

This recording is an interview with Ron Noullett a retired ILWU Local 502 longshoreman. The major themes discussed in this interview are longshoring, containerization, mechanization, workplace safety, women, wages, union, and socializing with coworkers

Interviewers: Dave Lomas and Jim McKinley

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Date Range: 1960s – 2013

Sound Recording Length: 00:56:26

Ron Noullett is a retired longshoreman and member of International Longshoremen's & Warehousemen's Union (ILWU) Local 502 who mostly worked in New Westminster and Surrey. Growing up in Queensborough, Noullett knew of the waterfront as a youth, since he and his friends would "get into trouble" for things such as playing on sand dunes and ships, and playing "boom tag." In 1962, at age 16, Noullett began working as a longshoreman, and attained union membership after 10 years as a casual. Although he retired in 2011, Noullett still remains active in the union on various caucuses and committees, and currently is a part of an education committee teaching new Local 502 members about the history of the union. Throughout the interview he speaks highly of about his experience working on the waterfront. The only negative thing that Noullett speaks about is that he has mixed feelings about ILWU members' sons, who he believes receive preferential treatment because their fathers who were a part of the union before them<sup>1</sup>. Noullett states that he worked everywhere throughout his whole career, in the interview he mentions Pacific Coast Terminals (PCT), Overseas Transport, Delta rice mills, and Fraser Surrey Docks.

Section 0:00 – 11:09

- In this portion of the interview Noullett discusses how he started working on the waterfront at the age of 16 with the assistance of his friend's father who was a longshoreman, despite the age requirement of having to be 18. He describes the type of jobs that he did on the waterfront, the different docks he worked at within the Local 502 area, and the different materials he handled. He discusses how the wage he was making as a longshoreman was higher than his father's wage, who was a senior man at a lumber mill.

Section 11:10 – 24:58

- In this section of the interview Noullett discusses the transition from longshoremen hand stowing cargo by to mechanization and automation, and how these changes affected their work. He describes his first experiences with the machines that were introduced to him during this transition to automation and mechanization, and his perceptions of how this has affected longshoring. In this section Noullett also describes how longshoremen would earn respect from one another, through doing hard work.

Section 24:59 – 27:25

- In this section of the interview Noullett talks about the different ways he socialized with his coworkers, during and after work, which often involved alcohol. He describes the

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<sup>1</sup> Noullett's daughter was inducted into ILWU Local 502 in 2014.

different annual social events that the union holds, such as the family picnic and Christmas parties, which he believes are important because the deteriorating effects that mechanization has had on the social bonds between workers. Noullett also discusses the different ways he got involved in the union by sitting various caucuses and committees, and he was elected as the business agent in 1972.

#### Section 27:26 – 37:06

- In this section of the interview Noullett discusses work safety on the waterfront. He recalls that there was a saying that if a ship was from New Westminster they knew it was safe and “even down south they would say that.” He describes safety on the job as being a learning evolution. He recalls the first woman to work as a longshoreman in the early 1970s, and states that it was a shame that she was put to work on a car ship, which was a prime job at the time, and this led to the president of the local to be impeached. He believes that she should have stood in the longshore hall to get a job like everyone else. In this portion of the interview, Noullett talks about his female family members who work on the waterfront, and his views about women working on the waterfront. In his section, he also describes the times he had to work with raw salted hides, which he describes as unpleasant.

#### Section 37:07 – 48:07

- In this section of the interview Noullett reflects upon the changes that the New Westminster waterfront has gone through, and how the work of longshoremen has increasingly become easier due to mechanization and automation. He mentions how the strength of the ILWU made longshoring one of the top paid industries. Noullett describes how longshoring affected his family life. For example, was divorced because he worked a lot and did the off shifts, because those were the shifts that paid “premium money.” He also discusses the drinking problem he developed, which he attributes to the prevalence of alcohol in the work environment. In this section, Noullett tells a story of how he almost died on the job. His gang was moving steel at Fraser Surrey Docks, and something went wrong with the machinery that led to the steel bars being dropped, which almost crushed the gang.

#### Section 48:08 – 56:26

- In this section of the interview Noullett discusses his views about the union and the committee that he is currently involved in, which provides orientations about the constitution and the history of the ILWU a week before new members are inducted into the union. He believes that when longshoremen are sitting in machinery they do not get the same the education about the union that the longshoremen of his time grew up with. In this section Noullett briefly mentions how he feels about members’ sons receiving preferential access to longshoring.