ORAL HISTORY PROGRAM

An interview with
Pasquale Giammarinaro, 1925-2011

June 5, 1988

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PREFACE

This is a story of an era in San Diego when ethnic groups settled in an area and developed its own way of life. In this case it was composed of people of Italian descent and the area in which they settled came to be known as "Little Italy." Pasquale Giammarinaro was born and lived most of his life in this area.

In this interview Mr. Giammarinaro gives a picture of the area way of life, identifies building locations, refers to the role of new freeways in breaking up the area, and tells the story of his life and experiences as a fisherman. Many San Diegans who arrived in this city in the last half century know little about the section of the city called "Little Italy." In this interview Mr. Giammarinaro, a San Diego native, provides a valuable and interesting account.

INTERVIEWER'S NOTE

This is Sunday, June 5, 1988. I am going to interview a fisherman of the old days. He was born and raised in San Diego. My name is Robert G. Wright.

ROBERT G. WRIGHT: Will you give me your full name?

PASQUALE GIAMMARINARO: My full name is Pasquale Giammarinaro.

RW: Where were you born? What's the date?

PG: In San Diego, January 3, 1925. I was raised along the waterfront.

RW: Did you live down on India Street, or someplace like that?

PG: A block off of India Street, but I was raised right in the neighborhood there. It was between India and State Street.

RW: Wasn't that called "Little Italy" at one time?

PG: Yes. It has always been called "Little Italy." But then one day in the forties, I believe, when they brought the freeway through, it went right through the middle of it and split it all up. Most of the people had to get out and that broke up "Little Italy." Some of the stores were still there.

RW: I remember DeFalco's down there.

PG: One of the first DeFalco's was down on the corner of India and Date Street.

RW: What was in that corner where that Princess of Wales pub is? Was that always a pub?

PG: No. That was a house at one time. I remember, I know through the [nineteen] thirties, somewhere in the late thirties or the early forties, they tore the house down and built that there. To tell you the honest truth, I don't remember what they built. Then it became a bar later.

RW: From Kettner down towards the waterfront, then you've got the railroad tracks. Beyond that wasn't that kind of a slough then?

PG: Right now where the Health Department is now, that was water. There were three little shipyards there. Right there where the Health Department is there was a ways. The first shipyard right there was Robbins; then I forget the name of the next one; but then there was Kettenburg. The two I remember of the three were Kettenburg and Robbins. From there going north right around were three canneries, Del Monte Cannery, California Pack, and Westgate. That took us there to about where Laurel Street is now. Then there was a little bit of beach along there to the Coast Guard Station which was just a little point there at that time. From there to Point Loma was nothing but slough, mud flats, and things like that.

RW: That was before the airport was even thought of.

PG: The airport was put in there, but it was just a small runway to the northeast of that. But where the runway is now, by the Marine Base was all marshland flats. We called it the "Green Island Flats" - no reason, that is just what we kids named it.

RW: Going back down towards the shipyards where the civic center is, was that open marsh, too?

PG: Where that civic center is now there was a wooden embarcadero with all empty lots. The old lumber ships used to come in from the north and unload their lumber there. That is where all our circuses used to come. Every year a circus used to come there by train or truck. They put up their tents and things right there. Where the civic center is now, there was just a big open lot.

RW: I know the Star of India, when it was towed down here, it was tied up there, too.

PG: The *Star of India* was right there in front, just about where it is at now. That was its original spot. In fact, that was our swimming spot. As kids we used to dive off of the *Star of India* and swim around there. That was our private little San Diego bay swimming hole.

RW: It was a lot cleaner than it is now.

PG: Not only cleaner, but it was safer; you could swim. We used to swim the whole bay from the coast Guard Station to buoy seven, to B Street pier, and back down to the *Star of India.* It was a lot of swimming, but we were young and healthy. And, like I say, it was safer.

RW: What kind of condition was the Star in when you went on board?

PG: It was abandoned; it was run-down and abandoned. We used it more than anybody else, just to swim off of it. We used to dive and jump off. Some of the guys would be more daring and go off of the masts.

RW: I assume you did a lot of running around before you went to school down around that area?

PG: Oh, I spent all my life down there along the waterfront.

RW: Was your father a fisherman?

PG: Yes. When he came to this country he was a fisherman out of San Diego. In fact, he sailed on the old Star; made two voyages on the old *Star of India* to Alaska. At that time they used to pick up fishermen and take them to the Alaskan fishing waters, then bring them back. They would go as crewmen.

RW: What was your dad's name?

PG: Guiseppi Giammarinaro. Most people called him Papa Joe.

RW: Did he come from Italy?

PG: Yes. I think he was 16 or 17 when he came to this country.

RW: Did he come to San Diego because he had family down here?

PG: No. My grandfather and my father went straight to Detroit where my grandfather had a brother. When they got there my grandmother had gotten sick and my grandfather went back to the old country on emergency and left my father temporarily. In the meanwhile my grandmother had passed away so my grandfather wasn't going to come back. He sent for my father to come back home, but my father didn't want to leave this country, so he took off and came to San Diego. He knew a lot of friends here and people from the same town he was from in the old country. He started fishing right from here.

RW: Was it pole fishing in those days?

PG: The pole fishing came later, not in the early days when my father was here. Pole fishing started in the mid-twenties sometime. I started fishing I think it was 1938 or '39.

RW: What kind of fishing did your dad - did they use in those days?

PG: There was the half-ring.

RW: What is that?

PG: It was sort of a purse-seine type of thing, but only the net was pulled by hand. They set the net from the stern of the boat half way, and they pulled half of the net, and then the other half. They called it a half-ring; they would make a half of a ring.

RW: They didn't use what they called a chaser boat, or whatever it was that went out?

PG: No, it was all done by hand.

RW: That was tough.

PG: Really tough.

RW: They just fished off the coast here?

PG: Yeah, they were in and out every day. Then most of them would do that. Then, like my father, a lot of them had their own little boats. My father had the Little John, a little Monterey that when that season of fishing was up he would go in and out every day on the Little John, his own little boat.

RW: What kind of fish would they bring in?

PG: Bottom fish. At lobster season they would go out for lobster; make the traps and go out for lobster. Then they had their set lines. They go out for bottom fish, rock cod, the cods, any bottom fish, mostly rock cod, red snapper, things like that.

RW: How about any tuna-type of fish?

PG: That is why they call them "jig boats," too. They would : put out their side poles and jig for tuna, skipjack, yellowtail, bonita, barracuda, anything that would bite.

RW: It seems to me they had ... They would set these long : poles; they would set them out on each side of the boat and they would be underway all the time. PG. : Yeah. That is where they are dragging them. That is what they call jigging.

RW: That fish would strike at the lure and then you would bring them in fast?

PG: At the end of the poles they have a spring. When the fish : would hit that would tell the fisherman that he had a fish on there and he would pull that line in, all by hand. Everything was by hand then.

RW: It seemed like a tough way of fishing, though, one at a time type of thing?

PG: Yeah, it was tough.

RW: How did they sell the fish - was it to the canneries or to the restaurants?

PG: The half-rings used to sell to anybody that would buy ... Well, the jig boats would sell to anybody who would buy them. The half-rings, when they had ... They carried 20/30/40 ton of fish - they would go to the canneries. The jig boats would go to the fresh fish markets - sell theirs to the fresh fish markets every day.

RW: Like the fresh fish markets would be ... Wasn't there one down on G Street pier?

PG: All the fresh fish markets were all, not under one roof, but all together in just about the same spot where, just south of G Street, there mostly where Seaport Village is now.

RW: Right near the ferry boat complex, where the ferry boats : used to come in landing?

PG: No, that was further south. This here is just about where the Star and Crescent boats tie up, by the G Street pier. That was the old market [area] right in there.

RW: Yeah, that is where the boats tie up now. Anthony's started their first restaurant down there. Did you know the Ghios down there?

PG: Yeah, the families have known for years.

RW: People would come from town down to buy directly the fresh fish?

PG: of course a lot of times during them early years a lot of the fishermen, like my father, would hold back some of the fish; they wouldn't sell them all. of course, they weren't getting a lot either; they were getting a penny, two pennies a pound for rock cod and stuff like that. He would hold back two or three fish, or something like that, and bring it back. Where he'd tie up there at the embarcadero he'd meet some farmers and they'd trade meats, vegetables, fruits for fish. That is how we got a lot of our meats and vegetables - trade our fish for their food.

RW: Was that a common practice?

PG: A lot of them did it. It was just a thing that started - nobody knows how it started. Why it finished, the war broke out.

RW: You didn't deal with the Japanese, then?

PG: There was Japanese and some ... they were mostly Japanese, but there were other nationalities, too. I couldn't tell you for sure.

RW: The Japanese farmed out in Mission Valley at that time.

PG: Most of them came from Mission Valley and south bay area. : one of the Japanese was from the south bay area, farming down there. A lot of them come up here.

RW: You went to school here, I assume. Did you go to different : schools down there? Did you go to Washington?

PG: I went right through Washington; went to Roosevelt. In fact, the day I graduated from Roosevelt Junior High School I came home proud with my diploma and my father says, "That's nice. You going to go to high school?" I said, "hope." Two days later I was on my way to Panama aboard the *American Voyager.* He said, "You don't sit around here; you either go to school or you go to work." That is how my career started as a fisherman.

RW: Did you ever get to high school later on?

PG: Never did.

RW: And what was your first impression on going out of the *American Voyager?*

PG: Couldn't wait to go. That was all our dreams, all us kids when we were growing up, to become tuna fishermen. It was a dream that we all had and all wanted to do. I think about 99% of us did. Some went on to bigger and better things, but like I say, 99% of us started as young men in the tuna fleet.

RW: Did you go out fishing with your dad before that, and get experience?

PG: Oh, yes. Ever since I started walking he'd take me fishing with him during the summer months and vacations, weekends. Whenever I didn't have to go to school, I'd go with him. So I was going fishing with him. Like I say, my brothers and I, we were just little kids.

RW: How many brothers and sisters do you have?

PG: We were five boys and one girl.

RW: Are they all still living?

PG: All but my sister. We lost our sister a couple of years back.

RW: Do you ever get seasick?

PG: Oh, yeah (laughter). Yes, I've gotten sick a lot of times. But it is something you just forget about. When I was a kid I got sick a lot. You see, when my father was fishing (when I used to go out with my father) we'd get up at two o'clock in the morning. He'd get up and go out at two o'clock in the morning and that way he could be on the fishing grounds at daybreak, and come back two or three o'clock in the afternoon. Then he would work till dark getting the boat ready, and his lines, for the next morning.

RW: Was that a common practice?

PG: Oh, yeah. We drew up along the embarcadero then and you saw all them little jig boats tied up there and all our fathers were down there getting their set lines ready to go. RW : Did they use . . . what was it called where they have one line and then a lot of hooks on it?

PG: That is what I am calling the set line. We call it "balongity" (sp?).

RW: Is that Italian?

PG: Yah, that's an Italian word for baskets. They had these huge baskets where they would wind the line in and the hooks. What it was, they have an average of 250 hooks to a line, a hook about every foot apart on the line. Every hook was baited. They tied these together and you'd have maybe, six, seven, eight hundred hooks in one line. Then you'd make another line; you'd have six, seven, eight hundred hooks going in another direction.

RW: They are still all tied to the boat?

PG: Well, what they did was they would have a bamboo pole with a flag. Each fisherman had his own color or flag or sign, or something, something simple, a bamboo pole with a weight to stick up out of the water, about five feet out of the water, so you could see it.

RW: Act like a buoy, then?

PG: Yeah. Then he would have a line go straight down to the bottom with an anchor. Tied to that would be his hooks. They would go on a straight line across the bottom to another anchor, another line that went up to another-buoy marker.

RW: In other words, he dropped the first anchor with a bamboo pole but tied to the anchor was a line with the hooks. Then they would chug along and drop the other anchor with a line on it with the hooks, then a line going on up tied to the buoy. So it is sort of a u-shaped arrangement?

PG: Yeah. You've got two buoys going down to the bottom with anchors to keep them down, then along the bottom, your hooks. Then you would go to another spot close by - make a design like. Sometimes they would have a "t," sometimes make an "h" - different designs. That way you've got fish coming and going in all directions.

RW: In other words, watch the current, I would assume.

PG: You watch the current and if you are superstitious, you've : got a certain angle you like, or whatever, but you try to get the fish coming and going in every direction. Because if you've got your lines like this you are just going to get the fish coming this way. Fish going that way will miss your lines, but if you've got lines going this way and that way ...

RW: Right angles to each other?

PG: Then you've got the fish coming and going in all directions.

RW: Can you spell this word, "balongity"?

PG: No. Lucky we can say it (laughter).

RW: That I know was your first experience, being involved with this part of it - using a small boat. What was your first impression going out on that American Voyager? It was a wooden boat, wasn't it?

PG: Oh, yeah. In them days ... I read somewhere one time, and it is true, they had "iron men running wooden ships," or "wooden ships with iron men." It was a wooden ship with a bunch of iron men on there. Boy, and they let you know they were iron men; they were rough on you.

RW: No color TV (television), carpets, or anything like that?

PG: No, no way.

RW: Do you live in the deckhouse?

PG: Yeah. That particular boat there we had eight bunks to a room.

RW: How many were in the crew, then?

PG: On that boat I think there were 16.

RW: That was a good-sized boat, then?

PG: It was one of the bigger ones at that time. Nothing like today's, but at that time it was a big one.

RW: How did you get on? Did your dad know the skipper?

PG: Yep. In them days all the tuna boats were owned and operated by families. "Little Italy" was all one big family down there; we knew everybody and everybody knew us. The *American Voyager* was owned by the - Johnny Tasso was the skipper, the Tasso family.

RW: Sometimes the dad owns the boat and his son takes it out. I assume there are all kinds of arrangements.

PG: His dad was on the boat, too, but he was the skipper and : part-owner.

RW: How were you paid on it?

PG: On that boat I was paid a dollar a ton. That is how most : of us used to start at that time. In fact, Tom Pataglia (sp?) (Battaglia?) - you know this Tommy's meats, the owner, down on Columbia Street - he and I started the same trip the same time. We started at a dollar a ton. That is the way most of the kids started out.

RW: What was the capacity of the American Voyager?

PG: I think the *American Voyager* carried 250 ton.

RW: So you would get $250 if you brought in that much?

PG: Whatever we brought in.

RW: That was big money back then. That was about 1944?

PG: That was about 1938 or 1939.

RW: That was good money in those days. You know what I used to resent was you guys, when I was at Roosevelt Junior High School, you guys didn't pay much attention at school and then you would go out on a trip in the summertime and you come back and you had a convertible and all the girls. The rest of us guys didn't have a chance (laughter).

PG: That happened to some of the guys, but in our particular case, whatever we made went into the family. The Depression was just getting over with and our family was trying to get on its feet. We had just bought a house on State Street and we were trying to get ourselves going fairly well. My brother, Johnny, and I and my father, the three of us working, we were concentrating on getting the family on our feet. The first car I ever owned, I was married before I got it. I was on my own and everything before I got it.

RW: If you went out on a bigger boat, does that mean that you went further, like down to Mexico or South America?

PG: Why, yeah, the bigger boats went down. At that time they used to go [to] Galapagos Island. That is right on the equator. In fact, in the *American Voyager* we didn't quite get to Galapagos, but we did most of our fishing outside the Gulf of Panama, the Panamanian Gulf, Central America.

RW: There are good fishing grounds out there, I guess.

PG: Very good.

RW: Was that the days before the 200-mile limit?

PG: Oh, yeah. That other stuff came in much later. We had no restrictions then - just go out and get them.

RW: You and everybody else; it was open. Now, what would you call it - was this pole fishing?

PG: Bait fishing we called it.

RW: Would the boat be called a bait boat?

PG: We called them bait boats. The others they called them seiners - the new type net fishing - called them seiners.

RW: How did you like working a bait boat? That was a tough job.

PG: It was tough but most of us didn't know any better. I mean, we didn't know the difference. That was a living; that was a job; that was what we were supposed to do. That's what we did. We didn't know there was anything easier.

RW: And every fish that came in was money in your pocket.

PG: It got to the point where when you are fishing and fish were biting good, you didn't see fish coming aboard anymore, you saw dollar signs (laughter).

RW: I've seen films where there would be one man on a pole, then there would be two-men-pole, and three and four. How did that go? How could you tell ...

PG: I think I know what you are trying to say. When you go into a school you are prepared. You have your one-pole and you have partners - your one-pole, your one man. You have two-pole partners, you have two men; your three-pole partners, your four-pole partners. You have your gear all ready. You go into the school anticipating one pole, unless you see something different. You get your one pole and you start fishing. That is it. Sometimes the bigger fish will move the small fish out, scare them off, and come in. As soon as that happens you throw your one-pole gear up on the tank and you get your two- or three-pole, whatever size fish it is. The men know what they are going to do - who is going to fish with who. And you get together. No time is wasted; everything is anticipated ahead of time. Everybody knows exactly what to do - when you do it and how to do it. And you start in, right now. One-pole fishing is one man, one pole. Two-pole fishing is two men, two poles down to one leader, one hook. Three-pole would be the same thing to one. Then four-pole, depending upon the size of the fish.

RW: Can you convert that to the size? I mean, how many pounds for a one-man-pole?

PG: Let me try to guess. Of course seven and a half pounds was the smallest you could catch. Up to about 15 to 20 pounds would be one-pole. Then from that to 50, 60 pounds, an average of 50/55 pounds would be two-pole. Then up to about close to 100/80/90 pounds would be three-pole You very seldom go into a four-pole unless they are monsters, I mean, over 150/200 pounders or more. You try to stay within two- or three-pole, the big ones.

RW: Was there a technique? In the first place there was kind of a lure on the hook, wasn't there?

PG: The hook is just a plain hook. We tied feathers to the hook and then fish skin around the feathers. That acts in the water like a real squid in the water. We call them squids, but they are hooks. It [would] act like a squid; the feathers will just go like that - a special chicken feather they got in Japan. We started using other kinds of skin, but the feathers all came from Japan, some kind of a chicken in Japan.

RW: So it stayed kind of a lively-looking thing?

PG: It was the only kind of feather that really worked well.

RW: Wasn't there a technique for putting the hook into the water and snapping the fish out? I've seen films of this where you go into the water, and, wham, right out.

PG: You've got your chummer up in the tank chumming out bait - whatever bait you have; it may be sardines, anchovy, anchoveta, whatever you can get. He chums out the fish. Now, if the fish are hungry, they start biting; they go crazy. Before you know it they will bite at anything in the water. That is when you start fishing real well. If they don't then they bite slowly. What you do, you hit the water, you keep splashing the water with the tip of

your pole, keep confusing them - keep them confused. Pretty soon they get excited and start biting and they bite on your hooks. As soon as they bite, you pull them in. It gets to be rhythm like. You pull your fish out, your hand comes up, you pull in, and just about the time the fish gets to a certain angle you give it a little jerk and that flips that fish off behind you, and the momentum carries it behind you. The squid is actually letting go just above your head. That fish is letting go just above your head, but it don't fall straight down because the momentum is carrying it behind you. As that fish comes loose you are coming down again and you are back in the water again before that fish hits the deck.

RW: You are talking about a couple of seconds, then?

PG: Like I say, before that fish hits the deck behind you, your squid is back in the water catching another one.

RW: You are wearing a leather thing in your crotch, aren't you?

PG: A leather pad that can hold the end of the pole.

RW: I didn't know you took it out of there.

PG: With certain fish you do. On the heavy fish you can't, not until you've gotten the weight off of it.

RW: Don't you sort of use the momentum of the fish to bring it back? Otherwise, it is all muscle.

PG: On the smaller fish you just [go] up in the air; everything comes up in the air. But on the big three-polers, the heavy two-pole and three-pole, and four-polers, you try to use the momentum of the swell of the boat, the roll of the boat. As the boat rolls down you pull in. In this way the fish, as it comes just halfway out of water will hit the rail and flip in.

RW: What was it like standing in the rack all the time? It would seem you were half drowned or you were pulled off.

PG: You get pulled in at times. I've been pulled in a couple of times.

RW: Was there an expression for that? Did they say anything to you?

PG: No, not really. You may get dirty looks if you've got a lot of fish and the fish are biting and you lose a pole, cause that will chase the fish away. But nobody really says too much about it because it could happen to them. It happens to everybody.

RW: I would assume you are not tied to the hull at all, just leaning forward and back. It could be easy. Then, of course, at the back of the boat, the stern is more up and down with the swell. I want to ask a quick question. What were the poles made out of?

PG: Bamboo.

RW: Was there anything special about the bamboo? PG- Not really. The best bamboo came from Japan. I think : they grew them specially for fishing. I know the best ones came from there. We'd buy bundles of bamboo poles and then we'd cut 'em and fix 'em and make 'em up to fit our own individual hands or grip. You'd cut the size you want.

RW: They were about ten-footers, weren't they?

PG: Oh, they range anywhere from 8/9 feet to 12 feet.

RW: And what kind of lines were on there?

PG: We used a cotton lead line, one-quarter inch. What you did, on the tip of the pole you made a loop, then you tied this cotton line about maybe four feet of that. Then you have a big tail swivel with a wire just where you could take it on and off real fast. You add your squid to that wire. That is all that is in the water, really, is that wire and that squid, because the lead, the fish would see that. You try to keep that as invisible as possible except for the squid.

RW: How did you find these bloody fish, anyway?

PG: There are several ways. You have a mast man; he goes up the mast with binoculars. Most of the boats have one, some two or three, whatever, and they look with binoculars. Then you have other guys on top of the pilothouse, all over the bridge. Everybody looks for fish in their own way. Some guys will stand up in the bow, other guys on top of the pilothouse, all over the rigging, with binoculars and they look for different signs.

RW: What were the signs?

PG: On the coast you'd look for porpoise. The porpoise you could see way off in the distance - you'd see a splash. Just one splash you may see, 20 miles away. You'd head that way and that is a school of porpoise. You don't bother the porpoise. You just go into them, start chumming. The porpoise will go their way and if the fish are going to bite they will follow you. And you start fishing. Bait fishing is nothing like seining. The porpoise go their own way. In fact, they will stay around sometimes and play with the boats. You see it in some of the films. That is one way. Another way is you'll go along and you will see a flip here or there. You stop and start chumming. That brings fish up. Then other times you'll see big schools of fish, just schools of it. Then other times you have a jig out. You don't see nothin'; you catch one of the jig. You stop and you chum. There is another way that you'll go to certain spots where fish is known to be hanging out. You don't see nothin'. you just go up to that spot and you throw a couple of bait out and the fish come out.

RW: They are not always on the surface? You say, once in a while they do come to the surface?

PG: They will come to the surface when they are in big schools and they are traveling. There are just different ways of finding them. It seems that the bigger ones seem to stay put more. The one-polers and small two-polers are usually on the move. Tape 1, Side B:

RW: Did you find that different times of the year were better fishing than others, and different years better than others?

PG: Always. Different times of the year, different areas. Summer months we'd call it local fishing. We'd only have to go maybe 5-600 miles down the coast, down lower California, maybe to the Gulf. Then other months we'd have to go down off of Central America. Other times we'd have to go to [Galapagos?] or South America. The time of the year had a lot to do with it.

RW: Were the summer months more fruitful than the winter months, or did it make any difference?

PG: You could make faster trips; you are closer to home in the summertime.

RW: Was it because the water was warmer up here?

PG: No, because you were closer to home. You see, when you went to Galapagos you spent 30 days going and coming, 15 days to go and 15 days to come back. That is without catching one fish. Whereas if you go local it is two or three days to go and a couple of days to come back. So you spend about four or five days in travel. You get your load in, say, four or five days, you come home inside of 15/20 days. Yet, when you are going to Galapagos you're taking 30 days just to travel. So you can make two or three trips in the time you make one down below. That is why . It is not that there is more fish, it is just that you make faster trips.

RW: When you came back you'd pull up at the canneries down there near Laurel [Street] where Solar [company] is now. Is that where you used to unload?

PG: That was in the early days. But when I was old enough to start fishing there was one cannery there, Westgate. The others were Sun Harbor, and then down there where 10th Avenue terminal is, in them areas down there, there was Chicken of the Sea, Sun Harbor, Peoples Cannery. At one time we had about nine or ten canneries in San Diego. The tuna fleet was born here in San Diego and this was the tuna capital of the world until ... I don't know if I should say it on this [tape] but until the politicians got in on it. When it was just local families it thrived. Everybody was happy; they had good jobs making good money and everybody was getting along and there was plenty of fish. Then all of a sudden things got big and the wrong people started coming in. All they had were dollar signs in their minds. They didn't know what a fish looked like; they just stood behind desks and ran the fleet from a desk.

RW: You mean the people that owned the boats?

PG: C. Arnholdt Smith and that group from National Steel. When they got into it, that brought in the politicians, and before you know it, the fishermen weren't running the fleet anymore. It was people behind desks running the fleet.

RW: Were you supposed to meet a quota type of thing?

PG: Oh, they would just call you up on the ship-to-shore radio sometime and ask you, "Where are you at?" You are here. "Well, go over there," or, "Don't stay there, go over to another spot." Do this, do that, come home, or stay out there, get fuel ...

RW: But how did he get control over a family boat, though?

PG: They weren't family boats anymore. That is what I am getting at.

RW: Did the families sell out on the boats?

PG: No. The family boats were still running their family boats, but these big corporations were building bigger and better boats, and more convenience and everything.

RW: So they were in competition with the family boats?

PG: Right. Then before you know it, they started getting the best crews, too, because of the convenience of things.

RW: Did you ship out on one of these?

PG: I never did work for a company boat. Most of my fishing days were on family boats like the *American Voyager, Stella Genoa, Pacific Queen,* the *Commodore* and the *Invader.* Most of my time was on the *Commodore.*

RW: She was around for a long time.

PG: They even converted her from a bait boat to a purse seiner.

RW: She was a wooden boat, wasn't she? I remember seeing her around.

PG: Yeah. Most of my fishing time was spent on her.

RW: I was going to ask you. There was a period where there were a lot of boats lost. It was about this time that there were rumors that a lot of guys were sinking their own boats for insurance, or whatever. There seemed like there was a rash of them going down.

PG: I don't know myself. I can only tell you from what experience I saw. I was never involved in anything, but we were right alongside one boat one time. We had just finished fishing for the day; it was at dusk, putting our fish away. We looked up and here was one boat just stopping alongside of us. It didn't seem like over three seconds somebody looked up and said, (I forget the name of the boat now) "Where is the so-and-so?" It was gone. She sunk that fast with two men aboard.

RW: A small boat, though?

PG: Well, it had 13 men aboard; it wasn't a small boat. The other guys were on deck and it just went out from under them. The cook was in the galley getting food ready and the engineer was in the engine room doing work down there. They didn't get out.

RW: How can that happen if the hull was tight?

PG: Nobody knows. Some of them boats were what we called "cranky." Any little move they would make a bad turn or something, and she would just get cranky. She would just roll over and go down. Anything can happen. This particular boat was a steel boat. A plate could have opened up on her. Then there was another case at another time when going along, when all of a sudden this unchartered reef, the boat hit this reef. I can't say all the boat losses were legal or not. All I know a lot of them lost some men that were good friends.

RW: Years ago I was talking to a fisherman and I asked about it and he said the boat was their home. That was the last thing they wanted to do was scuttle their own boat.

PG: It was their livelihood, and they were making money.

RW: Well, they started running out of that proposition with the corporation coming in.

PG: Well, with the corporations, why scuttle it - sell it to them. It is a rough life; it is a rough occupation; it was hazardous. A lot of people didn't realize how hazardous it was. You had hazard all around you. You know, my father had always said when I was a little kid going fishing with him ...

He'd pick me up and point out and said, "Look, see all that?" And he would point out at sea. "That is the Pacific Ocean. I've been coming to sea a lot of years and I still don't know it. Never think you know all there is to know about the ocean. I learn something new every time I come out here, and you will, too."

RW: It wasn't just the hazards of flying hooks ...

PG: You never know what's going to come up. Chubasco can come out of nowhere - just hit you like that [snapping his fingers]. That is a storm like a typhoon. Chubasco can come out of nowhere and just hit you before you have a chance to say or do anything. You are not fast enough to run for port. There are things like that. And then you could hit logs and debris that will open your hull right up. Fire hazards ... You've got so much machinery going and you've got so much fuel aboard. When you leave San Diego ... you leave home, your hull is full of fuel oil, mostly diesel oil. As you use up the fuel you wash these tanks out and this is where your fish tanks will be at. They replace with fish tanks. But you are just loaded with fuel and you are weighed down with it. That is another hazard, the weight. You've got all this weight on you all the time, and things give. It is just like anything; you get a paper sack and you put a lot of weight in it, the bottom is going to give. There are so many things that could happen.

RW: I know the water will hold the hull up, but then it is not constant. Sometimes you are between waves ...

PG: There is so much that can happen. I'm no scientist or anything, I am just guessing, but, like I say, there is so much that can happen that I don't say it don't.

RW: Along the same lines, not necessarily you, but don't some of the guys have superstitions that went along with this - you know, good luck charms?

PG: Oh, yes, something like never leave port on a Friday. We've seen where we were getting ready to go on a Thursday and something happened. They were working on the engine and it went one minute into Friday. We just stopped everything and didn't leave until one minute after midnight Friday, or Saturday morning - things like that. Then there was another superstition a lot of boats kept and a lot of them didn't - they would never carry a woman aboard. Then another one was ... There was a certain spot, the "Tehuantepec" that they claimed that every time a boat passed this certain spot, two seamen would appear on deck. It seemed that years before two seamen were lost there. Tehuantepec is a gulf just below Acapulco. It is a dangerous gulf. A lot of the storms originate out of there. It is the narrowest part of Mexico between the Atlantic and the Pacific, the narrowest piece of land. The winds from the Atlantic come across there and mix with the Pacific winds and churn up big storms. It is one of the most dangerous areas in the Pacific Ocean.

RW: Did each nationality, like the Italians and the Portuguese, have their own superstitious way of looking at things or doing something about it?

PG: Some did, but not really anything. Most of them were just about the same.

RW: I know sometimes you would wear a hat and you'd be fishing better than another time. If you don't wear a hat you don't get the fish.

PG: Some guys might have had individual superstitions of their own.

RW: None on the boat, particularly?

PG: No.

RW: Somebody was telling me that they put grease on the rails to keep the animals from coming on board.

PG: No. A lot of the boats have pets.

RW: No, I was thinking of something else - something like sea monsters coming on board.

PG: Oh, no, no. There might have been something, but I've never heard of any.

RW: Did you guys belong to a union? You paid into it?

PG: Yep. The seafarers union for local fishermen. The cannery workers and fishermen's union, it was the Seafarers International.

RW: Did that pay off for you? Are you still collecting on it?

PG: I got out of the tuna fleet in the (19) '60s and there was no real big thing about union then. But later on I understand that they got a union pension going and some of the fellows now are getting a small pension out of it - nothing big.

RW: After the war years did you get into the purse seiners?

PG: No. After the war years, that is when ... There was still the bait fishing. When I come back from the Navy I went aboard the Pacific Queen. When I left I was on the Pacific Queen and when I come back I was on the Pacific Queen. Then I went to the Sea Wolf, to the Monarch, to the *Commodore* and then the Invader. Most of my time was on the *Commodore.* Then they started to convert some of the boats to purse seining.

RW: Why did they do that?

PG: It was to catch more fish, quicker and easier. Let's face it. You get a net around a school of fish, in three hours you put 100 ton aboard, where bait fishing it would take you all day to get 50/60 ton, and a lot harder work. It is a lot harder and longer working hours - well, I won't say longer working hours, but harder working hours. The net fishing was an easier way to catch them.

RW: Were you getting competition from other countries? Were fish coming into this country?

PG: Oh, yeah. That is one of the reasons I finally got out of the fishing fleet. We would go out on a trip, come home ... You know, years before we would come in and go straight to the cannery, unload, wash the boat, then get a couple of days with the family and then go out again. But then they got to the point where you'd come home and they'd put you in line. They'd say, "You are not going to unload for two or three weeks." And you'd ask why. "Well, we've got a load coming from Japan," we've got this coming from here and that coming from there. And it was getting worse and worse every year. It was getting to the point where the foreign fish had priority over our fish. We'd sit on the docks for sometimes two and three months at a time with our fish waiting to unload. No income coming in at this time. Your income is on the boat. Things were getting kind of tough.

RW: Was the foreign fish cheaper?

PG: No. That is when your politicians started coming in. They were bringing in this foreign fish.

RW: Money is money. If they can get your fish cheaper than the foreign fish, why do they go for the foreign fish?

PG: They would buy the foreign fish cheaper, but sell it to the public for the same price. In fact, if you didn't know the code numbers on the can you couldn't tell the American fish from the Japanese fish. They were making a lot more money on theirs. Another thing, their fish was coming over on refrigerator freighters and they were paying this freighter outfit so much to keep the fish for them.

RW: It was like a warehouse?

PG: Right. Where our fish didn't cost them a penny. We held our own fish. If they were to hold them up for a month it would cost them thousands of dollars to hold that fish on that refrigerated ship before they would get it. But they could hold us up for a year and it wouldn't cost them a penny. It would cost us because that fish is ours until it is in the can. The American fishermen were responsible for their own fish until it was in the can.

RW: I thought it was once you dumped it on the dock.

PG: That's what a lot of people think, but it was not. You were responsible for that fish until it was in the can. The cannery can foul up a fish and you lost. In fact, they would take away from you at certain stages. If you lost one fish, or say, one pound of fish at the first stage, they would take a pound from you. If you lost a pound of fish at a second stage, they would take two pounds from you for every pound they lost.

RW: This is in the canning process?

PG: In the process, yes. And if they lost it at a third stage it would cost you three pounds to every one pound they lose. The cannery wasn't going to lose a penny. The fishermen were responsible for that fish, whether he did it or not, until it went into the can. That is when it was absolutely safe and that is the only responsibility the cannery had, was to can that fish and sell it.

RW: Was there any competition among the canneries?

PG: Later on they started to get some competition, yeah. That : is why I say at one time there was about 10, 11, 12 canneries here in San Diego. They were all getting competition. But then it got too many and things started getting .. canneries started to lose out. Then some of the canneries were operating cheaper, cheaper labor and everything in these foreign countries. And they were just opening up ... the same companies, the same canneries, canneries in foreign countries. Cheaper labor.

RW: One of the things I thought was the decline of tuna fishing here with the purse seiner was the dolphin fiasco that was going on. Were you out of it by then?

PG: I was out of it by then.

RW: You got out of it because you weren't making any money?

PG: I got out of it because money-wise I had a family and had to keep living and they were tying us up for months at a time with no income. I'd have to go out and get a side job. Luckily I had friends like Mr. Lavaro (sp?) next door who owned - it's Jones Furniture today, but it was Streps Warehouse - he let me work driving a truck for him. Things like that - make a couple of bucks here and there. This was no career or anything. I had to get out and find a new career. That is when I ... In 1964 or '65 I went to work for the city schools.

RW: What did you do for the city schools?

PG: I became a gardener. I started out as a custodian and then I went into the gardening. What else could I do? I knew nothing else. I learned as I went.

RW: At least that was stable.

PG: It was a good, honest income. I got to the point where I loved it. It made me a good living where today I've got a nice little pension from it.

RW: You have since retired, then?

PG: Yeah, two months ago, in March [19881.

RW: Getting back to this dolphin thing, do you know anything about it at all?

PG: Just rumors. There was pros and cons on both sides. Tempers were getting hot. But I will tell you one thing. The American fishermen tried, the foreign fishermen didn't. It is like anything else, the foreign fishermen were telling the United States government, "You mind your own damn business, we'll do it our way." The American fishermen, you put the law on there and they'll do it. They tried. The fishermen themselves came up with all these methods of getting the porpoise out of the nets. It was impossible to get the fish without trapping the porpoise. The thing was to get the porpoise out of the net without harming 'em. And the fishermen, through testing and working with it and everything, came up with several different methods of releasing the porpoise. Like anything else, you get a handful will injure themselves or kill themselves in the process. You are going to lose some. But they tried, they tried very hard. The only way you could say, well, to save all the porpoise is to stop fishing. Fine. You stop fishing, you stop the American fishermen, you are not going to stop the Japanese, the Russian, all these other countries who are fishing right here. You have these guys fishing right off our own coast here. We can't fish here! But they can. We have a 200-mile limit, for us. But another country comes along and fishes. He says, "Hey, no, you only have a 12-mile limit which is international." In fact, it is only supposed to be three miles by international law. So they went to the 200 miles for our fishermen, but not for anybody else.

RW: Can American fishermen go out within 200 miles and fish all he wants?

PG: They have so many restrictions; I can't even tell you the restrictions they have today. I doubt if anybody knows all the restrictions. That is why so many things are happening because without knowing it, they are breaking laws. That is just like, do you know all the laws of the road when you get in your car? They say whenever you get in your car and you drive three blocks you've broken a law. It is the same thing with the fishing now. You get in your boat, you start off and run a couple of miles, you've broken a law someplace. You don't know it, but you did. That's what's happening. They just put too many restrictions on the American fishermen. They are killing them. If it is going to save everything else, but ruin the industry, well, fine, go ahead, save everything else. But you are not because that foreign fisherman is going to come in and tell you to go to grass. He is gonna do his job, his way, the way he wants it. You are not going to run him. Then we turn right around and buy his fish because most of the fish is coming from his country. There are your politicians that I was talking about earlier. It is a vicious circle.

RW: I see boats down there now by G Street Mall. Those guys just sitting there, or are they going out fishing at all?

PG: They will go out. They are having their nets worked on and stuff like that, then have their machinery worked on, repair work. It is not that they are working out of here anymore. We have no canneries here anymore.

RW: What do the local restaurants and fish markets ... are they getting from local fishermen, or are they getting it from foreign?

PG: There are some local fishermen catching fish. You know, local fish markets, they are getting 'em, but nothing from the seiners or anything like that. Nothing being canned here. What is being canned here is sport fishing stuff.

RW: So if I had a fish market like they have near Shelter Island you can buy them off of the local fisherman's boat?

PG: You can, but most of them ... To survive in your own business you are going to have to import most of your fish because they won't let the fishermen bring in fish for you. They put too many restrictions on him. He is not allowed to go out and bring it in for you. So to survive in your business you've got to have outlets. Buy fish from up north, east, or from Japan, Australia.

RW: It seems ridiculous when you can go out here and catch them; they are that close.

PG: We never, never ... I don't remember ever having to buy any fish. Now it just kills me because I have to pay for the fish. We never bought fish. It was always just abundance of it.

RW: Do you think that the fishing ground is fished out, or that it could be fished out? PG- It has gone down a lot, yeah, but only because, like anything else, where years ago you had a handful of people fishing, now you've got a population fishing. You've got commercial fishermen going out, pleasure fishermen, sport fishermen, all going after the same things. Like I was telling you, during lobster season I used to go with my father with the traps and go for lobsters. They don't even make traps anymore. The lobster fishermen don't feel like doing it anymore because the divers come and steal the lobsters out of his traps. So it is just a mess.

RW: The same thing happened with the abalone. You could walk along the shore and pick up all the abalone you wanted.

PG: They just steal from each other and take in the young. They are fishing out the lobster and abalone. In fact, I think they have already fished the abalone out, to tell the truth. I've had an idea for years, but land is too valuable around here.

RW: What idea is this?

PG: I've always thought to farm lobster, abalone, shrimp ...

RW: They've been doing that down at south bay, I heard. Not to a large extent, but that is what they have been working on. PG. - You need a large extent because a little bit isn't going to do any good. I've been talking about this for the last 30/40 years.

RW: I [read] an article a year or so ago down in south bay they could control the conditions so much that the lobsters grow twice as fast than they do out at sea. I haven't heard anything about it since.

PG: I know you probably can. I believe it. Like I say, you can't get enough property together to do it. Somebody wants to come and build a condominium there. You haven't got a chance - either that or a boat harbor, or something, something to play with. Never mind making a living or making food, or eat, somebody wants to play there. The heck with the food. Let somebody else make the food or the living, we want to play here. All up and down the coast you can't touch anything. Like I say, to farm it you need acres of water. They aren't going to let you have it. I don't think the Coastal Commission will even let you think about it because they can build a condo there.

RW: I remember the guys who were fixing the nets down there.

PG: They used to allow the tuna boats to tie up all along the embarcadero and the guys would mend their nets there. This would bring a lot of tourists there. They were interested; they wanted to see a fishing net. Here they've eaten tuna all their lives and they didn't know nothing about it. They see these tuna boats and the guys working the nets [and] they were snapping pictures all over the place. And what did they do? They chased them out. They are not allowed to fix their nets there, not even allowed to tie up there - nothing. They just took a tourist attraction away.

RW: You were saying up the coast they are doing this.

PG: Up there they preserve this.

RW: Up there means Monterey?

PG: Monterey, Fort Bragg, in the San Francisco area, but not the city of San Francisco so much.

RW: The embarcadero is dead up there.

PG: No. San Francisco is doing the same thing they are doing here.

RW: How about San Pedro?

PG: In San Pedro they've got one section they have left for the fishermen. San Pedro is just half-like. They have "Ports-O-Call" over here that is new. But the other half is still the old fishing boats and stuff. So they've kept half of it. But San Diego is just completely out. They put them down there in a hole where nobody even knows they are there. You used to see people walking the embarcadero all the time, just walking back and forth. Now you don't see anybody there, whereas when the boats were there and the nets were there you'd see crowds of people walking back and forth all the time - even busloads of people. Tour buses would bring the people there and let them get out and take pictures. Somebody didn't like it, I guess, and took it all out.

RW: I know it is a shame that happened but I think there is a larger reason in that ...

PG: I think the reasoning was a lot to do; they were concentrating on bringing these cruise ships here and they wanted to clear all that. Now they haven't got either one. But the cruise ships were going out of the B Street pier. The fishing boats weren't bothering anybody where the Star and them are. And this would have been good business for the *Star,* too, because the people were there. While they were there they went aboard the *Star.* You know, one thing I've always gotten mad at. This town has got a lot of people like me, born and raised here, lived here all our lives, all up and down the wharf and do you know not one ... Now, I've been here all my life and I have never heard of one person on the Port Commission here or anything to do with this port that ever lived around here. They know nothing about this port; they don't even know what saltwater tastes like, or what it looks like. They sit up in that Port Commission office and they make all the dictations. Why don't they get some people on that Port Commission that know the port? They've got them here. This town is full of talent.

RW: I don't know how they choose people getting on the board, whether they are asked, or ...

PG: They've been asked, so far. That really gets to you, you know. They've got the talent here; they've got the best talent any town could ever want and yet they go out and get somebody because this guy did him a favor at one time. It is a favor job. I don't know too much about it, but as long as I've been here I've never heard of one man or woman, one person that has ever lived within ten miles of this waterfront ever being on the Port Commission. Everybody that is born and raised on the waterfront they don't even ask their advice. They don't care; you don't exist. Everybody on that Port Commission has never been any closer to that bay than ten miles or so.

RW: I think, perhaps, you are right on one hand. The other hand I think what their line of thinking is nostalgia is one thing, but the dollars are more.

PG: Yeah, but the nostalgia could bring you the dollars. It is doing it in all the ports up north. What is keeping a lot of them little towns going? The tourists, right? Fort Bragg has got nothing. But because of that little fishing thing it brings the people in and it is keeping them alive. Look at New England, too. The only thing keeping them little towns alive is the tourists coming, and what is it? The nostalgia, the old times; people want to know how their ancestors, how the people lived.

RW: Also, eating fresh lobsters and fresh fish.

PG: You are right there, right. And we've taken all of that away from them.

RW: Now that you mention it, it is kind of sterile down there.

PG: I know it is. That waterfront is never .. Like I say, I was born and raised on this waterfront. I've never seen it as dead as it has been in the last two or three years. In fact, I used to say, this guy I worked with, "Arch, I don't know what I would do if I retired. Just sit around?" Heck, if I retired I would never sit around the house. I can always go to the wharf and see a bunch of the guys that I was born and raised with, shoot the breeze for half a day. My father, for years, one of his biggest enjoyments was to take a walk down to the wharf. He'd walk from, say, Laurel Street to Broadway pier, or maybe down to G Street pier and back again. And in that time he'd see almost everybody he knew. And he'd love it. Then he'd go home. Today it is dead down there. You see it. There is nothing to do down there anymore. They've killed that waterfront instead of building it up.

RW: Pat, I want to thank you for the Historical Society and for the Maritime Museum. It was a good interview. We will get this in and I appreciate it. Thank you.

END OF INTERVIEW