

WILLIAM HAUSINGER
Timekeeper/Fireman/Longshoreman

Summary: William Hausinger Jr speaks about holding two jobs, one at the port and the other at the fire station. He explains how it was difficult to get a job at the port without having a connection with someone, pranks they played on new employees, and how his whole family worked at some point at the Port.

00:00 Oct 21, 2011
ILA office in Houston

William Hausinger
00.58

Born Nov 9, 1934. 5 years old moved close to ILA union hall. Watched it while growing up. Had a shoe shine box and used to set up near the offices during pay day, turned out to be a lucrative business. Only charged a dime but got good tips. At 18 stood in line to get a job. No seniority system. Button man means union member. Guaranteed a job over anything else. No automation. everything by hand. "Lamb back was a dirty job, cow hide was a stinky job." Tried to avoid such jobs. Had one four year break due to medical reasons. Worked for 32 years. Had side jobs when there was no work.

05:00

No containers. Commodities and household goods would be lifted out of the ship hatch cover and loaded out on the dock or vice versa. Worked Clerk and time keeping for last 25 years.

Worked in hold of ship for the first 7 years.

10:00

Rotation on cotton jobs only. Every man working the cotton job would draw the same salary. Good cotton gang would know one another. Know the system, then welcome to work in any gang. Cotton bales had buckles on them with wires that were sharp and could cut. Had protective layering on while working with cotton. Cotton wit 600-700 bales was a coveted job.

13:10

New comers. Kinship and friendship job. These days it is called networking, those days was just called kinship. Did not pull anyone down. Needed to know someone to get in. While hiring it was button men first. 1969 started seniority system. Union advantage of being a button man changed. While hiring it was button men first. Anybody could work and get in the union. Hiring a gang foreman or picking up a gang.

Early days there was a man who made ice water. His tools were an icepick. Been there 30-40 years. Took care of old timers then.

17:00

Gang numbers used to vary according to the job. Commodities were loose back then and then they started to be wrapped up in plastic. Worked to the bottom of the hole, called the skin of the ship. Worked down a layer at a time.

20:00

Gangs would stay together. The outsider was getting a start like anyone else. "Partner's progress." Retired since 1990.

23:00

Non-union shops were always known as Scabs. There were non-union jobs available. Port of Houston does not allow its docks to be completely used by non-union labor.

25:00

Nobody broke a picket line when organized by labor. The only people who crossed the picket line were "the ladies of the night." There were some fights when people had other jobs. Fights on the waterfront were a lot of times because of jealousy and sometimes because non-union labor was working in a particular dock. Union also has to police itself. If there are certain people who don't tow the union's line or continually get job abuse written up they are retrained, warned or fired. Don't want anyone harming the union or Port of Houston's reputation.

29:00

Common prank. To buy a Longshoreman's manual. Was asked to buy beer at midnight. Drinking was rampant then. Worked together always. Did socialize after the job. There were certain clubs that we frequented. In 1990, did not socialize as much. Do keep in touch and attend retiree meetings. Hoping to get a museum in Houston, trying to lobby Port Commissioners for the museum.

35:20

Compared to manual labor, clerks and checks only lifted a pencil. Need to make sure job was well done and reached the right place. Lot of responsibility and had a lot of paperwork.

Women in ILA. Women did not want to get a job in the hold. They took a dock checking job to check cargo loads on trucks for quantity, damages etc. It was accepted. They were as good workers as the men, sometimes even better.

37:30

Unions were integrated on April 1, 1983. Checkers hall was always inter-racial. Deep sea longshoreman, stevedores were separate. Stood together in the hall as union brothers. Had an equal chance at getting a job. in the old days, Ship was divided in half. First half went to the white locals and the second half went to the black. On the next ship it was

vice versa. So it was pretty equal then. Did away with that system in 1983 when the integration happened. Will Call, available when you need to be. Not a fixed time job. Seniority keeps the same level. Timekeeper job had a lot of responsibility. When foreman notices the time keeper is not there, he has to fire him,

44:00

Worst accident. Saw big forklift with tons of steel back up over a man's leg. Chief on the ship is the first doctor. Chief mate is the pharmacist mate on the ship. Containers squash two men on deck.

FBI incident.

Customs are the Gods of the waterfront. Nothing loads or unloads without customs approval. Check every ships paper work, people on it, what they are transporting.

48:50

Wife got job at coast wire shipping. Company turned out to be Sea Land company. First ship came with 20 containers. That was the start. Late 60s containerization really took off. Been to Saudi Arabia 7 times with shipping companies. Clerk and timekeepers. 20-40 containers an hour. Container royalty fund. Not as many new hires coming in. Fund that helps pick up difference every year. Great hospitalization plan.

53:20

Used to have papers ready within an hour of either direction. When they gang comes on and off the ship gave them piece of paper saying how much money they made , didn't have to wait, could go to the union hall and hand it in. If there was some problem, union hall would contact the walking foreman on the ship.

55:40

New people are so glad to get a job they will do their best. Union has education programs and safety programs and is continually educating new comers. Have tests and exams for computer literacy. Have to be computer literate, container qualified. Will always need people, even with automation and containerization. Losing a lot of labor is a far-fetched thought.

59:30

Wife liked the steady job of a firefighter. Was always reluctant to think there is no steady income from the waterfront. There is no guarantee. Always made it. Proud of benefits. Left City of Houston job after 21 years, got nothing. Son works at the Port as a clerk. Two daughters work for stevedores and company, son is chief clerk, other son puts up construction elevators. Whole family has worked on the port. Loved being a longshoreman. Different job every day, different people.

1:03:12

Worked 62 hours a week at the fire station. Then started work as a dispatcher for 40 hours a week. Started working at the port. Love the waterfront. Had a shrimp boat on the side.

rebuilt a 10 year old shrimp boat. Caught as much 1700 pounds in one day. Helped with the living. In the last 5-10 years just nobody can come and make a living in the first year itself. Have to do something else as supplemental income. Need to be able to leave the other job whenever the union hall calls. Women working in the hold of the ship. Never been approached to do anything illegal.

1:11:38

Visited a lot of ports. Socialize with people at other ports. Hiring time was 7, 8, 10 and 1 pm. Would play dominos waiting to be hired. Seining in Galveston. Have had the opportunity to work at the fire station close to the port. Certified welder. Retired as Deputy Chief from the fire dept. all had secondary jobs, house builders, fire fighters, concrete pourers, jewelry store owners.