

# Leo Braun Log

## **01:05**

Born in Houston, TX on Nov 6<sup>th</sup> 1933. Went to parochial school, dropped out of college. First towboat in 1955 and worked as deckhand for \$10 a day. No conveniences on board. No running water. On the boat for 20 days and back for 10. Segregation was prevalent and even bathrooms were segregated.

## **04:25**

Introduced to towboats by friend from college. Did not need application to get hired as deckhand. Was responsible for upkeep of boat. Cleaning and cooking, fastening luggage. Mates drive boat for 12 hours while captain drives for 6 hours. When not working on towboat, worked in Dallas for printing company.

## **06:33**

Then got drafted in the marine and served for two years. Out of service in 1958 and after a year on towboat decided to get college degree. After college degree, got married to secretary of registrar and went back to work on boat right after graduation. That is where the money was.

## **7:36**

After a few years got a job ashore at National Marine and worked as a dispatcher for four years. Pay got cut in half. National Marine had contract with Shell Oil and moved crude oil. As dispatcher, would ask boats to transport oil, fuel, diesel from one place to another. Then got a job with Sioux City and New Orleans Barge Lines. Work involved travelling on the Missouri River, very treacherous. Sold company to Crown Interest in Chicago. Moved to St. Louis for one year after company was bought over. Started work as a dispatcher and left as operations manager. Worked the Missouri river, Tennessee River, Ohio River and the Mississippi River.

## **10:20**

Boats would haul salt, grains, molasses. Barges can usually load 9-10 ft draft but on Missouri River can load only 6.5 ft. Moved to Houston as Operations Manager in 1970s to a company called Outlow Barge Lines. Business in the company was booming. Decided to leave and buy a boat in 1975. Partnered with Ron Dansby who was more into administration.

## **13:00**

First boat was a David B. It was making \$750 a day working with Phillips Petroleum. Formed company but did not quit till there was a contract. Got a job from Shell Oil. David B cost \$75,000. Bought three boats.

**15:29**

Would hear about boats through the industry and through different people because industry was small. Branched out and got a job with DuPont. Had two boats working with DuPont and three with Phillips Petroleum. Started building boats and started naming them after Texas Rivers. Met and started working with Bill Ivy, a good salesman. Money in towboat industry is made through barges. The boats are means to an end. Started building barges.

**17:17**

Government would help you to build boats and barges by funding some money. Called Title 11. In 80s everyone had overbuilt barges and boats and owed money to the government. By then owed \$10 million. Negotiated with the banks. Started paying back only interest, no principle. Decided to take care of equipment and not spend additional costs to put it up somewhere. Talked to different companies about merging. To get out of trouble. Worked out deal with Ed Smith. Bought more barges and boats. Had 10 boats and 20 barges. Talked about selling company to Dixie Carrier or Kirby Corporation in 1989.

**20:55**

Dixie Carriers were union. Company was non union. Started company called Dixie Marine which was Non union. There was red fleet and green fleet. Did not work because crews were bickering about what one got and the other didn't. After four years the companies merged. Kirby Corporation bought 5 more companies. Hodge-podge. Companies started bidding against each other. Sales group got together and reported to Houston. Each company had individual culture and was difficult to come together as one company. 1992 all companies came together.

**24:40**

Stayed in operations. Crewing vessels. Was VP of operations. Kirby did not have training centers. Was asked to set up training department. Trained deckhands and entry level people and were sent to school for 10-12 days. Stayed on a towboat and on a fleet and ran classes even at night. Created a scenario exactly like it is on a boat. They stayed on boat. Retired from Kirby and went back to ride boats.

**27:30**

To maintain license a certain number of days on board is needed or working in the industry can be counted as sea time. In 1955 did not need a license to run a boat. Licensing laws came in 1971-2.

**29:20**

National marine was a big company domiciled out of New York. But only 7-8 people worked in Houston office. Sioux City and New Orleans Barge lines had 15 boats, 240 barges. Alamo Barge Lines in Houston had 5 boats and 20 barges, Ed Smith built the company to 20-25 boats and 70-80 barges. Sold company to Houston Natural Gas which is now Enron.

**30:54**

Moved mostly liquid cargo than solids. Liquid being petroleum, poisons, pressure gases. More government intervention in regulations in the last 20 years. Regulations are pretty strong. Coast guard is regulatory body, used to oversee. Have become coast guard examiner. Check to see if people are qualified to do the job. Do some consulting and some survey work. Also sometimes called on to be expert witness. Ride boats 10-12 days in a month. Pick and choose what I want to do. Have to be familiar with the place. Ride from Brownsville, TX to Panama City, FL and Baton Rouge and New Orleans.

**35:22**

Depends on area of operation. On the Inter coastal waterway barges are restricted to a size of 1200 ft by 55 ft. On the river 40-50 barges, 7 acres of barges. 10,000 horse power. Inter-coastal waterway mapped out by government. Starts from East Coast, comes down to Florida, goes across Florida, Lake Okeechobee in Tampa to Carrabelle, FL. From Carrabelle, FL to New Orleans, LA to Mobile, AL. Between New Orleans and Mobile boat is in open waters. Inter-coastal waterway was completed in the late 40s after World War II. Government maintained. Canal is supposed to be 125 ft wide and 12 ft deep but parts of it are wider.

**38:52**

Contracts were done every year and were called evergreen. Can bid on contract for a year or for less time that. Different ways to bid on contract. If you give boat and barge, you get a sum of money or can move it by barrel. Spot marketing, no work but someone wants something moved one time. Lot of money in spot market. Uncertain about work. Contract work is long range. Good to have a mix. Rates are good for contracts in winter time. Summer time rates go down.

**41:40**

Word of mouth gets around, a lot of work comes that way. Pay is good. Anybody can walk in off a farm and in three years be a mate or a captain making \$89,000 a year. Paying you more than anything else to be away from home. Responsibility on the wife is a lot. While working at Sioux City and New Orleans Barge lines there were cooks and maids on the boat. Usually husband and wife team. Used to run a boat with 8-10 people, now it is just 4-5. Don't think industry recognizes the wives enough. 3-4 marriages are not uncommon for people to have. One captain nicknamed Bubba had 7 children, one set of twins, married four times and none of his children were from his wives.

**46:01**

Status difference is there. Like high school and college. Ship people are college people and tow boat people are high school people. Never cared to go to sea. Still challenging. Have had Collision or two. At the Houston ship channel ship was going too fast and too slow. Ship maybe doing 12 miles/hour. Hit the barge and knocked a hole. Did not sink completely, were still floating. No damage to cargo. Worst incident. Had lots of close calls but none so bad. They are either single skin or double skin. Because of

Exxon Valdez oil spill, everything had to be double skin. With double skin there is a tank inside of a tank. (shows pictures of double skin barges) Cargo was gasoline and floats on water.

#### **49:30**

Happened in 1961 and coast guard didn't come out. Today coast guard would come out immediately. It was mechanical failure on ship. Navigation features are incredible now. Has made communication easier and safer. Earlier couldn't talk to ship because of different frequencies. Now can talk to ships. Earlier communication was all visual. Biggest change was communication. Earlier had to pull up to drawbridge, blow three whistles and the bridge would open. Now can call ahead and ask for it to be opened. Education level has also gone up. Communication is all on computer. Orders come on computer. Lot of people could not read or write. Coast guard had oral exams. Salaries have become better in the last 20 years. There is still a shortage of labor because wives or girlfriends want men to be home. So they leave good jobs to stay home.

#### **54:27**

Met some people at a funeral. Thought of meeting often. Met 3-4 years ago and there were four people. Formed a group called Bay Area Ancient Mariners. Have 70 members but 30-40 are active. Meet once a month and talk about old times. Chance for people to meet people they have not seen in a long time.

#### **58:36**

BAM is made of operational workforce. Not too many commercial workers. 2-3 members are ex-coastguards. Good relationship with coast guard. Earlier coast guard shifts were 6 hours on and 6 hours off. Now they have 8 hour watch and 4 hour watch. Industry has become better.

#### **1:02:52**

Don't interact with Port Authority at all. Maybe corporate interacts with them. Seamen's center is a social club. Seamen's church institute has been training people since 1834. Is Episcopalian and has trained hundreds of seamen.

#### **1:05:18**

Propeller club is a social organization. International club. Meet once a month and don't have to be in the industry. Networking club that anyone can join. American Waterways Operator (AWO) is national organization for towboaters. Lobby group in Washington. Better waterways, deeper drafts, rules and regulations, more bridges. Infrastructure is the primary thing. More a watchdog. Gulf Inter-coastal association, regulatory authority that takes care of the Gulf Coast.

#### **1:09:22**

No school to teach these things, now there are schools. If wife can stand it is a good job. Enjoy this job. Adventure of it, being out on the water. Have time to be by yourself, no distractions. Lots of time to think and pray. Everything is provided. Groceries, laundry, uniforms. Benefits are good, like hospital.

Good place to start. River people start out on towboat by the time they are in college they make \$100,000 a year. Working 6 months in a year. 30 days on, 30 days off. Keeps you out of trouble.