

Regional Oral History Office
The Bancroft Library

University of California
Berkeley, California

Richard Mooradian

The Bay Bridge Oral History Project

Interviews conducted by
Martin Meeker with Sam Redman
in 2012

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Oakland Museum of California, the California Department of Transportation,
the California Transportation Commission, and the Bay Area Toll Authority

Since 1954 the Regional Oral History Office has been interviewing leading participants in or well-placed witnesses to major events in the development of Northern California, the West, and the nation. Oral History is a method of collecting historical information through tape-recorded interviews between a narrator with firsthand knowledge of historically significant events and a well-informed interviewer, with the goal of preserving substantive additions to the historical record. The tape recording is transcribed, lightly edited for continuity and clarity, and reviewed by the interviewee. The corrected manuscript is bound with photographs and illustrative materials and placed in The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, and in other research collections for scholarly use. Because it is primary material, oral history is not intended to present the final, verified, or complete narrative of events. It is a spoken account, offered by the interviewee in response to questioning, and as such it is reflective, partisan, deeply involved, and irreplaceable.

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The Bridges and the San Francisco Bay Oral History Project: Series History

The Regional Oral History Office (ROHO) of The Bancroft Library at the University of California, Berkeley, launched a new oral history series on the history of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge in May 2012. At that time, ROHO entered into an agreement with the Oakland Museum of California (OMCA) to conduct approximately 15 oral histories, totaling about 30 hours of interviews, on the history of the Bay Bridge, the San Francisco Bay, and bridges in the surrounding region.

This project was a collaboration between ROHO, OMCA, the California Department of Transportation (Caltrans), the Bay Area Toll Authority (BATA), and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission (MTC). This project was designed to fulfill the historical mitigation requirements associated with the dismantling of the eastern span of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge. The series coincided with, and contributed to, the research phase and design phase of an exhibit at OMCA on the social and environmental history of the San Francisco Bay.

This project provides a new set of resources widely accessible to students, scholars, and the public interested in the San Francisco Bay. Interviews focused on the men and women who spent a good portion of their careers working on the bridge, whether as painters or engineers, toll-takers or architects, labor or management. Beyond the human dimension of the bridges, these structures also connect geographic spaces, providing conceptual linkages between cultures, environments, and political discourses. This oral history project, then, explored the role of the iconic bridges in shaping the identity of the region, as well as their place in architectural, environmental, labor, and political history. This project enhances the historical understanding of the San Francisco Bay and the natural and built environment that helps define the region.

The Bay Bridge Oral History Project launched with an investigation of the history of the bay and the architectural, social, and political history of the bridges that span the waters of the region. Planning meetings attended by representatives of ROHO, OMCA, Caltrans, BATA, and MTC began in mid-2011. In these meetings, representatives of the various groups discussed the topics that should be covered in the interviews as well as the kind of people who should be interviewed. Although there were no known individuals who worked on the construction of the Bay Bridge (1934-36) still living, a foremost goal of the project was document the construction of the bridge and its early years, especially before the bridge was altered in 1959 with the removal of rail tracks on the lower deck. Beyond that initial goal, interviews were sought with individuals who would be able to share unique experiences related to the bridges from a variety of personal and professional vantage points: from laborers involved in maintenance of the bridge through bridge engineers who worked on the design on the new eastern span. The primary focus of this project was to dig deeper into the complex history of the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge and its changing relationship to human communities and the environment.

The project interview staff at ROHO consisted of Sam Redman, PhD, and Martin Meeker, PhD. The project interviewers were assisted by David Dunham, technical specialist, and Julie Allen, editor.

Interview #1 October 16, 2012

Begin Audio File 1 mooradian_richard_01_10-16-12_stereo.mp3

01-00:00:05

Meeker: Today is the sixteenth of October, 2012. This is Martin Meeker interviewing Richard Mooradian for the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge Oral History Project. Did I pronounce your last name correctly?

01-00:00:20

Mooradian: Absolutely. It was perfect.

01-00:00:22

Meeker: Okay.

01-00:00:23

Mooradian: There are people I've known here for thirty-plus years that still can't say my name. And that's okay.

01-00:00:30

Meeker: What we're going to do today is really walk you, or have you walk us, through your career working in and around the San Francisco-Oakland Bay Bridge, I believe as an employee of Caltrans for the entire period of the time?

01-00:00:49

Mooradian: Thirty-three years, yes.

01-00:00:50

Meeker: For thirty-three years. I want you to tell us about the different jobs that you've done, because I know they've been many. Once you talk about the different jobs, I'll probably ask a series of follow-up questions to get some more detail on those things. We'll also touch upon some important events and transitions that happened. Really the main one since 1979, when you started working, would have been the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake.

01-00:01:17

Mooradian: Loma Prieta, yes.

01-00:01:18

Meeker: So we'll certainly talk about that for a little bit, and then of course the construction of the new eastern span, and all of the issues that that brings up. Let me first start out and get a sense about who you are, where you were raised. Maybe tell me a little bit about your parents. Maybe just start out by saying what your birthdate is and where you were born.

01-00:01:43

Mooradian: My birthday is August 31, 1957. I was born in Burlingame, California. I was adopted as a child. I grew up in Oakland. I take that back. I lived in the city until I was three, and then we moved to Oakland, and that's where I grew up and went to high school.

01-00:02:03

Meeker: Where in Oakland did you live?

01-00:02:25

Mooradian: Right near Mills College. Right off of Fifty-Fifth Avenue.

01-00:02:10

Meeker: And—

01-00:02:14

Mooradian: What can I add? Like I said, I was adopted. My parents wanted to start a family, and they tried and nothing was happening, so they adopted me. Then three years later, my mom wound up getting pregnant, so I have a little sister. I met my birth mother ten, twelve years ago. I met her, which is really kind of cool.

01-00:02:34

Meeker: Was she living in the Bay Area?

01-00:02:35

Mooradian: No. Actually, she was from Racine, Wisconsin. She conceived me there and came out here to live with a girlfriend, to have me, because, fifty-five years ago, would have been a bastard kid, and that wouldn't work. So she gave me up, went back, met a man, married him. So I now have two more sisters and a brother back in Racine.

01-00:02:56

Meeker: A bigger, complex family, then.

01-00:02:57

Mooradian: Yes. It's really cool.

01-00:02:58

Meeker: So the family you were raised in, what did your parents do?

01-00:03:01

Mooradian: My dad worked for Southern Pacific. He started out loading and unloading boxcars for, like, eleven cents an hour or something like that, and then he wound up finally working his way into the claims department. My mom was a school secretary. She was, like, really smart. She used to run two elementary schools, just one secretary.

01-00:03:21

Meeker: These were in Oakland?

01-00:03:23

Mooradian: In Oakland, yes. Graduated 1975, Oakland High School.

01-00:03:30

Meeker: Where is that?

01-00:03:31
Mooradian: It's right off of Park Boulevard. Park Boulevard and MacArthur, or 580 basically.

[break in tape]

01-00:03:42
Meeker: Okay. All right, I can take a breather now. All right, so we were just getting a little bit of background about where you were raised, and you had talked about your parents' occupations, and you said that you graduated from Oakland High School in 1970—

01-00:03:57
Mooradian: Nineteen seventy-five.

01-00:03:58
Meeker: Nineteen seventy-five. Tell me a little bit about your high school experience. Were you interested in sports, or were you more—

01-00:04:05
Mooradian: I was a gearhead.

01-00:04:07
Meeker: A gearhead. What's a gearhead?

01-00:04:09
Mooradian: Motors, motorcycles, cars. I made the football team, I made the wrestling team, only because I wanted to make both of them. After that, I never participated in a game nor wrestled in a match. I wanted to see if I could make the teams, which I did.

01-00:04:26
Meeker: So you were one of those guys, then, that always had a car that was disassembled in his front driveway.

01-00:04:30
Mooradian: Or assembling your car or his car. Yeah, and I'm still that way.

01-00:04:36
Meeker: What was your first car?

01-00:04:38
Mooradian: A 1955 Chevy. My parents bought it when it was six months old, and I turned sixteen and they decided they wanted a new car, and they said, "You can have this car. You have to pay for your insurance, pay for your gas." I went, "Okay." They gave me a beautiful 1955 car. Within a year and a half, I destroyed the thing, because I was sixteen. I drove it into the ground. That's how that goes.

01-00:05:03
Meeker: What kind of work were you doing when you were in high school?

01-00:05:05

Mooradian:

When I was in high school, I worked at gas stations. My first job was at a gas station. I've worked at quite a few. My senior year in high school, I had enough credits to where I could graduate early, but I didn't want to, so what I did was I went to school for a half a day, and then I would work the rest of the time. My classes consisted of two hours' worth of welding, an hour worth of metal shop, an hour worth of auto shop, and then I think I had a history class I had to take. That's what I did for the whole year.

01-00:05:42

Meeker:

That's great.

01-00:05:43

Mooradian:

Then I would get off and then I'd go to work at the gas station.

01-00:05:46

Meeker:

When you were a kid or going into high school, how did you first get into being a gearhead, as you said? Were you always just taking apart home appliances?

01-00:05:55

Mooradian:

I always fiddled with things. I remember my mom—I was probably about ten years old—she had an old electric can opener that wouldn't work, and she said, "I'm going to throw this away. Do you want to fix it?" I said, "Sure." I fixed that can opener. It lasted about two more years.

01-00:06:11

Meeker:

No kidding.

01-00:06:11

Mooradian:

It really did. But I've always been fascinated with things—mechanical. Gears. This, that, and the other.

01-00:06:18

Meeker:

Do you attribute this to natural aptitude, or were there people in your life who were also like this and kind of brought you into it?

01-00:06:25

Mooradian:

It's a natural aptitude, I think. Again, I was adopted. My adoptive father, he wasn't very mechanical. I surpassed him mechanical-wise, but we're all given our own bent, so to speak. My birth father, the one that conceived me, he was a firefighter and he was very mechanical, so I almost think that it's kind of inbred into you like that.

01-00:06:56

Meeker:

Passed down like that.

01-00:06:57

Mooradian:

Passed down. But as a child, I was always taking bicycles apart, me and my friends, and doing weird stuff.

01-00:07:05

Meeker: When you were working in the gas station, were you primarily pumping gas or were you working in the shop?

01-00:07:10

Mooradian: I was pumping gas, but the boss saw that I was good with my hands and he let me go back there and work on cars. Matter of fact, in high school as well, I worked at the Oakland Airport.

01-00:07:20

Meeker: Oh, you did?

01-00:07:20

Mooradian: There was a charter company. They had DC-3s, twin engine tail draggers, and I would help the mechanics work on airplanes when I was in high school, which was pretty cool, too.

01-00:07:31

Meeker: When you were in high school, when you were getting all of this experience doing mechanical work, were you thinking about what was next, what you were going to do when you graduated?

01-00:07:39

Mooradian: Actually, I wanted to become a firefighter. It was a feeling I always wanted to do. I tried, but it just wasn't in the stars, I guess. I always liked working with metal. Not so much wood. I've done a lot of carpentry work, but metal always had a fascination to me. My first welding experience was at age fourteen. One of the neighbor kids, who was a couple years older, was rebuilding a truck, and he was welding something, and he said, "Hey, do you want to try this?" and I went, "Sure." At fourteen is when I started welding. I thought, wow, this is great. From there, just branching off into different things.

01-00:08:20

Meeker: That's great. It sounds like you made an effort to become a firefighter and that didn't pan out. Is that how you ended up at Caltrans or—

01-00:08:29

Mooradian: No. I was going to junior college. I went to Merritt Junior College. I was driving a tow truck in Oakland for East Bay Towing. It was a AAA contract station, and it was through driving the tow truck that I met this young lady whose brother worked out here driving a tow truck. He said, "Hey, why don't you come to work for the state on the bridge?" I didn't even know that they had trucks on the bridge. They got me an application. I filled it out. I tested and did everything else. I scored pretty good, but how old was I? Twenty-one years old at the time, twenty-two. I was having a good time driving a tow truck in Oakland. I remember they called me and said, "Look, this is"—his name was Jack {Oldenheg?}. He's since passed away, but he was—

01-00:09:19

Meeker: Name is? I'm sorry.

01-00:09:20

Mooradian:

Jack {Oldenheg?}. He was one of the superintendents here. He's since passed away. He had called me and said, "Do you want this job or not?" I said, "Yeah, I guess so." He goes, "Well, you need to come in here right now. Not two hours from now. You need to come in here right now." So I came waltzing in. We interviewed a little bit. He goes, "Okay, you got the job. You need to sign these papers." I didn't have a pen on me, and he had a pen in his shirt, and I reached over and I said, "Well, let me see that." I signed the papers. He said, "Now you need to go to San Francisco, to 150 Oak Street. There's paperwork there you need to fill out, and start on such-and-such a day." That's how I started.

01-00:10:00

Meeker:

What was at 150 Oak Street?

01-00:10:01

Mooradian:

That was our district office, 150 Oak Street. Now it's in Oakland.

01-00:10:06

Meeker:

It's on West Grand, yeah?

01-00:10:07

Mooradian:

Yeah, 111 West Grand. So it was kind of a fluke. Excuse me for interrupting you. It was kind of a fluke, because Peter said, "Why don't you just come drive a tow truck here?" Once I got here and started driving a tow truck, oh, this was beautiful. I loved it.

01-00:10:23

Meeker:

Can you tell me about what the job category was and what you were brought in as? What employee level?

01-00:10:28

Mooradian:

I was brought in as a Maintenance Worker II. Brought into the tow department on this bridge. Like I said, it was great. It's probably the best job that Caltrans has. I have a career doing this as a structural welder, but if you just wanted a job driving the tow truck for the state, doesn't get any better.

01-00:10:50

Meeker:

Why do you say that?

01-00:10:52

Mooradian:

I'm a people person. I really like people. I'm kind of an adrenaline junkie. I like the action of being in traffic, dodging cars. I like the excitement that might come along with—maybe it's an accident, a car fire, a suicide, perhaps, or something. I like that. I still, on occasion—they'll call me over and I'll drive tow trucks on overtime. I would do that for free, because I love it so much. I really do.

01-00:11:20

Meeker:

That's great. Tell me a little bit about, then, you start here. You come back across the bay. What kind of hours were you working when you first started as a tow truck driver?

01-00:11:32

Mooradian:

As a tow truck driver, they just went to a four-ten shift, which was beautiful. It was a day shift, and I had Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday—wait a minute. Let me think back. I'm sorry. Give me just a moment.

01-00:11:48

Meeker:

It's quite all right.

01-00:11:50

Mooradian:

My days off were Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday. Then the remainder of the week, I worked, which was fine. I didn't care. Would I have liked to have weekends off? Yes, of course, but we worked on a seniority basis, and since I was a new hire, I was real low on that totem pole.

01-00:12:07

Meeker:

How many tow truck drivers were there when you first started, about?

01-00:12:09

Mooradian:

Oh, gosh. I'm encompassing all the bridges, because we would work on all the bridges as well. It seemed like there was eighty-five or ninety of us. Because it's a twenty-four-hour, seven-days-a-week gig.

01-00:12:26

Meeker:

Just in comparison, has that number remained constant or changed?

01-00:12:30

Mooradian:

Tow service here has always needed people. They're always short on bodies. I think they're probably down in the sixties or seventies right now. But they've also done some restructuring, so I don't know what they need as far as employee, years-wise, for filling positions and whatnot. There always seem to be a lack of drivers. I don't know why. Even though it is the best job.

01-00:12:54

Meeker:

You had already done tow truck driving on terra firma, on solid ground, if you will, and then you started working here on the bridge. Not just this bridge, but you said it was—

01-00:13:06

Mooradian:

I started on this bridge, but then they sent me to San Mateo. There was a shift that needed to be filled. There was people below me, on a seniority level, that could have went, because I was happy here on my shift, and they said, "No, we want you to go." I said, "Me? There's others." They said, "Well, you're the most qualified." I said, "You mean to tell me, out of all these people, I'm the most qualified?" They said, "No, you're the one that's going." I was

irritated, but then I got down there for about a month or two and I thought, “Oh, this is sweet.” So I stayed down at San Mateo for about seven years.

01-00:13:45

Meeker: Then you made it back up here, but not as a—

01-00:13:46

Mooradian: Then I made it back up here. I got another shift on this bridge. Then they started having what they called a freeway service, where you would patrol the freeways. So I did that for a while as well. Yeah.

01-00:14:00

Meeker: Can you describe the difference between doing tow truck work on solid ground and then working on the bridges? How is it different?

01-00:14:08

Mooradian: Night and day. Number one thing is we don't charge for our service on this bridge. With AAA or any other towing concern, there's going to be an exchange of money of some sort, and people always seem to want to get over on you. I hate to say that, but—

01-00:14:24

Meeker: What do you mean by that?

01-00:14:26

Mooradian: If it was a AAA member, normally they'd have a AAA card, but sometimes there would be some chicanery, like the cards expired, or it's in their mother's name. There was a lot of rules you had to go through. Here, there's no exchange of money. It's like, “I don't have any money.” I'm going, “I don't care. This is a free service, so let's just take care of you.” It was great. Like I said, working in the traffic, I enjoy that. Yes, it's very dangerous. One of my friends, one of the tow truck drivers that I had helped train, he got hit and killed by a car back in '93, I think it was.

01-00:15:06

Meeker: Do you recall the circumstances of that?

01-00:15:08

Mooradian: Yeah. He was at the Carquinez Bridge. There was a car in the toll lanes, and he was hooking the car up, and I believe he got underneath to check a chain or something, and another car came and rear-ended it and pinched him in between the two.

01-00:15:23

Meeker: Wow.

01-00:15:25

Mooradian: He was a nice guy, too.

01-00:01:260

Meeker: That must have been hard.

01-00:15:27

Mooradian:

Yeah, it was. I remember I was up in the dispatcher's office that day when it happened. Because in between calls, I would just go up there and hang out with the dispatcher. I remember when it started to unfold, and I thought, wow, this isn't good. Nobody really knew the extent. We just knew that Roger had gotten hit. Then the big bosses started coming upstairs, and I thought, it's time for me to go downstairs. That's where our ready room was at. But the moment they came up there, I could really kind of tell by the looks on their face that this isn't good at all. It was sad, because Roger was a really nice guy, which has nothing to do with anything, but to see someone that does your job get killed like that—I'm still in between vehicles and whatnot. I don't want to say it's a matter of time, but it can happen, because it's very, very dangerous out here. Very dangerous.

01-00:16:19

Meeker:

Have there been situations that you were perilously close to injuring yourself?

01-00:16:24

Mooradian:

I've been hit—not my body, per se. My body has kind of been hit by—I used to stand in front of the car and I'd ask the person to try to start it, and a lot of times it would be in gear and it would bump forward and hit me. So I learned, after about the fourth time, to stand to the side. But as far as being in vehicular accidents, I've been in about thirteen. I've been rear-ended, broadsided, and head-on out here on the bridge.

01-00:16:46

Meeker:

While in a tow truck?

01-00:16:48

Mooradian:

Yes, in a tow truck.

01-00:16:48

Meeker:

No kidding. I imagine being in a tow truck, though, you were probably safer than the cars that would hit you.

01-00:16:53

Mooradian:

Oh, absolutely, because every car that hit me, I wound up towing it off with my truck.

01-00:17:00

Meeker:

When this happens, are you generally parked or stationary, and another car is moving?

01-00:17:07

Mooradian:

Sometimes. Sometimes I'm underway. When I was broadsided, I was westbound approaching the toll plaza, and a car just shot right across because it wanted to go through the parking lot and go back, and it broadsided me. We were underway.

01-00:17:22

Meeker: In driving tow trucks on the bridge, there's a whole different safety dimension, I imagine, than if you're on solid ground.

01-00:17:27

Mooradian: Oh, absolutely.

01-00:17:30

Meeker: Were you given a good amount of training when you first started, or is this something that you kind of learned on the job?

01-00:17:34

Mooradian: It's funny you say that. They have a class that they send you to, and I think I worked here two years before they sent me to the class. When you would come in, they would have you ride with other drivers, and since I had already driven a tow truck, and I guess I was really up to speed on how things worked, they didn't have to hone or refine me very much. They put me with a couple of drivers for about two weeks, and then they cut me loose on my own.

01-00:18:02

Meeker: What sort of safety precautions are necessary on the bridge versus driving on the highways?

01-00:18:12

Mooradian: Number one, when we get out on the bridge, we're in a lane of traffic. Normally, on the freeway, you're on a shoulder. But here, you're in the lane of traffic. Precaution-wise, the trucks are equipped with red lights, sirens, warning amber lights. We put flares out. The truck is basically like a fire truck. It has a water tank on it for putting out car fires. Safety precautions, you really have to listen—it's not just visually looking; you have to listen to the traffic. You need to look at cars over here, and you just start kind of watching how things are going and listening. When it gets really quiet, you stop and think, why is it quiet? You look. Certain things seem out of sorts, and you always have to really be looking, because otherwise, someone can plow into you. It's just the blink of an eye. I don't know the exact stats, but there's a lot of highway workers—we'll go away from tow truck, but just highway workers in general for Caltrans—a lot of highway workers are killed each year because of errant drivers. It just takes a moment. Someone putting makeup on, cell phone, whatever. I'm guilty. I talk on the cell phone while I'm driving.

01-00:19:28

Meeker: We'll cut that from the tape.

01-00:19:30

Mooradian: I don't care. You have to catch me doing it. [laughter] It's a dangerous job. Working on the roads is dangerous. Driving a tow truck is very, very dangerous, very hazardous. I've been accosted by different people. I'll never forget, coming eastbound right outside of the tunnel, there was an accident. I pulled in behind it, and the CHP officer pulled in behind. The young lady got out of the car, and I guess it was her boyfriend was in the front seat, passenger

side, and he's just in there laughing and carrying on. The CHP officer opened the door to try to get him out, and he bolted out and pushed her down, and then he grabbed me. He grabbed me and I quickly took his arm and twisted it, and I thought, I'm going to break this mother-so-and-so's arm off. I thought, no, I won't do that. So I just kind of twisted it around. She got up, and we both sat on him. She cuffed him, and then some more officers came. He was on some sort of drugs. But when he grabbed me, he grabbed my lapel like this, and he was just laughing in my face. I thought, wow, this isn't good.

01-00:20:35

Meeker:

I imagine that inebriated drivers are probably something you have to deal with a lot.

01-00:20:41

Mooradian:

Actually, people that are crazy, too. I'm able to talk to the crazy people. I don't know why. But no, I've ran across people that, for one reason or another, there's some sort of an imbalance, and I am able to go to my radio and ask for the CHP to come, and then they usually deal with it however.

01-00:21:04

Meeker:

This is pure speculation, but do you think that a tow truck driver on a bridge maybe would encounter more of these kinds of off-kilter drivers than you would just on the freeway?

01-00:21:17

Mooradian:

Yeah, I believe so, because I know when I drove—and I drove a tow truck in Oakland—I had guns pulled on me and this, that, and the other. Out here, every Tom, Dick, and Harry crosses this bridge. There's, what, 500,000 vehicles a day that go back and forth? Well, there's a lot of different people, different countries even. This and that and the other. You're a AAA member, you have a card. You kind of have a history of who you are, basically. Out here, it's a potluck. Just whatever.

01-00:21:52

Meeker:

Interesting. When you get a call about an incident on the bridge, how specific are the calls? Does it come in and does it just say, "Listen, there's a stopped car in lane X?"

01-00:22:06

Mooradian:

Some are specific. "We have a car westbound on the incline, lane number five, and it has a flat." They may know that by a passerby driving by, or the highway patrol called it in. Or it might be, "There's supposed to be a wrong-way driver on the bridge." "What direction?" "We don't know. We just heard that there's a wrong-way driver on the bridge." So then you go look for the wrong-way driver.

01-00:22:33

Meeker:

Have you encountered a few of those?

01-00:22:35
Mooradian: Yeah. Every time, it turned out to be an accident, and there was always a fatality.

01-00:22:40
Meeker: Wow. As a wrong-way driver?

01-00:22:42
Mooradian: Yeah. The wrong-way driver fared well. It was usually the person that they hit. Most of the time, the wrong-way driver was inebriated, so they just kind of slobbered onto the floor and did their thing. Someone else died.

01-00:22:56
Meeker: Wow. That's pretty intense.

01-00:22:59
Mooradian: Yeah, it is. It's really intense thinking that you're that messed-up that you're going to drive the wrong way on a bridge. We're not talking a couple hundred feet. We're talking about going across the bridge.

01-00:23:11
Meeker: It's not easy to get on the bridge, even if you're going the right direction, right?

01-00:23:15
Mooradian: Yeah. I could see how you can go the wrong way. You maybe come up on off-ramp the wrong way. But you would think after a couple hundred yards, the headlights coming toward you is a good indication that, hey, I must be going the wrong way.

01-00:23:30
Meeker: Most people understand the bridge is a one-way operation.

01-00:23:34
Mooradian: Yes.

01-00:23:37
Meeker: Is the process of operating a truck, tow truck, any different on the cantilever than on the suspension side?

01-00:23:45
Mooradian: No, it's all the same. Once again, you're in the lane of traffic, so it's dangerous any way you look at it. The structure itself doesn't impede us from the way the truck works. It's all the same.

01-00:24:00
Meeker: When you're working on the Bay Bridge, where is the yard for the tow trucks? Where do they—

01-00:24:06

Mooradian: The yard for the tow trucks is just west of the toll plaza. It would be across from where we're sitting right now, across all the toll lanes.

01-00:24:14

Meeker: And those trucks, then, operate on both spans of the bridge?

01-00:24:17

Mooradian: Yes. They usually have a truck stationed at the building. We call it the building, which is on the East Bay side. One at the firehouse, which is on Treasure Island, and then usually there's one in San Francisco side, at the terminal we call it. Then they have bridge service, which, during the peak hours traffic, there's trucks that just patrol back and forth.

01-00:24:42

Meeker: Do you have any memories of any particular events or circumstances that maybe required more than one tow truck or where it was difficult for the resources here to actually solve the problem that was on the bridge?

01-00:24:59

Mooradian: The resources here, we have just this gang of intelligence when it comes to town truck drivers. It's the only way I can put it. A lot of times, our management sells us short and they think that we can't—or even the highway patrol sometimes think that we can't handle it. I know, in particular, I had a bobtail truck. It's not a tractor trailer, it's a step down. It was rolled on its side, and it was at the San Mateo Bridge. I pulled up and their highway patrol said, "We don't need you. We've called for an outside tow. We don't think you can do it." I went, "Okay. I can." Then I noticed that there was a big pool of gas around the truck. It was leaking. The firefighters were setting flares out. I went up to—he was a captain, I believe. I said, "Excuse me. That's gas?" He goes, "Yeah." I used an expletive, and I said, "So why are the flares out?" Oh, it was like the Keystone Cops. The bottom line was they called the outside tow company. He tried to right the truck. He couldn't do it. So I righted the truck, and the highway patrol just was amazed that I did it. I said, "You really sell us short. You sell us too short." I don't know why that is.

01-00:26:24

Meeker: It's interesting. You're working, really, in safety—

01-00:26:29

Mooradian: Oh, absolutely.

01-00:26:30

Meeker: —on the bridge. It sounds like you do, then, have to coordinate to a certain extent with highway patrol and fire.

01-00:26:35

Mooradian: And ambulance. Sure.

01-00:26:36

Meeker:

And ambulance. Is that managed kind of on a case-by-case basis, or is there an established protocol relationship with all these different agencies?

01-00:26:52

Mooradian:

We know our job. Basically, the highway patrol should be there for traffic control and writing the reports and whatnot. I'm not dogging the highway patrol when I say this, please, nor the fire department just a moment ago. But sometimes the highway patrol wants to direct us as to how we're supposed to do our job. Once again, we're very competent as tow truck drivers, what we're supposed to do. I know I had an incident. It was eastbound on the lower deck, just past the island in lane number five. A tractor-trailer had hit a Volkswagen and climbed on top of it. No injuries, which was great. It was really nice. But I needed to separate the two, and the highway patrolmen started—they want to get the road open, and I understand that. But there's also safety. My safety, his safety, the motoring public. Everybody's safety is involved. He says, "I don't care. I just want this thing done. Do this, that, and the other." I'm like, "Yeah?" He goes, "Yeah!" So I did what he wanted. They're the one that has the badge and the sidearm. I did what he wanted, and the car flew up in the air about two feet, honest to goodness. I'm not lying. He jumped back and his eyes got this big. I said, "So, can I do it now?" He went, "Yeah, yeah." There's been times they've started ordering me around. Again, I'm not dogging the highway patrol. They want to get the road open. I understand that. They started telling me how to do it, and I had a—we call it a J-hook. It's a big metal J with a chain that you would hook the cars up with. You don't do that anymore, but at the time that's how we did it. I said, "Here you go." I just held it out to him like that, and he said, "What?" I said, "You do it for me. Since you got it numbered down here, you do it for me." He went, "Just do your job." I went, "Fine, okay."

01-00:28:43

Meeker:

Over the years, have you recognized some patrolmen and developed a relationship with some of them, or is it—

01-00:28:49

Mooradian:

Oh, absolutely. When I was—

01-00:28:50

Meeker:

—just such a big operation?

01-00:28:51

Mooradian:

No. When I worked on the freeways in Oakland, I really got to know some of those officers quite well. My last day working freeway service—I was going back to work on the bridge—they took me out for breakfast, which was really cool. Then I actually bumped into one of the officers about eight or nine months ago. They were having some training on the new bridge, and she was out here. I said, "Melissa?" Her name was Melissa {Prentiss?}. She looked at me and she goes—she gave me a big hug. She's a sergeant now, which was really cool. I hadn't seen her in years. It was really nice to see her.

01-00:29:29

Meeker:

We'll get to the welding in a second. There's still some more questions. I think we'll maybe kind of do this, because I know that you've worked—you continued to do tow truck driving on the bridge—

01-00:29:37

Mooradian:

Yeah. Like I said, we can do all tow trucks if you want. I love tow trucks. Honest to goodness, I—

01-00:29:41

Meeker:

It's really fascinating.

01-00:29:43

Mooradian:

It's an awesome job. I shouldn't say it's not a career. I really shouldn't put it like that. If you really get into it, you make a career of it.

01-00:29:54

Meeker:

I want to talk about a few of the big events that have happened. Just so you know where I'm headed, there's obviously Loma Prieta. There's then 9/11.

01-00:30:06

Mooradian:

9/11 was a biggie, yes.

01-00:30:07

Meeker:

Then there's the new span with the S-curve and all of the trauma that that has brought. Let me ask you to talk about your work around the Loma Prieta earthquake vis-à-vis tow truck, and then we'll talk more about the welding issues.

01-00:30:27

Mooradian:

I was working in the welding shop just prior to that. I had said, you know what, I want to go back and drive tow truck again. Because, really, I love doing it. I finished up some projects that I had and they said, "Okay, when you're done with that one project, you can go back." I finished that one project. It was a couple of months project. I went back. That was the day of Loma Prieta.

01-00:30:50

Meeker:

No kidding.

01-00:30:51

Mooradian:

I went back. It was a day shift, and I'm in my truck, and it was just like I hadn't skipped a beat. I'm doing my thing. They said, "Hey, would you like to work overtime tonight?" I said, "Sure." The A's, Giants were playing. I remember calling my wife—this is prior to cell phones, or prior to me having a cell phone—and I said, "Hey, baby, I'm going to be working overtime." She goes, "What are you doing?" I said, "I don't know. I'm either going to be on the bridge or I might be patrolling Cypress [Structure Freeway]." She said, "Oh, okay." I'm doing my thing. I remember towing a motorcycle off to Third [Street] and King [Street]. There was a motorcycle shop there. I remember

feeling the ground, and then I heard an alarm going off and I'm thinking, oh, somebody's getting ripped off. Then I start feeling the ground some more, and I looked over and I'm watching the street do this. That's when the earthquake hit. I didn't get to call my wife until three in the morning. Anyway, to make a long story short, I call her up. I go, "Hey, how are you doing?" She goes, "Don't 'How you doing?' me! I thought you were dead!"

Anyway. Earthquake hit, and I was just calling in my tow to say it was finished, and one of the other drivers, who happened to be right at the break, he said, "Rich, Rich, the bridge just collapsed." This guy was known to be a joker, and I went, "Yeah right, John." Then silence. Never got to talk to anybody else after that. I got on the bridge. At that point, CHP kind of takes over. Again, I didn't have any radio contact. They said, "We need you to secure this on-ramp. We'll get this secured, and then we're going to need to start moving cars off the bridge." So for about the next four and a half hours, I'd hook cars off and I'd drag them off the bridge. Just drag them off the bridge. One of the other drivers said, "Are we supposed to be logging these down?"

01-00:32:43

Meeker:

You were dragging cars off the bridge?

01-00:32:45

Mooradian:

We were dragging them off. The Sterling parking lot, which was—the Sterling on-ramp, there used to be a big parking lot. We'd drag them off there, and then we started dragging them into lane number five.

01-00:32:55

Meeker:

Why were you dragging them off the bridge?

01-00:32:57

Mooradian:

So we could open the bridge up, because think about it. People abandoned their cars, and the bridge was just full of abandoned cars.

01-00:33:03

Meeker:

I didn't know that. It was traffic, so people stopped and—

01-00:33:08

Mooradian:

Dawn of the dead! I'm sitting there, and there's these people—you can't blame them—with these bewildered looks on their face, just walking off the bridge. They're asking me questions, and I said, "I don't know." I said, "I don't know what's going on." "Can we take San Mateo Bridge?" I said, "I suppose you can." Because at that point, I was in the dark. I had no idea. It was an eerie feeling to see people walking off the bridge. But like I said, then we started dragging them off to open the bridge up. I remember it was about eleven thirty that evening. Highway patrolmen—there were two of them—they came up and said, "Do you want to go up and see the break? Because we haven't seen it." I said, "Yeah, I'd love to go see it." The three of us drove up

there in their patrol car. Once again, it's eerie. There was no lights or anything.

01-00:33:57

Meeker: I guess the top deck would have been empty, right, because everyone would have just continued to drive on, but the bottom deck—

01-00:34:02

Mooradian: Yes, exactly.

01-00:34:03

Meeker: —would have been packed.

01-00:34:04

Mooradian: The cars that were on the western side—excuse me, the eastern side of the break—I think they were turning cars around and people were driving them off. I remember the three of us pulled up in their patrol car, and we looked at this, and it was really surreal. Here's the deck that fell, and there's these three cars that were just kind of askew, just thrown into it. We didn't say a word for about a minute. None of us spoke a word. We just looked at it in amazement. It was bizarre. It's in my head. It will never go away. It really is.

01-00:34:40

Meeker: Wow. That's fascinating. Your work of that evening, right—

01-00:34:45

Mooradian: I worked thirty-three hours. Then I got to go home. Then I got in an accident on the way home, because I fell asleep.

01-00:34:52

Meeker: Oh no. Tell me about that, but in that thirty-three hours, what other kind of work were you doing? Was it mostly just towing these—

01-00:35:00

Mooradian: Once again, we moved cars off the bridge, but then there was—we had to secure—and again, I know we're not a security force. We would park the trucks on on-ramps and secure on-ramps, and they had us go and drive out on the freeway, because now there's more cars in different areas of the freeway and whatnot. I didn't get to see Cypress until I actually got home.

01-00:35:25

Meeker: Did you know that that had happened?

01-00:35:26

Mooradian: I had heard about it. When I finally talked to my wife on the phone, like I said, at three in the morning, she said, "Cypress is collapsed." I said, "This is what I've heard, but I don't know anything about it." When I finally got home, that was the only thing on TV. She flipped on the TV and I couldn't believe it, because I, number one, grew up here, but number two, I used to patrol Cypress. So to see what it did, it blew my mind. It really did.

01-00:35:57

Meeker:

What was the initial response of your fellow Caltrans employees to both the bridge as well as Cypress? I know that you're not an earthquake specialist, but did it seem like the damage was commensurate with the scale of the earthquake, or were people shocked that so much damage was caused by that level of earthquake?

01-00:36:29

Mooradian:

Actually, what happened to the bridge—take Cypress away. I can't comment much on Cypress, because I've heard different stories. Less rebar was used, and the type of concrete, the pour wasn't well. I don't know the exact thing about that, but on our bridge, where it fell, it's made to move right there. It's a turn in the bridge, in the cantilever section. A cantilever section is a rigid bridge, not like the suspension, where it's bouncing or moving constantly. It did what it was supposed to do. Unfortunately, it went farther than its saddle it was sitting on.

01-00:37:09

Meeker:

Farther than?

01-00:37:10

Mooradian:

Than the saddle. The deck was sitting on a saddle, and when it moved away, it went farther than that saddle, and that's when it fell. They now have keeper cables underneath it, so if it was to happen again, it might only drop about two or three feet, because the keeper cables would hold it. As far as shock and amazement, because I'd see the engineers and I'd talk with them, but it was pretty much business. There was no hand-wringing or anything like that. It was just, we need to get this open as soon as we can. It wasn't really Caltrans employees, per se. That was all contracted out. Like I said, since I was back in tow service, they had us patrolling freeways or on other bridges, because the flow of traffic was more so on the other bridges. As far as the employees around here, it was just, well, we've got to go to work.

01-00:38:04

Meeker:

Were you then put to work extra hours, I guess, during that period of time?

01-00:38:08

Mooradian:

Yeah. Like I said, I worked a thirty-three. Then I came home. Our son had just been born. Was he born or ready to be born? I'm trying to think. He was either just born or ready to be born. Anyway, we were planning on going to Yosemite, so we went to Yosemite for three or four days, then we came back. Then I just came back to work and it was business as usual.

01-00:38:32

Meeker:

Tell me about 9/11. I know that obviously there were no attacks here in the Bay Area, but there were obviously raised alerts and a lot of concern that there might have been.

01-00:38:49

Mooradian:

The day of 9/11—I was in the welding shop back at that time. One of the supervisors had a TV in their office. They'd watch it during lunchtime or whatever. I remember going in that office and sitting down, and that whole day I watched TV. I remember the superintendent sticking his head in, and he didn't say anything. I'm watching it. I remember watching that one tower, and then when I saw the second plane go into the tower, I thought, okay, this is really a problem now. I just spent the day watching it. Then after that, it was all security business. Then it was, what can you do to secure this? Can you weld this? What would you do? I had the highway patrol asking me, "What would you do to secure this area?" and this and that and the other. I'm no expert. I can seal something off. That's pretty much where I was at. They were kind of turning me loose and saying, "Okay, we need you to secure this the best you can, secure this the best you can." I remember I secured San Francisco anchorage, which is in San Francisco. They said, "If you had all your equipment, how long would it take you to get in there?" "What do you mean?" They said, "Now that you've secured it, how long would it take you to get in there with your torch and everything?" I said, "Oh, maybe a minute." They went, "What?" I said, "I'm not going to fool around with all that stuff that I welded shut." I said, "I'm just going to cut a hole in the door and I'd walk in." Oh, that day, after I said that, they came, and they had a contractor come, and they poured about two feet of concrete in front of it, and then they put an inch—I think it was an inch and a half steel plate in front of that, to seal off going into that anchorage.

01-00:40:31

Meeker:

When you said to secure it, you were securing the anchorage, meaning—

01-00:40:36

Mooradian:

I welded the door shut.

01-00:40:37

Meeker:

There was a door. Okay.

01-00:40:38

Mooradian:

Yeah, there's a door. I'm sorry. Yeah. There's different electrical components and whatnot in there. Plus, the engineers would go in and inspect—it's an anchorage point where the cables go in and they're anchored into the ground.

01-00:40:50

Meeker:

Which tower is this?

01-00:40:51

Mooradian:

This is San Francisco anchorage. This would be on Beale Street. The engineers would go in there periodically, or the electricians, different electrical components, and they would inspect them. There was these big, huge doors that are probably twelve feet tall. They're quarter-inch steel. So they're heavy, but they're not extremely heavy. They would just access, go in there, do their business, and then close the doors. They had me weld those

doors shut. I said, "I would just cut a hole in the door and go in. I wouldn't fool around, trying to unlock it." I'm always the path of least resistance. That's me.

01-00:41:27

Meeker: Obviously, they were concerned about explosives being placed in there that would have perhaps—

01-00:41:30

Mooradian: Very much so. Yes.

01-00:41:32

Meeker: —caused failure to the bridge.

01-00:41:35

Mooradian: W4, which is the center anchorage, there was a lot of places that I welded shut. Then they came back and they started doing a retrofitting, and the contractor came back and they put locks on it. But for me, I would just take a plate and weld it across and then weld the plate up. Two or three plates or whatever it would take.

01-00:41:53

Meeker: Is it still necessary to get into these anchorages and—

01-00:41:56

Mooradian: Yes. They're now all accessible. They've made everything accessible. They still need to get in there, because they need to periodically inspect.

01-00:42:05

Meeker: Interesting. You continued to drive tow trucks occasionally throughout this period?

01-00:42:12

Mooradian: Yes.

01-00:42:16

Meeker: Are there any interesting implications for 9/11 and increased security on the work that you were doing along those lines? Were there fears that somebody would have just parked a semi loaded with explosives on the bridge? Were you given instructions on how to deal with something like that?

01-00:42:32

Mooradian: It's funny you say that, because, again, I'm nobody. I don't know anything. Common sense leads me a lot of times. When I was with the highway patrol, and I'm suggesting what I'd do here and what I'd do there, I said, "Really think about it. All they have to do is bring some tractor-trailers loaded with explosives on the lower deck and pop them off." They didn't want to hear that, coming, I guess, from someone like me. I said, "What are they going to do? They're going to run up to these doors that are welded shut and turn around, dejected, and hang their head?" Those were my words. I said,

“Because it didn’t take a lot of finesse to fly airplanes into a building. They had to learn how to fly them and that was it.” I said it two or three times. I had captain, lieutenant, that were out there. They really didn’t want to hear that, because it’s reality, you think about it. I’m not giving away a secret. Some half-witted person can figure that one out.

As far as driving a tow truck, we weren’t trained any more, but our awareness, I guess, was heightened a little bit. If things looked out of sorts, which always—if there’s a bomb threat, they always like to send one of us out there, not as a guinea pig, but a lot of times we’re able to look and go, “Oh yeah, that doesn’t look right” or “Yeah, that belongs there.” I’ll never forget, there was an ice chest on one of the pier caps. This was late in the afternoon, and either the highway patrol or the Coast Guard had seen it. So we had to go out in our boat. There’s three of us in the boat, and we’re looking at it, we’re going, “Looks like an ice chest to me. Yeah, looks like an ice chest.” The three of us are going, “It’s an ice chest. They are doing construction work there. Maybe it belongs to one of the workers.” But they went through their procedure, and they found it was just an ice chest. But there again, there are things on the bridge that you might look at and go, “Holy crap,” but I might go, “No, that’s electrical component. They just put that in for seismic stuff” or whatever. We have a little bit more awareness as to what is supposed to be out there and what isn’t.

01-00:44:44

Meeker:

But there were no directives that came down after 9/11 about how to operate? You had to do—to work or what to watch out for?

01-00:44:55

Mooradian:

I don’t remember a directive coming down, but I think it was just kind of known that we really needed to be looking for vehicles that are left abandoned. I may be talking out of turn by saying there was not a directive. There very well could have been. I don’t remember seeing it, which doesn’t mean a whole lot. Because we would always call in abandoned vehicles or whatnot, but now it was more heightened. “Hey, there is a box truck abandoned.” I’ll never forget, one time on the island there was a box truck abandoned. I called it into the dispatcher, and the dispatcher said, “What do you want me to do about it?” I went, “Well, I don’t know. It’s a box truck. I don’t know what’s with it. You’ve got it now. I’m washing my hands of it.”

01-00:45:42

Meeker:

Dispatcher meaning you called the highway patrol?

01-00:45:43

Mooradian:

No, we have our own dispatchers. The tow trucks have their own dispatchers. I don’t know what that dispatcher’s thought was at the time, but then he did have a highway patrol unit come out and take a look at it. It was sitting in a parking spot, but it was just out of sorts to be sitting there. Everything was fine. It checked out okay. But as far as look out for this type of person, or

these type of actions, we always kind of looked for crazy people anyway. That's the best way to put it.

01-00:46:17

Meeker:

That's interesting. So then maybe the next thing that happens is the retrofit. The whole entire bridge has been going under a retrofit, which includes preparation for the replacement of the eastern span, and maybe the most notable thing that's happened is the creation of the S-curve and some of the—

01-00:46:39

Mooradian:

That's a nightmare.

01-00:46:39

Meeker:

—confusion that that's caused. Tell me a little bit about why that's a nightmare and—

01-00:46:48

Mooradian:

The reasoning behind it, it's all valid. They moved a section out, they moved a section in, so they have to be able to make it to where they can transition the new traffic—not the new traffic—the new bridge onto the old bridge. They have to be able to flow the traffic, so they have to put this S-curve in. I'm not an engineer, but I can't see any other way of doing it. It's valid. It's just that you have this span that people have been driving across, for eons now, at fifty-five miles an hour. Now all of a sudden, we're knocking it down to where they need to go around at twenty-five. They're not in tune with it yet. I live out in Manteca. Even out as far as in the Altamont Pass, there's still signs at the truck stops that say, "Caution: thirty-five miles an hour, S-curve" on the Bay Bridge. They're still getting people to where they'll slow down going through it. Once again, there's no other way of doing it. I've heard people on TV going, "It could have been done like this, that, and the other." Again, I'm not an engineer. I don't know that to be truth. It works fine if you know it's there, and how can you not? There's flashing lights and signs.

01-00:48:01

Meeker:

Rumble strips on the road.

01-00:48:02

Mooradian:

Rumble strips, yes. The only thing they don't have is someone escorting you through. If you just slow and go through it, it's fine, but it is a bit of a nightmare.

01-00:48:11

Meeker:

Did you notice an uptick in the number of accidents in tow truck work?

01-00:48:14

Mooradian:

Oh, absolutely. Yeah. Yeah, that's a really bad spot. We've had rollovers there. We had that one gentleman, unfortunately, went over the side. That was bad. Right after that is when they really started putting more lights up, I think, and rumble strips and whatnot. How am I going to put this? I don't want to sound crass. The gentleman passed away and that's bad, but you kind of have

to weed out the dummies, too. I hate to say it like that. There was a sign saying, “Slow, S-curve,” blah, blah, blah. We all feel we can do things—I do—in the car. I don’t need to do it like that. It’s unfortunate that that gentleman perished like that, but.

01-00:49:00

Meeker: You’ve got to preserve yourself first, right?

01-00:49:01

Mooradian: Yeah, you do. You do. Like I said, sometimes we have to weed the dummies out. That’s going to get cut. I know it is. That’s okay. I’m not a big Darwin person, but hey.

01-00:49:17

Meeker: Does the actual geography of the S-curve impact the way that tows happen in that section?

01-00:49:26

Mooradian: Actually, it impacts a lot of things, like when we put cones out on the bridge. I’ll occasionally help our crew put cones out when we have to go do work. There’s a whole different dynamic now. Okay, where should we start the closure? Where are we going to put the signs? Because the S-curve, like I said, it puts a totally different dynamic on everything as to how you’re going to approach it. The S-curve now is more of a blind curve. If you have a stall in the S-curve, you approach that thinking, okay, they really can’t see me now. It’s all these different variables that you think about. I don’t know that it’s been talked about like we’re doing now, but I think you just kind of, again, plug your common sense in as you’re working, whether it’s doing maintenance work or driving a tow truck. I think you just kind of plug it in and hope for the best.

01-00:50:22

Meeker: We just have a few more minutes on this tape. The last thing I want to ask you about for the tow truck work is, project into the future, when the new eastern span is built. Do you think that will have any impact on the way that tow truck drivers operate on the bridge, or maybe drivers themselves respond to the geography?

01-00:50:46

Mooradian: First of all, it’s going to have shoulders on it. The eastern span will now have a shoulder. That right there is taking a big dynamic out of the picture, because now you have a semi-safe spot to work in.

01-00:51:02

Meeker: Do you have any idea how that design feature was added? Was this just engineers, bridge engineers, recognizing that that is an important safety consideration, or do you think that came from people like yourself saying, “Gee, on my wish list for the new eastern span is to have a shoulder lane”?

01-00:51:20

Mooradian:

No, I don't think it had anything to do with me. If you look at some of the newer projects, like the San Mateo Bridge, the Benicia Bridge, the Carquinez Bridge, these are all new, and they all have shoulders. I think they probably just looked—historically, they looked at the type of accidents. I would have to think this comes into play. Again, this is just my thought. I believe that they probably looked at the history of things that had happened on the bridge and thought, why don't we put a shoulder in? There again, too, they may be utilizing the shoulder to put another lane in, eventually, too. Because if you now have two shoulders on a bridge, maybe you take one shoulder away and put another lane in. That might have something to do with it as well. Having a shoulder to work on, it's at times a false sense of security, because normally there's not someone on a shoulder. There's been plenty of highway workers killed on the shoulder. But it's nice. Even if it's a false sense of security, it's still kind of nice.

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02-00:00:00

Meeker:

So we've talked about tow trucks. I bet Sam will probably have a few follow-up questions about that, so let's move on to your work as a welder here. How did you go from being a tow truck driver for Caltrans to getting into welding for them?

02-00:00:16

Mooradian:

Again, like I said, I started welding when I was fourteen, basically. Working with metal was always—I don't want to use the word a passion, but I liked working with metal. I had, on my own, went to school and became certified in welding. The supervision over here found out that I was a certified welder. There used to be two welders in this shop, and one of them became quite ill. They asked me, "Would you like to come over and fill in?" I thought, yeah, why not? I'll try it out. I came over, and that's when I was introduced to the bridge welding. It was great. I really enjoyed it. Again, it wasn't driving a tow truck. I had been driving a tow truck all those years, and I was still young, so they took me from being outside and meeting people and this and that, to being put in a shop. I lasted two years in here, and that's when I went back and drove the tow trucks. Then the position came open. I actually talked to the superintendent at the time, and he said, "If you don't jump on this now, you'll probably never, ever get another chance to do it. And it pays more." I thought, you know what, I'm at work to have a good time, but I'm also here to make a wage, so I figured I'll go with the welding.

02-00:01:45

Meeker:

This coincided with the birth of your child, maybe?

02-00:01:50
Mooradian: Kind of, sort of, yeah. For a long time, even in the welding shop, I worked another job. I'd work here until three, and then I'd go and lump freight in Oakland until ten. Then I'd drive home to Manteca, and then get up and do it again.

02-00:02:06
Meeker: I'm curious. You started out, you said, as a Maintenance Worker II, is that right?

02-00:02:09
Mooradian: Yeah, we were considered Maintenance Workers II. Yeah. I'm a structural steel welder.

02-00:02:15
Meeker: Structural steel welder. Is there a number? Is that a professional category?

02-00:02:20
Mooradian: I have a position number, and as far as I know, I am the last one that holds the position as a structural steel welder for Caltrans. There used to be five of us. They've all either retired or died.

02-00:02:33
Meeker: Why is it that they haven't replaced?

02-00:02:35
Mooradian: It's the state. I don't know.

02-00:02:37
Meeker: Okay, but there's still a need?

02-00:02:38
Mooradian: Yeah, there will always be a need. We used to have a carpenter here as well. The carpenter moved on, and they have not replaced the carpenter.

02-00:02:48
Meeker: Do you have a home shop?

02-00:02:51
Mooradian: Yeah.

02-00:02:53
Meeker: A pretty major one, I guess.

02-00:02:56
Mooradian: I have a home shop. I was actually into artwork for quite a while. Making metal sculptures and such.

02-00:03:01
Meeker: Oh, no kidding.

02-00:03:03

Mooradian:

I had things in galleries. I was selling pieces. But then it became a business, and I got audited and it took the fun away. It really did. That's all I can contribute it to, because I haven't done—I take that back. Within the last two years, I've done one piece of artwork. Prior to that, I hadn't done artwork in probably seven years. It was for one of the superintendents. He asked me if I could make him this thing, and I—"Okay, fine, I'll make it for you." It was a dragon sitting on a rock. It really turned out cool, too.

02-00:03:42

Meeker:

What do you know about the bridge troll?

02-00:03:46

Mooradian:

I've seen it. Actually, there was—

02-00:03:49

Meeker:

You didn't have a hand in fabricating it?

02-00:03:51

Mooradian:

No. I was actually driving a tow truck the night that they installed that. There was an ironworker that worked on repairing it, that was also an artist as well. He fabricated it. I remember working that night, and he drove in his pickup truck—they had a welder on the back—they stopped on the incline, they put some cones out behind it, and I thought, this is insane. What is he doing? They went over to the side and they welded the troll on. There was another welder in here, Jackie {Tyres?}. He's retired, but he's since passed away. He was an artist as well. He made a replica of it. What happened to that, I don't know. I think it was for someone that was retiring, and they had him make a replica of it.

02-00:04:34

Meeker:

We interviewed the guy who got that, I believe.

02-00:04:37

Mooradian:

Who got it? Oh, okay.

02-00:04:38

Meeker:

That was Bob McDougal.

02-00:04:40

Mooradian:

Oh, Bob MacDougal. That's right. Yeah, it was for McDougal. That's right. Yeah, Jackie put that together.

02-00:04:46

Meeker:

That's great. Maybe walk me a little bit through the typical activities—

02-00:04:52

Mooradian:

I thought you were going to say my shop at home. I do have a shop at home. I've started building these really beautiful metal gates on my side yard. I'm going to put vines and grape clusters and this and that and the other, but what's the old adage? The shoemaker's kids never had any shoes. That gate—

it's up and it's functional, it works really nice, but it's not finished, and my wife always says, "Are you ever going to finish that?" I say, "Yeah, I'll get to it someday."

02-00:05:18

Meeker: That's the retirement project.

02-00:05:20

Mooradian: It's one of the projects, yes.

02-00:05:23

Meeker: Maybe you can walk me through what a week would be like when you did come here to work in the shop fulltime.

02-00:05:33

Mooradian: It's always changing. Always changing. I might have a set schedule of things I need to do. I might be in the midst of repairing or fabricating something. A lot of times, the engineers will design something and I'll fabricate it. I might start in on that, but then my supervisor will come out and go, "Hey, we have such-and-such happened at this bridge. Can you go down there and take care of that?" Or—we are so shorthanded, and I do possess a class A driver's license—sometimes they'll ask me if I can drive a truck to help out the crew, which I'll do. Yes, I might have something going on, but it's always subject to change. I'm very surprised that we're able to do this without interruptions, other than the people that have stuck their heads in here. The peanut gallery has to come in.

02-00:06:22

Meeker: Yeah, that's what it sounds like. What kind of repairs are typical? Repairs that you've done many, many times.

02-00:06:31

Mooradian: We have a great paint department, but there still is going to be rust on the bridge. They can't stay on top of it like they should, because it's such a massive structure. Not to say that they're not good at what they do. It's just it's such a massive structure, there's still going to be places that rust out. So we'll go in and we might cut out sections and weld in new sections and bolt them back in or whatever it might take to replace, or, in this case of accident damage, say there's a substantial-sized truck or something, hits the side rail on the bridge, that's damage and we need to go out and repair that. I know there's a repair at Richmond Bridge that I went and inspected with the engineers and we formulated a plan. There's about 120 feet of rail that needs to be repaired, so I'll go up there and eventually do that.

02-00:07:28

Meeker: When you're talking about repairs, for instance, due to deterioration or something like that, rusting or something, and you have to pull out a section, do you work with structural engineers to—

02-00:07:42

Mooradian: Yes.

02-00:07:42

Meeker: —determine that you're not going to pull out a section that's going to cause a catastrophic failure?

02-00:07:47

Mooradian: Yeah. I mean, I'm smart, but I'm not that smart. I'd love to be an engineer, but I'm stupid, so I can't. I have engineers that I work with, and they value my opinion, which I really like, but I really like working with them, because I love to watch them sit and analyze and figure things out. It's really cool. To me, it is, it's fascinating. But yeah, we'll talk about things. They may look at it one way. I have a lot of practical work, or practical experience, where a lot of the engineers don't. It's from doing book work. I'm not taking away from them when I say that, so I hope it doesn't come across that way. If it does, Sam, cut that away, okay? Because, no, the engineers I work with are great. They'll sometimes design things, and I'll go, "Can we do it like this?" Because, again, I'm really lazy. So I'll go, "Can we just do it like this and remove that?" and they'll look at it. I've had them tell me on numerous occasions, "Well, I design it like that because I'm an engineer. Your way is much better." So they'll go with the way I've suggested, only because it is, it's simpler.

02-00:08:54

Meeker: So you're actually sitting down in the office sometimes.

02-00:08:56

Mooradian: No, they'll come in here [to the Bay Bridge maintenance building, where the interview was conducted]. We'll draw on the floor. Or we may go into the lunchroom and sit at the table where it's cleaner and roll out some prints and look at them.

02-00:09:06

Meeker: As far as determining what needs to be done, are there bridge inspectors, or is this kind of work that you would go out and actually inspect a bridge from the perspective of a welder and say, "This is good; this needs fixing"?

02-00:09:22

Mooradian: We have—it's called SM&I, which is structure, maintenance, and investigation. They are specific for inspecting our bridges. They have their reports, but there again, while we're out there working, or the painters for that matter, we're now there. Even if we're there to do this, we're still within this area. We're constantly looking. They have these new dampeners on the bridge that are huge. They weigh about 3,500 pounds, 4,000 pounds each, and they're held on with a stainless-steel pin, a solid stainless-steel pin, and it has two nuts on either end. We were doing a job one night, had nothing to do with that. I believe it was my supervisor or one of my buddies that I work with—I can't remember which one—but they looked over the side. The nut had fallen

off of one side, and the pin had almost worked its way all the way out. That would have been awful if that thing fell. So we had to stop what we were doing, and then we addressed that. Yes, we have inspectors that are out there, but we're working out there, so if we see something that doesn't look right, we at least tell our supervisor, who in turn will call them. They'll go and give it the final blessing as to whether, yeah, that's good, or we need to do something about it.

02-00:10:44

Meeker:

You had also said fabrication is another main thing that you kind of do. Can you give me an example of what that might be?

02-00:10:50

Mooradian:

Different bracketry or staging. A lot of times, now especially, the painters have to do 100 percent encapsulation for while they're painting or sandblasting or whatever. In years past, environmental concerns weren't like they are now. A lot of times, they have to shrink-wrap and whatnot. Shrink-wrap areas. It's like a cellophane, so to speak. I'll have to perhaps build some staging or some extra bracketry that they can actually now put the shrink-wrapping up so they can try to get 100 percent encapsulation.

02-00:11:26

Meeker:

Interesting. Sort of like creating kind of a paint studio around—

02-00:11:32

Mooradian:

Exactly.

02-00:11:33

Meeker:

—a particular area.

02-00:11:36

Mooradian:

Or like an armature on a sculpture. You know how they'll make an armature and then they cover it with something? It's along those lines, too. I might just be making a framework, and then they're going to stretch canvas or shrink-wrap or something around it so they can catch the paint or whatever it is that they're doing. Scraping paint or painting, slopping paint, whatever it is they do.

02-00:11:58

Meeker:

What's the biggest welding task that you've been involved in while here?

02-00:12:03

Mooradian:

Oh, gosh. I remember we fixed about eighty-five feet of bridge rail on this bridge. The double slide was sliding and they needed some H-beams that they were sinking into the ground. The one welder was in the shop, welding, because we had to put beams together. They weren't long enough. She was in here welding, and I was out in the field. They have a Quonset hut, we call it, and I was in there welding. That was quite an undertaking. We were putting beams together, cutting them square, and welding them together. That was quite a job. Those are two of the biggest ones I can think of.

02-00:12:47

Meeker: What percentage of work that you do in here is actually just for the bridge, roughly?

02-00:12:57

Mooradian: When you say for the bridge, you mean a component for the bridge?

02-00:13:02

Meeker: I mean, you said there was Devil's Slide work, right? That wouldn't—

02-00:13:05

Mooradian: Oh, okay, I see what you mean.

02-00:13:08

Meeker: Because you're working for Caltrans, right?

02-00:13:09

Mooradian: I'm going to say 90 percent of what I do is bridge-related. I just did a job on University Avenue in Berkeley. I had to weld some studs on a traction plate. I'm going to be doing a job for a bridge—is it the {Rio Dale?} Bridge? There's a bridge in district ten, which is not our district, but the supervisor there, he used to be my supervisor here. He called me and said, "Hey, I need these cages fabricated." I said, "Yeah, I can do that." I just got the material in, so I'll be fabricating that. I'm willing to work anywhere. Matter of fact, I built some bracketry. I had to build a machine to make the bins, and that was for the Coronado Bridge in San Diego.

02-00:13:52

Meeker: Oh, really?

02-00:13:53

Mooradian: Yeah, I built twenty-five brackets for them.

02-00:13:56

Meeker: One of the things that we've been learning from, particular from the engineers, is the transition from reinforced concrete to prestressed concrete, and how that has been really a revolution in bridge-building. Have you noticed a difference, as a welder, working on bridges that are pre-prestressed concrete, and then that are prestressed concrete?

02-00:14:21

Mooradian: No. As far as my work, no. It hasn't affected me as much. A36 steel is what we use. There might be occasion that you're going to use a high-strength steel, but for the most part, that aspect of it has remained the same.

02-00:14:38

Meeker: A36 steel. I'm ignorant in this.

02-00:14:42

Mooradian: So am I.

02-00:14:42
Meeker: Can you maybe walk us through a little bit about—

02-00:14:44
Mooradian: It's a number that the steel industry has plugged into the steel. It's A36. You have high carbon content steel, low carbon contents. There's a myriad of different steels.

02-00:15:00
Meeker: So the A36 is the standard that would be used on the bridge?

02-00:15:02
Mooradian: Yeah, it's kind of a standard that we use for what we're doing, but there again, if it's something that has to be—like the I-bars, for instance. That's not an A36 steel. Or if it was, they heat-treated it to such to where it's now changed into something else.

02-00:15:25
Meeker: Was there any welding activity associated with the 1989 earthquake, in order to bring it back?

02-00:15:32
Mooradian: Not by me, because, like I said, I went back to tow service.

02-00:15:35
Meeker: You were there for what period of time?

02-00:15:37
Mooradian: I was there for about two and a half years, and then I came back to the shop.

02-00:15:43
Meeker: So you've been here at the shop for about ten years, I guess?

02-00:15:48
Mooradian: Now?

02-00:15:49
Meeker: Yeah. Oh, no, twenty years. I'm sorry. Time flies.

02-00:15:53
Mooradian: I'm going to say I've been here twenty, twenty-three years in this shop, if you figure the two years I was here prior.

02-00:16:04
Meeker: You weren't involved, then, in the rebuilding of the—

02-00:16:06
Mooradian: No.

02-00:16:06
Meeker: Repair of the bridge, I should say.

02-00:16:07

Mooradian: No. Actually, the maintenance crews, which I knew the maintenance people, they didn't do any of the repairing of the bridge where it collapsed, but they did a lot of roadway repair. Methacrylate and Percol. It's a product that they would—

02-00:16:27

Meeker: What is this?

02-00:16:28

Mooradian: It's a product that they'd put down over the roadway for sealing up cracks, and fishers and whatnot. They did a lot of that.

02-00:16:38

Meeker: Now with the retrofit and the preparation of the eastern span for the new bridge, that's done by external contractors.

02-00:16:49

Mooradian: Correct.

02-00:16:50

Meeker: How do you interact with them? It must be a little tricky sometimes when you have this massive structure that you probably know extraordinarily well, that people from the outside are always coming in and fooling around with. Making drastic changes to. How do you stay on top of what they're doing and make sure what they're doing isn't going to have negative consequences for your job?

02-00:17:15

Mooradian: Really, I don't have much control over that. That's all left up to our engineers and whatnot. I got to know a couple of the superintendents that are doing the jobs out here. Really nice guys. The new bridge that's taken place, that's not my bridge yet. I've been on it maybe a half a dozen times. I have no connection with it whatsoever. It hasn't been given to me, so I have nothing to do with it. I went out there and I fixed a little safety line that they had. They were talking about moving some ladders around. I have had a little bit of exposure to it, but I have no love for it yet, so to speak. I'm going to hate when this one comes down.

02-00:17:56

Meeker: Why is that?

02-00:17:57

Mooradian: Because I really like it. It's something that I went across when I was a kid, even. Now I've worked here. I've got to touch it, I've got to climb on it. Inclement weather. I've been out here for everything, and it's going to go. Now we're going to have a masterpiece. It's going to be a beautiful bridge when it's all said and done, but I'm going to miss this. I'm a blue-collar kind of person, and this is a blue-collar bridge. The other one is more like for Hollywood. I hate to say that, but that's the only way I can put it.

02-00:18:30

Meeker:

It's great, because obviously, if you ask anyone around the world about a bridge in the Bay Area, it's not going to be the eastern span of the Bay Bridge. It's going to be the Golden Gate Bridge.

02-00:18:41

Mooradian:

It's the Gate. It's always the Gate.

02-00:18:46

Meeker:

One of the things that we've discovered in this project, like when we first announced this project, is how much interest there was in the Bay Bridge, and how much affection there is for it. But there are also a lot of people who say that the eastern span is ugly.

02-00:19:05

Mooradian:

And it is. Okay, it's not a beautiful, flowing bridge. But it wasn't built to be that way. It's functional. It's a function. It's a functioning bridge. Not that the other span isn't, but that's its whole idea.

02-00:19:25

Meeker:

I wonder if you can give me a little sense of what you mean by it being a working-class bridge. What does that mean to you?

02-00:19:32

Mooradian:

It's rivets, it's steel. It's dirty at times. It's a means to an end, to get by. You're working and you've got to cross this thing, but it's still looking out for you. It's taking care of you. I don't know. I can't describe it. I really have affections for these bridges. I really do. I know that's going to sound sappy. I really don't care.

02-00:20:00

Meeker:

It's sort of like how they talk about Chicago as a city of broad shoulders. It's kind of like a broad-shoulder bridge, maybe, huh?

02-00:20:06

Mooradian:

It is. You go across it, you look out, you see Oakland. You see the Port of Oakland out here, with the containers and everything like that. It's a blue-collar bridge.

02-00:20:21

Meeker:

Tell me about, then, the personalities of the bridges you've worked on. How would you describe those?

02-00:20:26

Mooradian:

That's funny to put it like that. I like San Mateo Bridge. It doesn't have a lot of personality. It's just there. It gets you across, going to the airport. To me, it has no personality whatsoever. Looking at it from the side, it looks beautiful. It's very majestic the way it rise—the high-rise and whatnot, but it's just a big, long straightaway.

02-00:20:52

Meeker: Most of it was just a viaduct anyway.

02-00:20:54

Mooradian: Yeah. You're in a causeway, and then you go up the high-rise and you come back down the other side. Like I said, it doesn't have a whole lot of personality, so to speak. Same with the Dumbarton Bridge. Richmond Bridge, I classify that like a blue-collar bridge there again. It's a working bridge. Nuts and bolts and rivets. Let's see, Zampa—

02-00:21:15

Meeker: Like an erector set or something kind of.

02-00:21:17

Mooradian: Yeah. The Zampa Bridge [Carquinez Bridge]. There was a '34 bridge. That was just like our cantilever bridge. That's the one that they took down. That was a nice bridge. The other one, '57. I think it was '57. That's the year I was born. I like that bridge. The Zampa Bridge, eh.

02-00:21:35

Meeker: That's the new—

02-00:21:36

Mooradian: Yeah, suspension bridge. To me, they're trying to be a copycat. They're trying to make it look like the Bay Bridge. But that's me. Benicia Bridge, that's just a bridge. No personality.

02-00:21:49

Meeker: You've also worked on, you said, the Coronado Bridge.

02-00:21:53

Mooradian: I made things for Coronado. I've never gone down there.

02-00:21:56

Meeker: Oh, really?

02-00:21:57

Mooradian: I've driven across that bridge on my own, but as far as an employee, I've never been down there to do it.

02-00:22:04

Meeker: Do you think you have a different perspective on these bridges because you've worked on them, versus somebody who maybe just views it aesthetically or instrumentally?

02-00:22:11

Mooradian: Absolutely. Absolutely. I think I do. Number one, I work on it. Anyplace you work, you kind of get a—well, I like to think you kind of get a feel for. See, I have a big affection for this bridge out here, because this is where I started. It was thirty-three years ago. I've come to love it. Has it been a bitch sometimes? Absolutely. It hasn't been all just roses the whole time, but it's

good. It's a good thing. I am going to hate to see it go away. Like I said, the new bridge is going to be beautiful. I think there's a bridge in Boston that kind of resembles it. The cables. Yeah, that's nice. Whoop-de-doo. You know.

02-00:22:59

Meeker: Are you going to be involved in the dismantling of the eastern span?

02-00:23:02

Mooradian: I doubt it. That's all contract work. I wouldn't mind going up and getting a few keepsakes for myself. I don't think I can indiscriminately go up there and start hacking away it.

02-00:23:15

Meeker: What would you like to keep?

02-00:23:18

Mooradian: Some of the lattice work or lacing. There are diagonals that go like that. I'd like to have one of those bars.

02-00:23:27

Meeker: Do you have an art project in mind?

02-00:23:28

Mooradian: No, I just would like to have it. I hate that I don't do artwork anymore, but it's not fun.

02-00:23:42

Meeker: One of the things that we like to ask people about is related to the bridge, but more specifically about the workplace. Since you've worked here from 1979 onward, or for Caltrans, we like to ask people about their participation in the labor organizations, but also the changing character of the workplace, like the kind of people you've worked with. Have any of your positions ever been unionized positions?

02-00:24:17

Mooradian: We're union in the sense that we are part of Operating Engineers.

02-00:24:23

Meeker: What is that? Operating Engineers, that's a—

02-00:24:25

Mooradian: It's Local Three. They basically are the ones that do a lot of the roadwork you see out here and whatnot. I'm not a big union person, and that's just how I am and I've always been that way. I understand the reasoning for unions. I understand that, because a long time ago, people really got jacked around. Not to say that they don't now, but conditions back then were deplorable. Now we've got pretty good conditions where we work. I'm not a big union sympathizer. I'm not a big rah, rah, rah, this, that, and the other. Just let me go to work. That's all I want to do. What was the other part to your question? I'm sorry.

02-00:25:07

Meeker: Well, so you—

02-00:25:08

Mooradian: As far as the change in people, I'm going to sound like an old guy when I say this, and I'm only fifty-five and I'm not that old, but I've watched how the generations that are—matter of fact, I was just talking to one of the supervisors here, who's my age, and we were just discussing that, just before you guys got here, at lunchtime. The work ethic is not like it was when we first started. Whereas I know the old guys that were here when we first started probably thought we were a bunch of louses, too. That's the one thing I've found. I'm going to say it like this. I want to see more elbows and assholes. Just work. Get after it and work. I don't see as much of that as I'd like to.

02-00:25:59

Meeker: Do you attribute that to anything in particular?

02-00:26:01

Mooradian: I don't know. I think it's a generational thing. I do. Yeah, we've been cut back in pay. Furloughs, and this, that, and the other. I can understand people's frustrations with that. I really can, because I'm one of those people as well. But it's still a job. I've hired on. This is what I'm doing. No one forces me to stay here. I can leave if I want. No one has a gun to my head and says, "You have to come to work here." I can go find another job. I don't care what anybody says. There's jobs out there. I can go find another job someplace else if I want. I choose not to.

02-00:26:39

Meeker: This is a masculine bridge, and also a pretty masculine workplace. Have you worked with any women?

02-00:26:48

Mooradian: I like working with women. Matter of fact, I'd rather be around women any day than around men. I would. I enjoy being around women. There used to be a lady in the shop, was a welder. Then I came in, we worked for a few years together, and then she retired, and it's been me since. But yeah, I have no problem working with women.

02-00:27:10

Meeker: You haven't found any difference in abilities or anything like that?

02-00:27:14

Mooradian: Yeah. Men have more upper-body strength. I'll argue with a woman about that if she wants to argue, but that's how we're created. We've got better upper-body strength. Women have better manual dexterity. Women make some of the best welders, because their dexterity with their hands is much better than a man. We all have our strong points and our weak points.

02-00:27:34

Meeker:

That must have been interesting, though, to have a—were you involved in the hiring decision?

02-00:27:39

Mooradian:

No, no, no. Uh-uh. No. When I walk through the door and come to work, I just come in here to work. You can be a man, a woman, you can be a giraffe. It didn't make any difference to me. We're in here to work. That's kind of how I view things. If someone doesn't pull their weight, I don't contribute it to being a man or a woman, because I've worked with plenty of men that don't pull their weight. Bottom line, my paycheck has my name on it. That's the only paycheck I care about. If you get a check, that's great. If you don't, that's fine too. My check is the one I'm concerned with. So if I'm working with a woman and she outworks me, that's great. If she underworks me, that's fine too. My check is all I worry about. That's a terrible way to be, but I'm responsible for me. Man or woman, whoever I'm working with, they're responsible for doing the best they can. It's not for me to say, "You're not doing as good as you should." I don't care. I'm pretty opinionated, aren't I?

Honest to goodness, I do like working with women. I trained a young lady on tow trucks. I trained a few of them, but this one in particular, her name was Kelly, she really had something. I could just tell. When I left from there to come to the shop, I had a special bag of air fittings and whatnot. I said, "You know what, Kelly? I want you to have these." She goes, "What do you mean?" I said, "I'm not going to need them, and you know what? You really have something going on. You use these, okay?" There were fittings that no one really had. I had things for starting buses and stuff like that, just because over the years I {raffled?} stuff. So yeah, I love working with women. They bring a different dynamic to the workplace. We have a woman on our crew right now. Brandi is fantastic.

02-00:29:26

Meeker:

What kind of work does she do?

02-00:29:27

Mooradian:

She's part of maintenance. She does whatever we're doing. Are we jackhammering? She's jackhammering. She's doing whatever she does.

02-00:29:34

Meeker:

In addition to doing structural steel welding, are you also doing general maintenance activities too?

02-00:29:39

Mooradian:

Yeah. Whatever my supervisor wants me to do, I'll do. I clean the toilets, too, and I have no problem with that. The toilets and the urinals.

02-00:29:48

Meeker:

Awesome. I'm going to hand it over to Sam and let him wrap it up.

02-00:30:03

Redman:

This is great. All right. This is Sam Redman now, on October 16. I'm just going to fill in a few questions here. Actually, my questions, believe it or not, along some of the same lines, but I may ask you a few questions about bridges as symbols. What do they represent? We'll see if you take the bait.

02-00:30:26

Mooradian:

Oh, I like that. A lot of times I talk stuff like that and people roll their eyes. That's how I am. I'm kind of sappy when it comes to that.

02-00:30:35

Redman:

But first, we talked a bit about this, and I wonder if you want to say anything else on comparing the experience of working on the different bridges. Then, in particular, the traffic levels I would imagine being a huge consideration, just for safety, but then also in order to get the job done of working on a different bridge or another.

02-00:30:57

Mooradian:

As a tow truck driver?

02-00:30:58

Redman:

Yeah. In particular, as a tow truck driver, but I imagine traffic considerations might also be something to consider when welding, depending on what—

02-00:31:09

Mooradian:

It's more so for tow trucks. My concerns, traffic-wise, with welding is, are we able to put a closure out? Now can I go out and do my job? Or, put a board here so I'm not going to flash the cars as they go past. There are sometimes I'm right on the line when I'm welding, but I always figure I have someone watching me, and if I get hit, it's going to be quick and it will be done. That's the truth. That's how I've always viewed it.

02-00:31:37

Redman:

When you are maybe either in a position where you're welding on the side of the bridge, or you're either on a shoulder or on one of the lanes on the edges of the bridge, and you look down at the bay and you see that water below you—

02-00:31:54

Mooradian:

That's beautiful.

02-00:31:56

Redman:

I'm wondering what goes through your mind. What sort of emotions are you filled with? What do you think about?

02-00:32:01

Mooradian:

I tell you what. Working on this bridge right here—they're all nice, but working on this one, because you get to see San Francisco, you get to see Oakland, there's boats, there's waves—there's nothing like it. People travel all over the world to come here, and I get to look at it and get paid for it. No, it

is. I love working on this bridge and just the view that you get from it. There's never a dull view for me. I don't care what time of year. It could be storming. It's beautiful. Midnight, pitch black, it's beautiful. It is. It's a beautiful place to work. It really is.

02-00:32:36

Redman: Talk a little more about dealing with inclement weather, if you would.

02-00:32:39

Mooradian: I love inclement weather. Oh, the rainy and cold weather, that's my favorite weather. It is. In the tow truck. I don't do a lot of maintenance work when it's raining outside. There is times that we have to go out and do things. It's mostly shop work. But in the tow truck, oh, it's beautiful.

02-00:32:55

Redman: So that adds a little bit to the adrenaline aspect of it, I would imagine.

02-00:32:57

Mooradian: Oh yeah, because you've got a whole lot more accidents. It's always busy. A ten-hour shift will fly by. Absolutely fly by. But I love being out. I love inclement weather. We have some property up in the mountains. When it snows, I'm just absolutely loving it. But when it's cold and windy and rainy, it's my favorite. Laying down on the ground to get underneath a car and the water runs down my back, I have no problem with that. None whatsoever. I love it.

02-00:33:22

Redman: That's really amazing. That's really interesting.

02-00:33:24

Mooradian: I know, I'm an idiot, but I can't help it.

02-00:33:29

Redman: To each their own. That's great.

02-00:33:31

Mooradian: Exactly.

02-00:33:33

Redman: This is another thing of, I guess, to each their own, is that we've asked everybody the following question and everyone has a different answer. I wonder if you think of a bridge as a living thing or if you think of it as a static structure.

02-00:33:48

Mooradian: Oh, it's living. Have you ever been on the bridge? It has a heartbeat. They all have a heartbeat. They're all different. They all bounce and move in a different way, and that's the heartbeat. The bridge is alive. Yes, I'm a sap for saying it. I really don't care. No, the bridge is alive. It is. There's times, like when they've had to shut the bridge down for different reasons, I can almost

imagine the bridge going [sighs]. Because there's no traffic. And just able to just [sighs]. "Oh, this feels good." I can just imagine the bridge saying, "Oh, this is great." [sighs]

02-00:34:27

Redman: So the question of whether or not a bridge has a particular personality, it's almost a farce to ask, because it's so true, it's so extremely true to you in a sense, because not only do they have different considerations in terms of how they're laid out, but how they're sort of feeling on that day or what they're going through on that day.

02-00:34:48

Mooradian: Right. Someone else will tell me I'm full of shit. They would, and they're entitled to their opinion. But the fact that I've been on it, and it moves, and it just kind of like—it's not talking to me, but it's just there. It's living. I know it's not alive, but it's alive. I don't know if I answered your question, but I—

02-00:35:11

Redman: You absolutely did. Thank you.

02-00:35:12

Mooradian: I don't know how to describe it, other than I just know what I know.

02-00:35:17

Redman: In 1986, this bridge had its fiftieth anniversary. Do you remember anything around the fiftieth anniversary celebrations or anything like that in '86?

02-00:35:25

Mooradian: That was a time in my life there were some things going on and I didn't participate in—and I kick myself that I didn't. I went up into the Oakland Hills and I watched the fireworks go off. But I wasn't involved in it like I should have been. Like I said, I'm mad that I wasn't.

02-00:35:46

Redman: Now, again, I'm going to ask you to compare some iconic meanings, or some symbolic meanings. We talked a little bit about the Bay Bridge as a blue-collar, utilitarian working bridge.

02-00:35:59

Mooradian: Utilitarian. Thank you. That was the word I was struggling for. I couldn't get that. Thank you.

02-00:36:03

Redman: Versus than you've got the Golden Gate Bridge, which has always been complimented as a beautiful aesthetic design. But I wonder if, when you look at those two bridges—what you see.

02-00:36:16

Mooradian: I've been on the Gate. I've been underneath it in a boat. I've walked on it. I've never worked on it, because it's not a state-owned bridge. It's a nice bridge,

but it doesn't seem to have any personality to it, other than it's a really nice—it's pretty to look at. It's probably because I've spent my time on this one. I'm looking at it through my eyes, through my rose-colored glasses, so to speak. I'm sure if I worked on the Gate, I'd be able to say something different about it. To compare the two, there's no comparison. There just isn't. It's beautiful. It ushers you out into the Pacific Ocean. It's wonderful, but no, this is the bridge right here.

02-00:37:04

Redman:

We've talked about this a little bit, but today, when you're looking at the bridges as they are now, with the new east span going up and the cantilever span still being there, in ten years, it's going to look different, as we've talked about. Now, when you see those two side by side, maybe from the boat, or if you're on the bay, or driving over and you look and see a glimpse of the old bridge and the new bridge, what sorts of emotions and thoughts go through your mind?

02-00:37:36

Mooradian:

I have no emotion to the new bridge. None. My mother-in-law will ask me, "How's that new bridge coming along?" I'll go, "I don't have a clue." I don't pay attention to it. I just don't. It's not mine. I have no thing with it yet.

02-00:37:54

Redman:

Can you talk about suicides a little? Experiences.

02-00:37:58

Mooradian:

We have suicides on the bridge. It's not publicized, because the state doesn't like to publicize it. It's a sad thing. I've been on quite a few of them.

02-00:38:08

Redman:

Can you ballpark—

02-00:38:09

Mooradian:

I've got to actually talk to the people.

02-00:38:12

Redman:

Before they—

02-00:38:13

Mooradian:

No, I've got to talk them from doing that.

02-00:38:16

Redman:

Is that right?

02-00:38:16

Mooradian:

Yeah. I had one evening—I had just gotten back from Hawaii, too. We were on a two-week vacation. Just got back that morning, came to work that night. Coming out of San Francisco, there was a guy up on one of the diagonal braces on the lower deck.

02-00:38:32

Redman: Were you driving over the bridge?

02-00:38:33

Mooradian: I was on tow truck. I was working, so I was on my tow truck. I pulled over, got out, called it in, and I started talking to the guy. The CHP rolled up and fire department rolled up, and I'm chatting with the guy, and they started to pull me away. The CHP officer said, "No, he's doing fine. Leave him alone." So I talked to the guy. I'm talking to him. I said, "Okay, you need to come"—you know. I got him to come down. I don't want to say the CHP were roughing him up. They have a protocol they have to go through, but it pissed me off. I said, "Hey, I promised this guy," so they lightened up on him a little bit, but I kept telling him, "Look at me, look at me, look at me."

It was a nice feeling. Then there was other times. I had a lady on San Mateo Bridge. She was pulled over on one of the turnouts. We got to stop anyway, see what's going on. She was sitting in the car looking really lethargic. I went over to the car. She had taken a whole bunch of pills and she was waiting for them to kick in, and then she was going to drive and jump off. I couldn't get the key out of the car, so I just sat there and I talked with her. I was out there for about forty-five or fifty minutes. They didn't know what was going on. Finally, the other driver came out and he goes, "What's up?" I said, "Oh, thanks. I need CHP out here really quick." So they sent CHP out and they brought an ambulance out. She was having some marital problems or whatnot.

02-00:39:55

Redman: So it seems like, in those and other instances, you do come in contact with humanity in this—

02-00:40:04

Mooradian: Yeah, which is what makes that job—

02-00:40:08

Redman: More compelling than—

02-00:40:09

Mooradian: For me. Some people might not like that. I like that. It's not that, oh, look at me. I could care less about that. I am actually doing something for humanity. I like that. I know I had a guy—it was a young lady, actually—right outside the island going westbound. She was in a Volkswagen and she pulled over. I called it in as a stall, and she started climbing up on the side, and I went, "Oh, shit." So I ran up there and I said, "You okay?" She climbed back down and she goes, "You know what?" She looked over and she goes, "I'm fine now."

02-00:40:40

Redman: Wow.

02-00:40:41

Mooradian: Yeah. It was an older Volkswagen with an Oregon plate. I remember that. It was blue.

02-00:40:46

Redman: Those instances really stand out in your mind as powerful and—

02-00:40:52

Mooradian: Very powerful, yeah. I know I had a young lady that rolled her car over. She got ejected. I remember kneeling with her head between my legs, holding her head together. This was at nighttime and the highway patrol was there. She'd stopped breathing, and I was screaming at her, "Breathe, breathe, breathe." He started getting in on it. He was yelling for her to breathe, and she'd start breathing again. Her dog got ejected as well. She wound up dying. I don't know what happened to the dog. I remember that, because I was covered in blood. Covered in blood.

02-00:41:28

Redman: That takes a special kind of person, I would imagine, to be able to be all right with that.

02-00:41:34

Mooradian: I'm nothing special. That's just my gift that was given to me. I empathize with people. Her family, her dog. I empathize. I really do. I'm not any more special than the next person. Some people can't do that, and that's fine. That's not a problem.

02-00:41:50

Redman: Have you ever had people not be able to deal with that emotional side of maybe seeing an accident or something along—

02-00:41:58

Mooradian: Different drivers?

02-00:41:59

Redman: Different drivers.

02-00:41:59

Mooradian: Yeah, I've had some that go, "I'm not going to go up there. I don't need to look at that. Don't. Don't need to." I'm the first one. I want to go in there. I want to help. If I can lessen your suffering in some way or whatever, I want to do that. Again, I don't know anything. Advanced first-aid, whoop-de-do. I'm nobody, but I want to be, if nothing else—there was a guy that he drove—he was drunk. He drove his car underneath a tractor. Not a tractor-trailer, but just the trailer. He drove it underneath the landing gear side of it, so it was open, and he stuffed it all the way underneath it. I thought, oh, this isn't going to be good. This was at San Mateo Bridge. It was on the frontage road as well. I got the door open, and he was alive, and I remember I was holding his hand until the CHP came, and then I got to go. Because I'm thinking, I'm going to open this door, his head is going to fall out or something. I'm not sensationalizing anything. I'm nobody. I'm really not. It's just God gave me a gift. I like to help people out if I can.

- 02-00:43:02
Redman: This is changing subjects so dramatically. I almost feel bad.
- 02-00:43:04
Mooradian: Change it. It don't matter.
- 02-00:43:05
Redman: What did the carpenter do in the shop?
- 02-00:43:11
Mooradian: They would build—I want to say entertainment centers, but no—cabinetry. Very beautiful cabinetry for our buildings and stuff like that. They might say, “Hey, we need cabinets for here.” He'd build those. We may have to do some concrete work. He'd go out there and build forms for it. You would think, carpenter, bridge? No. There's carpentry work that has to be done.
- 02-00:43:36
Redman: Can you talk just a moment about the seismic retrofit of—I think I'm getting the years wrong here, but was the west span, the retrofit was completed maybe 2004 through 2007?
- 02-00:43:49
Mooradian: That sounds about right, yeah.
- 02-00:43:51
Redman: Did they also do some retrofitting of the eastern span to maintain it seismically through to sort of carry it over? Do you have any comments on those?
- 02-00:44:00
Mooradian: Their reasoning, I think, for not pushing forward with doing the eastern span, it was not cost-effective. I don't know that to be true. This is just kind of things I hear, that it was going to be cheaper to build a new bridge. Yeah right. Please.
- 02-00:44:17
Redman: You were aware of those retrofit projects, but maybe not involved in—
- 02-00:44:21
Mooradian: We weren't involved. As a matter of fact, when the contractors are out there working, we're not scheduled to do any work we're they're at. Obviously, that's a moneymaking concern for them. They don't want anybody out there, number one, within their work zone for safety issues. Plus they don't want to impede the flow of their workers.
- 02-00:44:41
Redman: Do the dispatchers sort of control the landscape of the bridge in terms of where the different contractors are working and how that affects your work?
- 02-00:44:52
Mooradian: No. No, our dispatchers have nothing to do with that.

02-00:44:54

Redman: How do you figure out who's working where on a particular day?

02-00:44:59

Mooradian: Engineering sends information to either our superintendent or my supervisor, and in turn, my supervisor lays out the work. "We need to go tend to this, we need to go tend to that."

02-00:45:12

Redman: Usually, the easiest question at the start of all this is the first one, which is your name, and then the last question is always the hardest, and I'm sorry to do that to you. When you look at the long history of your life, your life story and your work career story, can you sort of place for me the meaning of the Bay Bridge for you in terms of—it seems like it's such a central role, it's almost hard to wrap around in words.

02-00:45:45

Mooradian: I grew up here. I literally grew up here. I started here when I was almost twenty-three. I was the youngest one here for years. I was the youngest person working here. So I grew up here. This is part of my life. People always say, "I can't wait to retire, to start having a good time" and this and that. I've had a good time. My work experience is part of my life experience. It's not that, ugh, it's something I have to do. No, it's part of my life experience. I have been very blessed, very fortunate, to work here, and the group of people I work with. There's been a few a-holes. You're going to get that anyplace. But for the most part, it's been perfect. It really has.

02-00:46:28

Redman: With that, I want to say thank you very much for sitting down.

02-00:46:29

Mooradian: Thank you. You guys have been great.

02-00:46:31

Redman: Thanks.

02-00:46:31

Mooradian: You didn't want to ask me about my building [referring to the historic Caltrans Bay Bridge maintenance building in which the interview was conducted] , though? Real quick? Can we just real quick?

02-00:46:37

Redman: Yeah, tell me about this.

02-00:46:39

Mooradian: This whole building is a holdover from the Key System, the trains that they used to have on the bridge. They would bring them in here and they would repair them in some fashion here, and then they'd move them down and do another, perhaps, interior. I don't know. This whole building is historical. They're going to turn this into a museum, which I find really cool. They're

wanting to kick me out of my building—no, that’s the wrong word. They’re going to displace me and put me in another spot, and then I’ll have to be moved into the new building. Well, the new building hasn’t been built yet, and I’ve been lobbying anybody that comes around, “Please just let me stay.” Number one, it’s a logistical nightmare—look at this place—to move this. Two, cost-wise, it doesn’t make a bit of sense. Number three, this is my home. Don’t throw me out of my house. This whole building, a lot of history to it. But this shop here, a lot of stuff has been done in this shop. Some that we can’t even talk about. That was a bygone time.

02-00:47:52

Redman: Actually, can I ask one—

02-00:47:54

Mooradian: Sure.

02-00:47:54

Redman: There’s one additional question that I’d like to just make sure to—we’ve had some folks mention to us an aspect of the danger of different workers, and maybe different contractors, working on the bridge. We talked about the different safety considerations, but I wonder if you could say a word on, were there any instances of folks drinking on the job or things like that, where maybe they didn’t—

02-00:48:17

Mooradian: I can neither confirm nor deny that anything like that ever happened here.

02-00:48:223

Redman: Maybe can you either not confirm or deny—are there instances where you’re working with someone else, and maybe a guy is not in the right headspace? Like, they had a fight at home.

02-00:48:35

Mooradian: That I can say yes. For sure.

02-00:48:38

Redman: That is part of the safety calculus, probably, as well.

02-00:48:41

Mooradian: Yes. These are people I work with. They’re my friends. I’m going to say the term, you don’t want to rat somebody out. But I’m here for the next guy, and I’m hoping that they be here for me, too. But if things do get a little bit out of hand, I’ll be the first one to go tell my supervisor, “This ain’t happening right here.” It’s kind of an unspoken thing. Everybody kind of looks out for everybody. But we don’t have any of that problem. Since—I forget how many years—we now do mandatory drug and alcohol testing, which is a fantastic thing. It really is, because, I mean—

02-00:49:19

Redman:

I would imagine that must have changed some of the culture of the old holdover days from 1930s and 1940s. I can imagine it might have had a—

02-00:49:28

Mooradian:

Nineteen eighties as well. That being said—things are safer because of it. There was abuse going on out here, no doubt about it, in a lot of places. The drug and alcohol testing, I think it's fantastic. I don't have a problem with it. I'm clean and sober. I've never had a problem with anything. I know those that have. I like being in my right frame of mind and I like the person I'm working with to be in the right frame of mind. It's dangerous enough as it is. I don't need to have you doing some silly thing over here.

02-00:50:11

Redman:

That's good. I have everything I need. Great. Thanks again.

02-00:50:14

Mooradian:

You're welcome.

[End of Interview]