

This recording is of retired ILWU Local 502 longshoreman Ron Zona who worked on the New Westminster waterfront. The major themes discussed are longshoring, union involvement, the dispatch system, “wolfing”, and cargo handling.

Interviewer: Joe Breaks

Interview Date: 29 January 2013

Date Range: 1967 - 2011

Sound Recording Length: 14:26

Ron Zona is a retired longshoreman and member of International Longshoremen's & Warehousemen's Union (ILWU). He started working as a longshoreman in 1967 when he was 17 years old. His first job was only for half a day at Overseas Transport where he worked hand stowing lumber, but he left the waterfront after his first shift. In 1970, after he had gotten married, he worked as a cab driver often driving the longshoremen back and forth from the dispatch hall to Fraser Surrey Docks. One day he decided that he was going to become a longshoreman again, which is how he got his second start longshoring in 1970, and continued working until his retirement in 2011. Zona felt like it was his duty to serve in the union leadership, and for 75% of his time he served on some kind of committee, and found the experience to be very rewarding. Overall, he found his longshore experience very positive. Some of the different docks that Zona worked for were Overseas Transport, Westshore Terminals, Annacis Island, Fraser Surrey Dock, and rice mills. Along the west coast Zona also worked in Woodfibre and Squamish.

Section 0:00 – 2:52

- In this section of the interview Zona discusses how he first started working on the New Westminster waterfront, at Overseas Transport, in 1967. However, after his first day on the job he left and came back only in 1970. During that 3-year period he worked as a cab driver, driving longshoremen, who needed to be driven from the dispatch hall to assignments at Fraser Surrey Docks. He describes in detail how he returned to longshoring in July 1970.

Section 2:52 – 6:26

- In this section of the interview Zona describes the work safety and gear that the longshoremen wore to work, the changes to the dispatch system that he experienced, and why he enjoyed working as a longshoreman. Zona stated that longshoring maintained his interest: he could work on different ships from different countries, different longshoremen, and with different gangs. He describes the organization of the work gangs. Zona handled many commodities including unpackaged lumber, sacks of rice from the rice mills on Number 5 Road in Richmond, cars, grain, nickel matte, and fruits from New Zealand.

Section 6:27- 8:50

- In this section of the interview Zona discusses his involvement with the ILWU, spending 75% of his time in the union serving on some kind of committee. He first served as a committee member on the grievance credential board that which sorted out issues amongst different people that needed to be dealt “in a proper

manner”. He also served as an executive member. Zona also discusses how the ports on the west coast shared their work, for instance, a longshoreman from New Westminster could work in Squamish, Vancouver, or Vancouver Island, and vice versa. An individual who temporarily worked at a different port from his own was called a “wolfer”.

Section 8:51 -- 12:42

- In this section of the interview Ron Zona discusses his difficulty working a regular graveyard shift at Westshore Terminals. He states it felt like the work would consume your whole week because when he went home he would sleep and then when he woke up, he would have to go back to work again. Overall, he believed the waterfront gave him a good life. Zona discusses the respect from the workers and amongst themselves, and how the workers looked after each other. He discusses the various tasks he did at Westshore.

Section 12:43 -- 14:26

- In this section Zona tells a funny story about one time of how he worked in Vancouver and had to handle animal hides, which came in boxcars from Manitoba and Saskatchewan, and had a horrible stench. He recalls one time he had to work hides in the summer, the maggots and the smell from the hides was just terrible. When he got on the bus to go home after work within two blocks he had the whole back of the bus to himself.