to sell from different countries all over the world.

BW: That's why the fishing industry has gone to pot here. Did you guys have to do your own gutting and ... ?

LC: No, what we did was gut them.

BW: You gut them?

LC: Gill 'em. Yeah, we'd gill 'em and gut 'em. Wash 'em out nice and clean and we'd pack 'em in crushed ice

BW: Gilling -- what does that mean? Cut the head off?

LC: No, we didn't cut the heads off. We took -- they have their gill -- they breathe through in the water. You gut that out -- it's connected to the stomach with all the guts and everything. We'd take that all out, wash 'em out nice and clean. In other words, they'd have nothing when we brought them in -- there was nothing but the hollow shell of the head and the stomach. And there was nothing in it.

BW: You'd clean them coming in then?

LC: Yeah, we'd clean 'em out there before, pack them in crushed ice.

BW: And maybe you'd get 20 cents or 2 cents?

LC: It used to be markets, you see where the big Naval building, Supply building is, and everything. Used to be a string of markets there about -- there was about seven or eight of them, I guess -- Union Fish Company, Peoples Fish Company, Chesapeake Fish Company.

BW: You named them before, but I'm just curious, did you deal with just one fish company?

LC: No. When we'd come in with a load of fish, well a lot of times they had one guy that would manage it, you know. They always try to get the price down. He'd talk for the rest of them, you know.

BW: Oh, is that the way it worked?

LC: Yeah, he'd talk for the rest of them, then they'd work together and get so much apiece off a boat when they came off, so they'd all get some, you know.

BW: I thought maybe each fish company would ...

LC: They didn't bid against each other. No, they worked together.

BW: Screw the fisherman, huh?

LC: Oh, yeah, that went on for years and years. I remember when I was a young guy I even threatened them. The guy, who was it, the Chesapeake Fish Company. I was in my medium teens and the price would go from 10 cents a pound down to three, four cents a pound. God, you'd lose all your profits. You wouldn't make nothing. And I threatened him one time to throw him overboard off the dock. And he says, "You can't do that!" And I says, "The hell I can't. I'll do it right now for you if you want me to." I always remember that. Oh, God, I was mad. Gee, they used -- it was nothing to take six, seven, or eight cents off the price of the fish when you come in. Just drop it down to nothing. Then they'd make a big profit on it, naturally, you know. Those markets were facing the bay right there where the big Naval Supply Depot was there -- right in that corner there.

BW: Then people from town would come down and buy a lot of fish?

LC: A lot of people used to -- as a matter of fact, Ghio's had a fish market and a cocktail seafood cocktail bar right there, right on Broadway going down towards the Broadway pier. About -- right there about where the big building is now facing on Broadway. They were, not the building. There was none -- that building wasn't there in those days.

BW: You mean down by the railroad station?

LC: Right, and they had a cocktail bar and that's where the Bregante's started with their seafood market there. They didn't only have the bar, but they also had the wholesale part of the market and everything. They used to buy a lot of fish.

BW: Couldn't people from town come down and buy fish right off the boat?

LC: Yeah, they used to come down sometimes. A few people

BW: Seems to me that if I wanted a fish I'd go down and I'd give you 20 cents a pound and take the fish and go home.

LC: Yeah, well, we'd sell some to a few people. I don't know why there wasn't more, but in those days the fish wasn't -- seafood wasn't as popular as it is today. They found out what could be done and how enjoyable and good food and they commercialize -- sell tons and tons of it. In those days they didn't sell that heavy. A lot of people didn't even know what a fish was for God's sake. They didn't.

BW: Yeah, that was a steak and potatoes society.

LC: Yeah, that's right. They didn't know too much about seafood.

BW: Well, that's why we have so many heart attacks

LC: Maybe so, might be.

BW: How long did your father fish then?

LC: Oh, my father fished till he was almost in his 70s. That would be way back in about 1941, 1942.

BW: Were there other fishermen like Japanese, Chinese?

LC: We never had a lot of Japanese in San Diego at that time. We had some and the only type of fishing they did was during what they called the albacore season here in San Diego in the summer. They used to go out fish albacore which is the white meat tuna.

BW: And it's sort of the delicacy?

LC: Oh yeah, that's delicious, very good. That's not only good for canning, you could cook it, fix it different ways. The meat is so white like chicken breast. Very good.

BW: But the Japanese fish more for that than anything else?

LC: Yeah. Van Camp cannery down there almost in the same place where it is now used to have docks and places for the Japanese where they'd live in them right on the dock. Japanese people. And all they'd fish for was their main fishing was during the albacore season.

BW: Otherwise, forget it, huh?

LC: Otherwise they didn't do much as far as I can remember.

BW: Was there any rivalry between the Portuguese and the Italians here in town?

LC: Not much. Might have been a lot of friendly rivalry, you know. You always got along -- see they were across the bay over there.

BW: Over where?

LC: Well, where all your sport fishing boats are now. Roseville, La Playa. Of course, in those days down there it was like living on the ocean front. There was nothing. All of Point Loma was sagebrush. It wasn't like it is today.

BW: You should have been buying property while you were down there.

LC: Yeah, I guess so, but we weren't -- we didn't know too much of what was going on in those days, you know. In other words, I went to junior high school only for a year and then -- it was hard to make a living in those days and as soon as I was big enough and old enough I went out with my dad on his boat.

BW: Did you -- when you got older like say 20, did you leave your father's -- fishing with your father and go with the bigger boats?

LC: Yes, because at that time the tuna fleet started to get into the show, you know. They started bringing in tuna and it started building up more and more and then Campbell shipyard at that time started to build all the big wooden tuna hulls, not steel. All wooden hulls -- when we used to go out with those big wooden hulls and fish with the poles. And we used to ice the tuna down -- pack it in crushed ice. So you can imagine that job when you got 25 or 30 ton of tuna. The whole deck full on them big boats. We used to have to go down the ice hole and chop the chopped ice and pack it in bins -- iced tuna.

BW: Did you make your own ice on board, or ...

LC: No, no. Lawrence Oliver -- Portuguese gentleman -- hell of a nice man, very good, real gentleman. He had docks that took the big blocks and crushed them and went down the tube into the ice holes.

BW: So you'd pull up to the dock and then get iced down?

LC: Yeah. Then you'd get them iced down -- crushed -- fill the hole with crushed ice. Then when you went down to fish for tuna you had to have choppers, 'cause after a certain length of time it'd get a little hard -- it'd stick together. If you chopped it up and packed the tuna in bins down in the -- them boats were, well, the Queen Mary and the Normandy were two of the biggest boats they ever built for tuna with the poles. And they were 425 ton boats. All iced tuna. And then later on they developed the brine system like they have today and they put them in cold brine. They had problems with that for a while till they got to where they knew how to use it, how to operate it. You had to put so much salt -- in other words, the colder you want it, the more salt you had to put into it, otherwise the water would freeze and you had agitating pumps that would take the water from the bottom, pump it and dump it on the top and it would circulate the water. Freeze the fish as hard as a rock.

BW: Was this salt water they were ... ?

LC: Ocean water.

BW: Ocean water and then they added salt to it?

LC: Add more salt 'cause if you -- in other words, the colder you wanted it, the more salt you added to it to keep it from freezing.

BW: Did you always go just as a fisherman; you never went as skipper?

LC: No, [in later] years I was skipper. I run a few of the boats.

BW: How did you like being on the other side where you were skipper?

LC: Well, I was pretty ambitious. I was young. I didn't mind it at all because I didn't like the way some of the skippers operated their boats. I wanted to do it my way which I thought was better.

BW: Well, what was the difference between them? What would the other guys do?

LC: Well, their system of operation and the way they treated their crew and so on and so forth. Some of them were pretty rugged guys to work for, you know. You didn't have -- if you didn't put out in those days there was no union or nothing. You had to put out work and you had a job. If you didn't work hard you didn't last on the boat whichever one you happened to be on. You was fired. You was replaced by someone else.

BW: I would assume who determined what was working hard is what the skipper thought.

LC: The skipper, right.

BW: Well, that could be difficult because he could be asking more than ...

LC: Oh, he could like somebody better and so on and so forth, as far as that goes ... get along better with them. You could be out, but all my years of fishing I never in my life ever went begging for a job. A matter of fact, a lot of the men in my time used -- if I was out of a job temporarily for some reason or other, I was always called at home or anywheres. I always had a job, in other words. But I was a tiger. I realize now that I was -- I could do more work than the average guy, you know.

BW: Well, you took pride in what you were doing.

LC: That's what kept me on the job. In other words, I could outshine the other guy any time. Was no problem.

BW: Did that mean that you could pull more fish in?

LC: I could pull more fish, a bigger fish. All of that. Why if anybody don't wanna believe this, maybe you could meet some other old timers if they're still around, they'll back up that reputation.

BW: You know, you were -- I know about the single pole, double pole, three pole ...

LC: Yeah, right.

BW: And that's a tough job.

LC: Oh well, you'd pitch 25, 30, or 40 ton a day with the poles. You know how many times you got to work them poles up and down before you get that much fish. And in those days we did it all -- passed them all by hand. We didn't have even shoots to slide 'em forward to get 'em down below and all to pick 'em up off the deck and slide them forward to get 'em up there where we could put them in the ice hole. Of course, all that was gradually developed, you know. We had chutes developed (for) the brine where you didn't have to go in the ice hole. We used to go down in the ice hole for four or five hours icing down all the big catch of tuna all over on deck.

BW: That's after catching them?

LC: After catching them -- right.

BW: It's a wonder you guys didn't come down sick.

LC: I don't know. It seemed like we never did. We were, I guess we were pretty tough class of characters in those days. Well, we didn't know anything different. It wasn't done any different. This is the way it was done. We accepted it. And we earned -- we did earn a good living when the tuna industry started to develop. We made a good living at it.

BW: When the canneries took over?

LC: Yeah, the canneries started operating, packing a lot of tuna, and it got popular and the public in the United States, you know. We earned a good living. We had through the years like up until today there's been some up and down movements for some reason or another, but it always come back and you'd be back to making a good living again. You'd go through spells once in a while, either the market or something was wrong and then you wouldn't sell much. Price would go down.

BW: You fished most of this fish, a lot of this fishing you were doing during the 1930s then, I take it.

LC: Yeah, a lot of that, yeah, in the 1930s.

BW: How did the Depression affect you?

LC: Well, if I remember right, during the Depression we was still working pretty steady in the tuna industry. I can't remember exactly day-for-day, but I remember we had some -- the real bad time we had in the tuna industry was in the end of World War II when the Japanese moved in.

BW: Oh, you mean they started shipping?

LC: Yeah, they started shipping a lot of tuna in here and competition with us and it -- the price stayed pretty low, you know. We didn't earn quite as much money.

BW: Is that when the purse seiners started up?

LC: That was when it got real bad. Then they started the purse seiners and they started -- in other words, what they did when they first got the purse seiners, the price of tuna still wasn't very high, but we caught more quicker. Brought in bigger loads in a shorter time. That made up for the difference in price. In other words, we were delivering more tonnage in a shorter period of time to earn that money. And, then, as they developed the big modern seiners and all that stuff, why we got -- we were good at it. To be honest with you, when we first built the seiners, why this was new to us. They used to have seiners up in San Pedro up there that they fished -- lot of fresh fish and all kinds of fish, but they weren't that big although they did fish tuna a few months of the year down south around lower California. But San Diego developed the big seiners. They saw how successful it was and they kept making them bigger and bigger and bigger until they got boats like they have today.

BW: You can go out and travel further.

LC: Oh, thousands of miles all the way down into South America and thousands of miles out at sea. All over the whole coast -- we took over the whole coast down there. All from Mexico down to -- well, I took a boat down -- I made, I think it was three trips at different intervals down to Chile. That's 4100 miles from here.

BW: Gee, one way?

LC: One way, right. That's right. We went down there and we went down there with bait boats. Had the bait boats yet.

BW: Oh yeah?

LC: Yeah. And I seen -- Chile was sort of -- they'd be there and they wouldn't be there for some reason

BW: You mean the fish would be there?

LC: The fish, yeah. In other words, at times looked like there was full of them, and at other times there wasn't very much, you know. Didn't show much.

BW: There's no way to tell the seasons.

LC: Well, the season I think down there was just in reverse of what it is here. In other words, the summer season down in Chile is when the fish would show up, which would be in the wintertime here.

BW: I'm about ready to turn this tape over here. I think I will ... One of the things I want to ask you before we skip over it, I don't want to skip over it, is when the war started there was a sizable fleet here. Were you involved with ... ?

LC: No. Let's see, at that time I was married and I had only one child, my daughter. She was just a little girl at the time and I was skipper of one of the boats.

BW: Do you remember the name of it?

LC: Oh, let's see; what boat would that be at that time?

BW: Name some of the boats you've been on anyway.

LC: Yeah, well the boats I've been on would be the -- just a second. I run it for about a year and a half -- was the Sun Europa. And after that I worked on a lot of them, but the bait boats was the Invader, the Sun Hawk or the Sun Venus bait boat. The -- sure, go ahead, ask ...

BW: I know what a pole fishing boat is, I know what a purse seiner is, what's a bait boat?

LC: It's a pole fishing boat. They call it a bait boat 'cause you carry loads of live bait on it. Tanks of live bait to chum the fish up.

BW: And a purse seiner doesn't?

LC: No, the purse seiner doesn't do that at all. They have ...

BW: They don't chum at all?

LC: No, they have those high masts and now they have choppers that they spot schools of fish and then they ...

BW: So they don't need to chum at all?

LC: No, they don't chum at all. They just put that big net around them. Trap them.

BW: So it's a bait boat. Now I know what a bait boat is. That when you pull up to a school of fish ...

LC: Chum.

BW: You chum so that you can bring them in?

LC: Bring them into the boat and they start biting and then you pull them in.

BW: On a pole?

LC: Right.

BW: Okay, now I understand. Can you remember any more, any other ships you ...

LC: Oh, let's see. I run the Sun Glow was one of them. The -- I had my own boat -- I had an interest in for seven or eight years was the Sun Streak. It was an 85 ton modern boat. Not one of the real big ones, but that was a beautiful boat. It had that good machinery and everything. It cost me a lot of money, but ...

BW: I hope it made you some money

LC: Well, it did, but I put a lot of money back into it. And about the time I was getting on my feet I was in partnership with Sun Harbor Cannery which was operating down here at the time. They went out of business so they gave me the squeeze. And I had to go to court and every darn thing else to save my last few dollars.

BW: Wow. Getting back to World War II, did you keep on fishing?

LC: Oh, yes. They took some of the boats 'cause, as you know the story the Navy was -- in other words, we let our Navy go to pieces. An inadequate Navy for a war 'cause we were peaceful people and we weren't looking for war, but it happened and then we had to fight so they took the best of the tuna boats. The bigger ones and the good ones and used them. They came in handy 'cause they had refrigeration and wells, and they used to carry gas and supplies, food, meat and everything 'cause they had all the machinery necessary to carry that stuff. They had them all down in the south Pacific in those islands delivering to the different outposts down there that were fighting during the war. A lot of them got shot out of the water. They only had small guns on them, you know. The Japanese destroyers picked them off like wooden ducks, you know. Lost a few of them.

BW: You weren't part of that then?

LC: No, I kept operating. They didn't bother me at the time I was married to my first wife, and I had the little girl and my wife and I talked it over. Then I told her, "Well, I'll just keep working. If they call me I'm not going to have a thing to say because I'm not any better than the rest of the kids that's out there. I'm not as young." I was already in my thirties then. And so they didn't actually bother me too much although they had all my cards that you carried in those days, being the skipper and all that and delivering tuna which was food at that time. They used a lot of it during the war, canned tuna. They could ship it over there, you know, and use it.

BW: So you were more important being a skipper on a fishing boat?

LC: Right. That's what they considered me anyway. Of course, as the war developed later on, or right after the war, they started to build more and more boats and there was more and more demand for it and lot of the guys had the money to back up a boat or a new boat. They made big money at it -- the tuna industry.

BW: Did you find it very difficult to make the transition from a big boat to a purse seiner?

LC: Not really. There was a few things we had to learn, believe me it's a lot different. A great big seiner net, the cables, and big winches and all this stuff, and you had to -- a lot of the boys got hurt pretty bad.

BW: I would think that's what would happen

LC: Yeah, they did. A lot -- well, some got killed and some got a foot or a leg busted off. You know, there was quite a few injuries. And, of course, after the war they got to where they knew more what they were doing and everything. And then this type of big seining was never done in the history of the fishing industry. This was developed here in San Diego. This is where they started to build all those big steel seiners. Hey, boy, when you're pulling that big net in and that cable, and that big hydraulic winch pulling it in, you'd better be out of the way when something lets go 'cause if you are [in the way] you get mangled. A lot of the boys were hurt pretty bad.

BW: I can imagine. Well, [was there a] difference in handling a steel boat versus the wooden ones?

LC: Yes. Sure there's a difference.

BW: What was the difference between those?

LC: The difference was in their buoyancy, capacity. In other words, you see those old wooden boats, we used to load them down when we had bait tanks and everything. We used to load them down where the back part of the boat, the lower deck where you fish was under water a lot of times coming back. Yeah, a foot or two of water on deck. But the boat, the wooden boat has a buoyancy. Now the steel boats, matter of fact, they lost a few if I remember right now. When they first started to build them they had trouble with them. They capsized and sunk them and everything else because they weren't used to using a steel hull. A steel hull you only got a critical. In other words, when you get so far -- so much weight on it and you get so much water on that deck, watch out because there's no buoyancy there at all and nothing. It's not wood, it's steel. It sinks. After you get it so heavy, if you don't watch out, that thing'd go right down underneath you. Sink. You had to keep it up to a certain point. Couldn't get to that critical.

BW: In other words the builders didn't give you ...

LC: Well, no, on account of the method of fishing with the poles, you always kept the boat, main lower deck where you'd get all the work, was even with the ocean. You had to be low to be able to fish with the poles. You couldn't fish way up in the air, you know. It wouldn't work, see.

BW: Was there a way of flooding the stern?

LC: Well, they were -- especially when they got to the brine system -- they had all the tanks where they'd keep the brine in cold water for the fish where they'd put their fish away. The boat was always heavy right in the water. And they didn't have fish in those wells; they had live bait in them. As they caught fish and used the bait, they'd clean the well all out, fill it with fresh sea water and turn on the refrigeration and throw the fish in there. They'd just replace the bait ...

BW: The bait with fish?

LC: Yeah, they'd use it for bait and for fuel. Those fuels were used for fuel. When you'd start to go on those long extended cruises you had a lot of fuel in those wells.

BW: How in the heck did you clean them out enough to ...

LC: Oh, we used different types of soap and stuff, you know. You had to wash them out and clean them out good 'cause if you got a little fuel in the fish the canneries would dump 'em out on you. They say they were no good.

BW: That was a dirty job if you had to clean the fuel out.

LC: Oh, it was a tough job, yeah. We used to have to wash those wells.

BW: Was that diesel fuel you had?

LC: Diesel fuel, yeah. They know what we're doing.

BW: On this buoyancy of a steel boat I guess that was more trial and error than ...

LC: Right. That's what it was 'cause they never had them before. Lots of them sunk.

BW: Yeah, I remember when I was a ...

LC: You see they were working -- they were running them the same as they did their wooden boats. And they didn't operate the same way. See, they had to learn all of these things. A lot of them sunk, turned over -- got 'em too heavy in the water and they get in trouble with them. 'Cause the tuna fishing -- the type you did in those days with the poles, your boat was like a submarine. It was right down to the ocean level, the main deck. Right even with the ocean. The water'd run in and out of the scuppers.

BW: Yeah, that's true. I saw the guys in water that would come up to their shins at times.

LC: A lot of times when it'd get a little swell or a little rough, you was fishing when the boat would roll, the water got up to be up on the rack here. You'd have to hang on or you'd float off.

BW: Yeah, I often wondered why you guys weren't tied to the rail.

LC: We never did; I don't know why. It would bother you I'd think. You had to be free to move anyway you had to when you was with the poles.

BW: Did you ever get pulled into the school of fish?

LC: I got pulled in once at the Galapagos Islands. At one of the big islands we had a big wild school of what we called one-pole tuna. And they were really biting. We were throwing them in as fast as we could. And out of nowhere one of the big old babies that we call the submarines come out there about 30 or 40 miles an hour, hit my pole. And I was a couple fathoms under water before I released it. But I went down under water for about a couple fathoms.

BW: So that's about 12 feet

LC: Yeah, way down before I let the pole go. But I was a hell of a swimmer and that didn't bother me too much. All I was scared of was sharks.

BW: They were right in the school, huh?

LC: Oh, yeah. there were plenty of them around there.

BW: I would have thought your clothing would have held you down, too.

LC: Well, we didn't have much clothes on 'cause it's warm down there. We used to do a lot of fishing with shorts and just a thin shirt on or something. And our boots were short with holes in the bottom of them.

BW: Let the water ...

LC: Let the water run in and out, see. Otherwise, they'd get so heavy you wouldn't be able to move, clumsy. And the water was warm, see the water down there was in the high 70s or the 80s. Sea water was warm.

BW: Yeah, like a big swimming pool.

LC: Yeah, so it didn't bother you too much.

BW: But the shark did.

LC: Oh, like I told a lot of the guys, hey, I wasn't even completely wet when I got back on the boat. There was something to really be afraid of. Man, I was scared. The water didn't scare me but, boy, there's some big baby. And when you're fishing that's when they're wild 'cause you got all the blood running out of the scuppers from all the fish on deck and everything, and they get to where they snap at everything they see. I seen 'em come up, take a hold of a guard rail on a boat with their teeth. You could hear their teeth grinding on the wooden guard rail on the boat. I've seen 'em do that. And a lot of times when they -- not too many -- and they'd bother us a little, we'd turn the pole around and we'd use the butt end and we'd hit 'em. You know what they do, they turn around and bite it and a lot of times they crush it.

BW: That's enough to give you religion, isn't it?

LC: Pretty good. You ain't kidding. Don't think you're brave guy with a shark in the water. Don't let these other people try to tell you what happens. This and that because in the water the shark is the boss, not you.

BW: Yeah, you're just meat.

LC: That's right. We used to -- they used to get so thick around the boat sometime you had to leave a school of tuna 'cause tuna couldn't come up.

BW: In one piece, yeah.

LC: Yeah, those sharks they were lousy down there. Man they were thick. But we didn't have nothing to do in later years when we were purse seining. We used to cut up fish that was, you know, kind of mangled up or something, or we'd cut it up in pieces and put one of our what we called bombs, actually they're big heavy fire crackers. We used those to scare the fish back in -- see the purse seine that you make a circle by the boat it goes down this way. There's an opening so you'd throw those down there and blow 'em up. Keep the fish back in the net.

BW: From going out?

LC: From going out, right.

BW: Little one pound bomb or something?

LC: Yeah, they had a pretty good kick to them and we used to put one of those in a slice of fish at night when we were through for the day and throw it out there and a big old shark'd come up and take that and about the time he had it, why it'd blow up.

BW: Give him a headache.

LC: We didn't feel sorry for them, you know, 'cause they were our enemies 'cause they used to chew up our nets pretty bad, too. They'd come and bite right through the net to get to the fish, see. They'd leave a big hole in the net. Then you'd start losing fish out of it.

BW: Yeah, well were the porpoise a problem at the same time as the shark?

LC: Well, the porpoise was a problem, but they weren't from -- the damage that they did was not what they were trying to get away because they're all with the tuna. And you know we destroyed a fair amount of them, you know, at that time, especially when we first started seining. Big beautiful school of tuna and the porpoise with them and, you know, we were out there working. We wanted to make money. What the hell could we do? When we'd haul them they'd be all trapped in a net, although when we had the net in, we'd be right in with the fish and porpoise and everything. After we had it all bunched up.

BW: You'd jump in with them?

LC: Yeah, jump right in there with them and they were all alive bumping you and everything else. And we'd take as many of them out as we could. We'd have a man on each side -- the net was in a circle with the big skiff out there tied to it to keep it up and the rest on the boat. So here we had this big net full of tuna and porpoise with a shark or two mixed in, and we used to get right in there with them.

BW: And try to get the porpoise over the net?

LC: We had a guy on each side of the net straddling the cork line to hold it down deep enough so you could slide the porpoise over. And once in a while you'd get to a shark. And he'd be right up along. You'd be in the water this deep, you know, with the porpoise thing. And you'd get him by the fin, you know, and just lead him, but he'd be -- they'd get groggy or die. A lot of them would drown because they couldn't get enough (air) when they were crowded all in that way; they'd die and drown - [not] get enough oxygen.

BW: The shark or the porpoise?

LC: The sharks and the porpoise, too. We'd slide a lot of them over, but a lot of them was too late. They'd be dead already.

BW: Gee, this probably happens very quickly.

LC: Yeah, not -- in other words they didn't last -- as long as the net was open, but after you once crowded them all together so you could bring all the tuna out, then they'd die pretty fast in there. They wouldn't get enough oxygen.

BW: That's too bad.

LC: But that was one of the things. But now later on as we developed the fishing, we learned ways to -- where we wouldn't kill too many porpoise. Cut the percentage way down. Use a method where if you had porpoise mixed in with the tuna, the porpoise were always on top, see. Tuna were always underneath swimming around in the net. Porpoise was always on top and we'd bring in half or three quarters of the net and then we'd lash everything down. Tie it down good. Then we'd back the boat down, back it down. And as you back it down, the net would all go out this way -- stretch out and out at the point out there we had one of the little boats out there always hanging on so that the corks wouldn't sink too much 'cause if they did, a lot of tuna would go out. So we'd just sink -- drag the net enough so that the corks would go down a couple of feet -- porpoise would all go out, see.

BW: Yeah, sort of pull the net out and the tuna out from underneath the porpoise.

LC: Right. And the porpoise would get out. Still a few got tangled here and there, but the percentage was so different, you know. So much better.

BW: I know you guys aren't -- you want to catch a fish because that's your living, but I know you're not killers either.

LC: No, we don't kill them on purpose. God, we'd like to be rid of them. In other words, it'd be so much easier for us. It's a lot of work.

BW: Well, what do you think killed off the tuna industry around here?

LC: Canners. They moved out. They got tired fighting the unions and everything and went across for the cheap labor.

BW: Yeah, but which union, the cannery union or ... ?

LC: Canners. Cannery workers, yeah.

BW: Cannery workers? The ones who cleaned the fish and ...

LC: Do all the work in the canneries?

BW: Yeah. Well, can you blame them for wanting to make a buck, or do you think they were wrong?

LC: Well, I'm a firm believer that the unions have gone overboard in the United States. They've done us a lot of harm. In other words, we can't be competitive any more. How can we? That's why the Japs have taken over the automobile industry like they have. Guys want more and more. I look at it -- every man has a right to make a decent living; now don't get me wrong. The original idea of the unions was very good. Brought a little respect to the working man which he deserves, but as the unions developed they begin to get more and more demanding and some of the people they've got at the head of the unions aren't actually what you would call, you know, straight shooting guys. That's the trouble, you see, but they talked the workers into all these strikes and demanding more and more and more, so eventually what you do you put a big company in so much trouble that they just either shut down or move out, see. That's your problem.

BW: There was a cannery union, or was there a fisherman's union?

LC: Well, actually down here in San Diego the cannery union and the fisherman's union were in the same building. They both had their own problems that they run, but there was a lot of times they tried to work it together to help one another, you know.

BW: I see. Were you working for union wages or were you working for ... ?

LC: Well, we could say the cannery workers and the fisherman both were working under union control for quite a few years there.

BW: Yeah, but I thought most of the time you guys were working for a percentage of the tonnage.

LC: Well, that all depends on the size of the boat and the market conditions and all that. The price would vary every now and then. But generally as a rule, the fishermen on the boats they were on a good boat, they'd always earn a pretty good living. They worked hard for it, but they -- there was times when they made pretty good money.

BW: Was this because they got a percentage of the catch?

LC: Of the catch, right. What they'd do is they'd take so much percentage out for the boat and the owners and then the rest they'd share amongst the crew. So much percentage.

BW: Do you remember you as a skipper at times you'd get a higher percentage than the crew, right?

LC: Oh, yeah, because after all man, you had a lot of responsibility when you run one of them boats. You had to bring it in loaded.

BW: Absolutely.

LC: That was your responsibility.

BW: Well, how many guys would be on a crew of a purse seiner, for instance?

LC: Like a modern purse today, it can vary from the smaller ones to 13 [or] 14. Maybe these larger, bigger ones they have now they carry up to maybe 20 men.

BW: I see.

LC: Pretty sure they carry that many.

BW: How many guys were usually on a bait boat then?

LC: On a bait boat we were working from the smaller boats, I mean 80/90 ton boats -- 70 ton, eight/nine men. Then the bigger boats, 200/300 ton boats, they'd go about 14/15 men.

BW: Usually it was a skipper, engineer ...

LC: Engineer, an assistant ...

BW: Assistant engineer?

LC: Yeah.

BW: Yeah, 'cause they had 24-hour watches.

LC: Well, we -- besides loading the boat up and all that, you had to do your watches at night, and if you're traveling you had to do your wheel watch, or whatever. You did all that stuff, too, plus catching the fish.

BW: The guys that were actually catching the fish, they also stood watches on the wheel?

LC: Yeah, at the wheel, on the deck. If you were drifting at night, if you was in a good fishing area, naturally at night you'd shut down. You wouldn't travel. You'd drift at night.

BW: Really?

LC: No. You'd lay there and wait till the next morning at daylight to start looking around again.

BW: Yeah, okay, I can understand that. I wasn't thinking about that unless you were going to a certain fishing ground.

LC: Unless you were traveling from one point to another. In other words, you were headed from fishing spot and through radio communications, or whatever, you -- or you thought yourself would be better you'd move, or if you got information off one of your friends, you take off and travel in that direction.

BW: Well, that's something I was curious about. When a boat pulled out of here, San Diego, were you guys on your own, or were you part of a group, or ... ?

LC: Well, they used a group system, but you had friends, too, that might not of been in your group that you talked to on the radio phone and you generally had a fair idea of what was going on on the fishing grounds when you left here. You know you'd get in touch with your friends or your particular group and you'd get the information where the fishing was going on.

BW: Well, you know I was thinking that if I had a 150-ton boat and a crew and I found a school of fish, I'd keep my mouth shut and fish that sucker out and then tell the other guys.

LC: Oh, that was done a lot of times outside of your group. In other words, you had a group and you had a code. You didn't speak just plain English. You gave out numbers.

BW: Oh, I see.

LC: And your group, you're supposed to not keep anything from one another, you know. That's why you grouped together to help one another. Of course, once in a while there was always a sneaker that got himself two or three good fishing days in before he called his friends in, you know.

BW: Would that kind of kick him out of the group?

LC: Well, if you did it too much, it would, yeah. Yeah, you'd get kicked out.

BW: You know, what gets me with the Italians and the Portuguese, you guys can screw each other and yet you're still buddies.

LC: Oh, we used to get along pretty good there. There was a lot of, what you call it, bantering or whatever you want to call it, back and forth, you know. Oh, I had a lot of Portuguese friends, heck. Lot of them.

BW: You know another thing I'm curious about, was there any superstition on these boats?

LC: Well, the old superstition of Friday -- never go out on a Friday. I don't know why that started way back during the old sailing ship days. And a lot of them never liked to leave on a Friday. And the Portuguese, I remember, used to, some of them, not all of them, but some of them used to still believe in some of this burning of leaves and stuff. Out on the boat when they were out, you know, and things like that.

BW: You had to keep the spirits away?

LC: Bad luck or spirits, or whatever you want to call it, you know. I guess that dates way back, you know, to old times.

BW: Yeah. Did you actually have somebody do that on your boats?

LC: I had them do it one time. But let me tell you a story now. Now I was always pretty lucky in fishing. I always got by pretty good. Or, if you want to call it skill or whatever. But I was running the boat that was a good boat for me; I always made good money with it. We were working what you call the local banks here in the summertime off of lower California starting about 350 miles south of San Diego. Down that way. And we got into a streak where we weren't doing too good. A lot of the boats were doing better than we were and naturally being an ambitious young man at the time, yet, hey, I didn't go for this at all, you know. I didn't appreciate it. I'm trying to figure out why this and that, but we were in an area where we used to get our bait. Put on a bright light and the bait would come around. Then you haul it and get bait for the next day when you'd go out. And a lot of boats were having a tough time getting bait. There were seals and stuff and they'd come through the lights and scare it away and all this. It wasn't too easy to get. But we'd had a little bit of we weren't doing too good then. So this one day these kids of mine on the boat -- they were good workers, good men. I always had a pretty good bunch of guys on the boat. Good workers. As we were coming in the bay we figured we had to get bait that night. They had buckets and they didn't have any of those leaves or anything like, so they put some diesel soaked rags in them and they lit them up and they walked all around the rails and up on rigging and the baskets smoking and all. They did it as a joke. You know, trying to make fun of some of their friends and a couple of the guys. I says, "Look at that damn Larry. Christ, he's got the buckets going voodoo and everything." So I let the kids do it. What the hell, it don't hurt nothing. I didn't believe any of that stuff anyway. But that night we put out our light and we had all the bait around the boat. I swear to God we never got out bait so easy. We got our bait, all we wanted, and some of the boats couldn't get the bait around their boat 'cause the sea lions or the big fish come after you'd chase it away. So a couple of other boats come and hauled around our light which you let them do after you get your bait you leave the light out there for them so they can get bait. We got all our bait and we went out the next day and we caught fish the next two or three days. We loaded up and went home. So now you see those are the things that make a believer out of you if you want to be. Of course, that was coincidence, you know, that's all it was. But that actually happened and there was -- we made a beautiful trip out of it. Loaded up and went home. Yeah, it was

funny. I had a friend of mine, a real nice guy. He weighed about, oh, hell, 300 pounds. Big heavy guy. Young man at the time. He come on here. He says, "That damn Larry," he says, "he come around there. He made all the bad luck come over to us and he caught all the fish, now he's going home." We used to kid each other a lot, you know.

BW: What do you think? You know there's such a decline in the fishing around here now. I know it's because of the import of other fish. Is there any other reasons why the decline? Is it sport fishing? Do you think that kind of took over?

LC: Well, as far as the fresh fish go, the sport fishing has just about got control of it now. And nobody realized it, but I don't know how many sport fishing boats was out there.

BW: There's plenty

LC: Between San Diego, Los Angeles, and San Francisco, you know. And they're picking all that water every day. Don't forget that's 365 a year there out there picking, picking, picking. And don't tell me they don't take any fish out of the water because they catch a lot of it. But the commercial fishing is, you know, pretty far down now. There's some going on yet, some of the fellows still manage to make a living, but the fish isn't out there like it used to be. It's not ...

BW: Does that mean that it's fished out, or what's the ...

LC: Well, sure. There's a whole lot to that. In other words, you're taking it out faster than nature can bring it back.

BW: Seems like you have to have a moratorium on all kinds of fishing licenses.

LC: Well, they -- who knows. They might have to. They've got restrictions on the commercial fisherman. They've got a lot of restrictions on 'em, you know. They can't do this and they can't do that. But there's a lot of difference in the amount of seafood that's out there, believe me. I think if we want seafood we're going to have to learn how to bring it back, in which Japan is already way ahead of us. They are already doing it to a lot of seafood. Japan ...

BW: You mean like rock cod, bottom fishing?

LC: Well, even bottom fishing I think could be done. Coastwise fishing like barracuda, sea bass and maybe even halibut on the bottom. Scientific knowledge you have nowadays, they could do it, but what they'd have to do is close off an area for a certain length of time.

BW: Let 'em develop?

LC: Let 'em develop and work another area. Then after a certain length of time they could open this other one and close this one that was open. Work with nature -- try to build it back, see.

BW: An area like ten square miles?

LC: Right, sure. That could be done. There's no reason in the world why it can't. Plus the bottom fish and all local fish that you know that just doesn't travel too many miles or anything like that. The only reason you have salmon today is because they've taken control of it. They raise 90% of our

salmon. Then let 'em go in the streams and let 'em go their way. They keep bringing them back.

BW: Human beings sure can waste

LC: We destroy everything on this earth. Let's face it. We do. We destroy everything there is.

BW: You know, it's an interesting phenomena that when you started fishing there were plenty of fish, but they were not eaten that much. Now people want to eat more fish, there isn't that much to get.

LC: Now seafood is a very popular item, nowadays.

BW: Well, one of the tenderest pieces of fish I eat is shark.

LC: Is that the thresher shark that they catch out here?

BW: Well, whatever they call it. Gray shark

LC: Gray shark. There's a gray shark that's pretty good, too.

BW: Well, the Ghios, they pride themselves -- they don't call it gray fish like some restaurants do. They say it's shark and that's what it is. And it's good eating.

LC: Yeah, it's good. There's few different varieties of sharks. There's some that aren't too good, you know.

BW: I can imagine

LC: Some are a little tough or strong, but there's others that are pretty good. You can enjoy. Makes pretty good food.

BW: When did you quit fishing?

LC: I quit fishing only about, what a couple of years ago. Two-three years back.

BW: Really, and you're 75.

LC: Oh, yeah, I was about 75.

BW: Were you out on the purse seiners?

LC: No, the last two or three years I worked on smaller boats. Local. Along the coast during the albacore -- call it the local tuna season. They come in every season. I used to go out on the local boats all up and down the northern California coast and up to Washington and Oregon and up as far as Canada.

BW: How did you catch them, with a net?

LC: No, with poles. Albacore, we fish them all with poles.

BW: Oh, really, even to this day? You're still a tough guy.

LC: Well, I was then, but I'm -- the old legs are what's giving out more than anything else.

BW: Arthritis, or what?

LC: I think that's what it might be, yeah. It ought to be. I been soaking in ocean water for the last 70 years.

BW: It's a wonder you didn't grow some gills

LC: Or barnacles.

BW: Barnacles, yeah. What are you doing now to keep busy?

LC: I do watches on some of the boats. I make a few dollars extra to add to my pension. I'm going down tonight, you know.

BW: What kind of pension to you have? Do you have Social Security?

LC: Yeah. Social Security. We tried to -- some of us had enough sense we tried to develop a pension for the unions, the fisherman's union.

BW: Yeah, that's what I was leading up to.

LC: But you couldn't talk some of them guys into it. The minute you asked them for money, forget it. They thought they were going to get the money. They don't know before you get money you have to put some money in.

BW: Well, they thought the money was always going to come in fishing. They didn't realize there was going to be an end to it.

LC: All I get is \$52 a month from our local union. And I've been putting money in it for the last, oh, I don't know, is it ten or twenty years now. We should of had it in for the last 50 years. 'Cause when it develops, it develops real fast 'cause they reinvest it. And they build up the fund, see. And if they would have done it before they would have had who knows how many millions of dollars now in the union fund.

BW: Yeah, you guys could have been dragging in three, four, five hundred dollars more a month.

LC: Easy, easy, easy. All of that. With no problem

BW: So you stand watches on the boats when they come out. Well, some of them have dogs too, don't they?

LC: Well, the dogs keep strangers off and stuff too, you know. Sometimes we have to go down below, down in the engine room and check the machinery that's running: lube, oil, water, and cooling system and all -- and the bilges. So we were down there maybe for a little while, you know, looking around checking things. And when we're down there there's nobody on deck. They used to steal a lot of stuff off of these boats, especially radio equipment. Stuff like that.

BW: That's people off the docks?

LC: Yeah, off the beach. Bums and stuff, you know. Go jump on it, take whatever they could. So I think the Coast Guard and insurance both enforce this. They require that they have men on the boat watching it. In case of fire, or a leak, or broken pipe or something, you know. Get emergency call in soon enough to save the boat. Save everybody a big headache.

BW: Well, that has happened, too.

LC: Yes, it has.

BW: Are you kept busy enough doing this?

LC: Well, yeah. It gets pretty boring 'cause there's nobody on those boats. Everybody goes home. When they're in, which you can't blame them 'cause 90% of the time they're out on the ocean so when they're in they try to get as much time home or time off as they can. Have a little fun or something, you know, whatever. Those that have families like to be with their family and the young guys like to go out in town and see if they can pick up a girl friend or whatever, you know.

BW: Nothing's changed in that aspect of it

LC: No. That's still the same. That gives me something to do. There's no physical labor.

BW: I used to stand watch on the Star of India for years.

LC: Leonard told me.

BW: Seven and a half years of that sucker. I had trouble. People came on board.

LC: At night?

BW: Yeah.

LC: Can you imagine.

BW: Had to kick them off.

LC: There's always some nuts.

BW: I had two young guys, I think they were in the Navy or something, they came on board and they disappeared. I heard them come on board. I went out on deck. I couldn't find them.

LC: Yeah. They went wandering around the ship

BW: No. Where they went -- I had this flashlight. Real good flashlight. And I got looking in the rigging and one of them stuck his head around the mast and I could see his white face. They were way up there.

LC: Crazy asses.

BW: I says, "Get out of there." They came down. And one just ran off, the other off the side, and the other one was a little slower. But they got off. But they were within minutes because when I heard them come on board I got on my pants and went out on deck. They were way up there.

LC: Young guys, you know. Not much sense.

BW: Oh, yeah. I would have done the same thing if I had a chance.

LC: Young guys.

BW: I even had a woman come on board with a long dress and boy friend. They were a little bit drunk and they climbed over that gate and were walking around having a good time, so I came out on deck. I says, "All right, take off." And she walked down the gangway and it had this gate and she says, "How do I? Open the gate for me." I says, "You climbed over the gate, you climb back over." So she hiked her dress up to her bellybutton and climbed over that gate and took off. It was funny. Hey, we're out of tape. Yeah, two sides. That's all right.

LC: Oh, we are. Did you get pretty good?

BW: Yeah. Thank you very, very much.

LC: You're welcome to it.

BW: You know the Historical Society ...

LC: In a way, it's interesting - there's so many things that we didn't get, you know, as far as that goes.

END OF INTERVIEW
