

Interview with

Don Terwilliger

March 15, 2005

by Kristi Hawthorne

for the

Highway 101 Association

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**Interview with Don Terwilliger on March 15, 2005 at his home in Del Mar, California.
Interviewer and transcriber: Kristi Hawthorne.**

Kristi: I'm Kristi Hawthorne and it's March 15, 2005 and we're at the home of Don Terwilliger in Del Mar, California. We're going to talk about the Highway 101 and his memories of the Highway going through the city of Del Mar. Can you tell me your full name?

Don: Donald C. Terwilliger.

Kristi: When and where were you born?

Don: I was born December 9, 1930 and I was born actually in San Diego, but we were living in Del Mar. I'll you the story.

Kristi: Sure.

Don: Mother and Dad were at the La Paloma Theater to see a movie "Feet First" with Harold Lloyd, an old comedian in silent pictures. They actually had talkies by the 1930. Anyway, in the middle of the picture mother started to go into labor so my father put her in the car and they headed to San Diego to the hospital. The doctors weren't plentiful around here, and they had no emergency rooms or doctors on call. So he headed down there and I was born two months early and I was feet first, a breech birth, like the movie "Feet First"! Anyway, they lived in Del Mar and they died in Del Mar.

Kristi: Can you tell me your parents' names?

Don: My dad was George Theodore Terwilliger, or Ted, they called him. My mother was Mary Louise Kibler Terwilliger. She was an orphan and was raised by her grandmother until a certain age and then they shipped her out to Pasadena to an uncle and her uncle, Luke Kibler, came down in 1925. He was brought down by the South Coast Land Company to sell land for them. They were developing Del Mar and the heights. So they brought him down and mother came with him, of course. She went to Oceanside High School. She got to school by the bus, it used to pick them up and take them to high school up in Oceanside. Her aunt, Mae Kibler, became the postmaster of Del Mar for thirty years. They built the first commercial building in Del Mar. Do you know where Julie's Swimwear is? Well, it's a little building and it's still there in town. That was the post office on one side in a little teeny space about as big as this room. She lived with her uncle and aunt.

Kristi: Did she graduate from Oceanside?

Don: No, she didn't graduate. She was a good girl but she was a party person. She didn't like to go to school. She liked to go to the beach, as my father said. She had all these boyfriends, too. She had four or five engagement rings. My father said, "don't worry, she was a virgin!" In fact, when he told me this he must have been 65 and he said, "in fact, she still is!" Anyway, they married and I came along and I was schooled at Del Mar Elementary School. I went to San Dieguito High School, which had the 7th, 8th, 9th, 10th, 11th and 12th grades at the time I went

Interview with Don Terwilliger, March 15, 2005

there. Then Carlsbad Junior College, which is Mira Costa. Then I went to San Diego State for a year. Then I was a party person! I said, "Who needs this?" I didn't get my degree. I got my high school diploma, which is a miracle. I just talked a lot, that's all. I got my AA at Mira Costa, which is another miracle. When I got down to San Diego State, reality set in. I, too, liked to go out then. I would go to bed at late hours and I was supposed to be at a class at 8:00 in the morning and I got to a class maybe at 2:00 and that was modern dance! So let me tell you, I got incompletes, an "A" in modern dance and that's it. So I left and I went away.

Kristi: How did your father and his family come to Del Mar?

Don: They were living in Canada, up in Calgary, Alberta. His father was a grain broker and a rancher. He raised Belgium workhorses. He was up there. My dad went to school up there, except to college. He went to Oregon State because he had relatives in Oregon. Then my grandfather, at a certain time, would winter at Long Beach or Point Loma. So he decided he'd sell his businesses and come and retire. He was about 40. So he took an option to buy some land up in Long Beach and then he came down looking around Rancho Santa Fe, which was just opening up for land for sale, that was around 1923. The latter part of 1923 he decided he would take the Rancho property and let the other option go. He had a six-month option on that one and that property became Signal Hill, which is a big supplier of oil and which he regretted many times after that. Then he came to Rancho Santa Fe and built his house in 1925. It's still there, it's on the Department of National Registry and it's a beautiful house. A lady by the name of Laura de Seroux, a horse trainer--she trained the champion horse, Azari--she lives there now. My grandparents came down and my dad would come from college. My aunt Mae Kibler was the postmaster. They became friends at a dinner party and they said, "I want to introduce our niece to your son." So they arranged another dinner party so they met and then that's it. They got married maybe three years later. That's how they met. My dad worked for the 22nd Agricultural District, who own the San Diego County Fairgrounds and Del Mar Racetrack. He worked there for almost 39 years. Mother worked for years with her aunt in the Post office.

Kristi: Great, we've got your background information, which is always important, so now I will ask you your recollections of the 101. When you were growing up, where did your family live in relation to the 101?

Don: When I first started walking, I was living up by the library. Do you know where the library is? It's where the St. James church was on 13th Street. It's a house cattycorner from the Library. We lived six different places in town, one was on Ocean Avenue around 13th Street, so that's like two blocks away, then from there it was here, which is 226 20th Street.

Kristi: What year was it when you moved here?

Don: 1946. Before that they lived five different places. They were gypsies!

Kristi: Can you tell me what outstanding event that occurred that was meaningful to you on the 101?

Don: My father had an accident and almost died. That was in 1935. My mother and I were up in Orange visiting a girlfriend of hers that she went to high school with. In 1935 the World Fair

Interview with Don Terwilliger, March 15, 2005

was going on in Balboa Park so my dad went down to the Fair and coming back, evidently he had too much to drink and right by the bridge down to the south of Del Mar, he fell asleep and he hit a car that was parked. There was a nurse and doctor in the car. He was in the back of the car taking a leak and she was in the car and my father came along and passed out and hit the car and injured them very, very badly. I mean very badly. He was unconscious for two weeks at Scripps Hospital in La Jolla at the time. That was one of the things that happened on the 101. Another thing that happened on 101, in those days there wasn't any traffic. There was like one car every half hour or something, but if there was an accident in town during that time, they would call everybody. The Bertoncini family were living up by the road, the Highway 101, they would call and it was like ring, ring, ring at 1:00 in the morning, "there's an accident!" So everybody would go to the accident. It was like an event. We didn't have, well the one movie house in La Paloma, that was it, so it was a happening. I remember more than a few times getting out of bed and running up to see those accidents, because that was like a sporting event!

Kristi: How old were you when you first rode the 101?

Don: I was nine weeks old.

Kristi: Do you have a first memory of your first trip on the 101?

Don: Well, yes. I was about seven or eight months old, I can remember then. I remember we had a car with a rumble seat, it was like a coupe and I remember riding in that car but I never rode in the back, but we did have some more cars with rumble seats. But that's the first recollection that I can remember, I was like eight months old.

Kristi: You can remember that early?

Don: Yes, definitely.

Kristi: How remarkable.

Don: Yes, definitely, and I can see a picture of the car.

Kristi: Do you remember where you might be going?

Don: We would either be going to the store or the market.

Kristi: Which was where?

Don: In Del Mar.

Kristi: What was the name of the store?

Don: At that time it was owned by I.E. Conner's; it was Conner's Grocery Store. It was in the Stratford Building where Earth Song is now and that shoe store, in there. That was built purposely for a market.

Interview with Don Terwilliger, March 15, 2005

Kristi: Do you remember what kind of car your dad had?

Don: It was a Marquette. Marquettes, I believe, were put out by Chevrolet.

Kristi: Do you remember the first time you drove on the 101 yourself?

Don: Yes, I was very old, because I made every excuse not to drive and I didn't drive, this is kind of embarrassing, but that's okay, I didn't drive until I was 40 years old. I was in a profession that I was traveling a lot and not by car. I had a real thing about – it goes back to the mother – the fear factor. Now I love to drive. I love to drive every place. When I was in high school kids didn't have cars like we do now. Mommy and Daddy didn't give you a brand new car at 16 years old and pay \$30,000 for it. They didn't do that. Only a few had cars at San Dieguito. I think when I graduated there were 400 or 500 kids there and I think probably 2 out of 20 or so had a car.

Kristi: How did you get to school?

Don: The school bus would stop right down here. Even when I went to Mira Costa, the bus came and picked me up.

Kristi: Can you recall some of the buildings or businesses along the 101?

Don: Sure, lots. I'll start from the north end of town: There was nothing until you got to the hotel, the Hotel Del Mar. There they had a dining room and they had a coffee shop. They served breakfast and lunch and so on. Part of the time, my aunt, the postmaster, she lived in there at the hotel many years. She would leave her husband and go back and forth and so on. The next building, there was a drugstore on the corner and in the drugstore they would had a soda fountain and they sold sandwiches, hamburgers and so on. I would go in there a lot of times. Mother would give me a nickel and I would go in there for a cherry coke. After school, even grammar school, we'd head down to the drugstore to get a cherry coke. Next to the drugstore, I had an aunt by choice--I was part of her estate--Ann Sterrett, she was a businesswoman in town and she had a beauty shop but she didn't run it. She owned everything in it and she leased it out. Next to the beauty shop, she had a dress shop, Del Mar Sportswear, now La Miraposa. Next to that dress shop there was a doctor's office. First, Dr. Davies and when he left, Dr. Savage took over. Next to that was the I.E. Conner's Market and later that became the USO during the war. Up the street came my aunt's building, the post office was in there. At that time, the other part of it they lived in. Then there was a real estate office that Bully's is in. That was Batchelder's Real Estate Office. In between, in the early years, there was nothing there, but later in about 1940, they built a building which was another market and now there is Durante's Menswear and another shop there. Up the street to the south there was a building it En Fuego then, it was called La Tienda and La Tienda was a wonderful restaurant. It was just very, very popular. We didn't have many restaurants, so it was a very popular restaurant and it was very well attended. Tony Jacal in Eden Gardens, those people, Catalina and Tony, who started Tony Jacal's--when I was young, she was a cook and he was the bartender in La Tienda. Down the street on the corner of 13th was the Hotel Del Mar Garage, which they had the limousines and the chauffeured cars and they had gas and maintenance and stuff. From there, all the way down, there wasn't a thing – when I was real young—there wasn't a thing until the school, which is the city hall, that was a

Interview with Don Terwilliger, March 15, 2005

grammar school. Farther on there were no businesses, nothing. On the other side of the street, the other side of 15th Street, that whole block, except one little part, it was higher and it had a lot of eucalyptus trees in there, but right at the corner of 14th and the Highway, was the Richfield Station and then on the other corner, there was a Standard Station, then there was nothing until the church, St. James, and then there was nothing all the way down to the bridge, this is early, early. So those were the businesses at that time, in the early 1930s. During that time there was only one upscale restaurant in the area and that was up in Solana Beach along the highway, the south end of Solana Beach, it was a restaurant called Paion's. It was a French restaurant in the early 1940's.

Kristi: Do you remember any landmarks or unusual structures on the 101?

Don: Yes, I do, actually. Every time when I was a kid, if we were going to San Diego, and at that time I got to ride in the rumble seat, I was a little older, there was an oil derrick on the Rose Canyon, up in the hill, an oil derrick that struck nothing, but that was my grandfather's. So every time I'd do down I'd look and I'd say, "Oh, that's Bobo's!" That what I called him. Bobo also had a dry well over where Torrey Pines High School is. That derrick was there for years and it finally just fell down. Some of the parts were still there when they built the school. But I would always look at that.

Kristi: What was your grandfather's name?

Don: Claude Terwilliger. He was in Rancho Santa Fe. He did have property here in town. He had the land up on Klish, the whole block on one side, it was probably 1944, he said, I'll give you a lot so you can build a house on it, up on Klish. I remember more than one day we were up there pulling weeds and trying to get all the brush off the lots and all of sudden we got a phone call from him and he said, "I'm not going to give you the lot, because I've sold the block." He sold the whole block for \$10,000. That was a lot of money then. In later years the 101 went down to San Diego and this was during the war, the Consolidated Vultee Aircraft and they had it all covered with chicken wire and camouflage, the whole area there. So when you went over you would see all this camouflage netting. During the war they would put up barrage balloons and I would see these barrage balloons. Do you know what they are?

Kristi: No.

Don: Barrage balloons are these inflatable balloons that they would raise on heavy cables and they had these cables hanging down around them and they put those up for the low flying planes would get entangled and crash. They used those in England. They thought the Japanese were going to land any minute.

Kristi: Where were they located?

Don: All around the airport and around the defense plant. Every time we would go down there, which was quite often, I wanted to see the barrage balloons. They weren't up all during the war because it was pretty logical nothing was going to happen so they took them away after awhile. The chicken wire stayed up there for years.

Interview with Don Terwilliger, March 15, 2005

Kristi: Was there a particular person associated with this stretch of the road?

Don: In Del Mar? A businessman?

Kristi: Yes.

Don: My Uncle, Luke Kibler. He had an office next door to the post office. He was a very nice, very good looking and at one time named the best-dressed man in San Francisco; this was at the turn of the century. He was into real estate and he used to dress very, very nice and he was very smart. But he was an alcoholic. He was actually a very smart man but alcohol wrecked him.

Kristi: He had a real estate office? Do you remember the specific address?

Don: Yes, I do. The address was 1414-18 Camino Del Mar. It was the first building in the business district. The palm trees that you see along the street down here, the ones on Coast Boulevard that are disappearing and getting sick, he planted all of those. There were 125 of them, I think, at one time. Those trees were only three feet tall and he got them when they were developing the fairgrounds. Those fairgrounds were the golf course for the Hotel Del Mar. So he had those palm trees taken from the golf course and planted along the boulevard, because the South Coast Land Company owned all this and then they owned the hotel, the Hotel Del Mar, too.

Kristi: What year did he plant the palms?

Don: In 1934. So the person that comes to mind is L.T. Kibler and Mae Kibler, who was his wife, who was the postmaster. I spent a lot of time in that post office.

Kristi: Do you have a favorite destination on the 101?

Don: My favorite destination, well, now if I drove up to the Santa Anita racetrack! I like to drive up north to Carmel and along the ocean route.

Kristi: As a teenager what would have been your favorite destination?

Don: Going to the movies in San Diego, that was a big thing. That was a really big thing. We would go to the La Paloma Theater on the Highway 101 to Encinitas, so to go to San Diego was a big deal and to go out and go to the zoo, that was really big, because it was different in those days. It was an event.

Kristi: You told me that you father had a bad accident, but do you have any memories of bad accidents along the 101?

Don: Yes, I do. I happened to be standing in town and this car came around the corner. It was jeep and a woman was a passenger and they came around real fast and she fell out and she hit her head on the pavement and she was dead. I was transfixed then, it was the first dead person I ever saw.

Kristi: When was this?

Interview with Don Terwilliger, March 15, 2005

Don: It was the late 1940's. The second dead person was my grandmother, in 1951. She died young. But I couldn't believe it.

Kristi: What made her fall out of the car?

Don: I think they were inebriated. He was turning the corner and somehow she just fell out of the car. That was the most awful thing.

Kristi: Was there a Highway Patrolman in Del Mar?

Don: Yes, Bill Thompson. He was our guy and also there was another man, Charlie McDermott that was around that I remember. Bill Thompson, McDermott, and they had a judge around, Judge McLaughlin. His offices were up in Solana Beach. It was near the chamber of commerce at the plaza. There used to be a hotel there, the Solana Hotel and it was right in there, I think.

Kristi: Did they patrol the highway or the town?

Don: Kind of both, actually but Bill Thompson was the highwayman.

Kristi: Was he a motorcycle officer?

Don: Yes, but so was McDermott, I think.

Kristi: Do you remember anyone getting a ticket, like your dad?

Don: No.

Kristi: Do you remember the speed limit through town?

Don: I think it was something like 35 miles an hour. It was either 25 or 35.

Kristi: How would the races impact the traffic?

Don: The races only impacted at certain hours. When they get out and when they come in. I remember Leucadia and on north, I remember being on the 101, I didn't drive it then, but I was with people driving back and forth to Los Angeles. Sometimes I was living up there and coming back, commuting back and forth, and it would take a long time. I remember I had a friend who had a little MG and he was going through suicide alley and there was a strip on either side and he would go on that strip. It was incredible. He never got caught. But you would just come to a halt forever. Now it's like that all the time but this was just at a certain time when the races would let out.

Kristi: Do you remember any parades in Del Mar?

Don: They used to have some kind of parade during the summer; I think it was around the fair time. At that time I was up working in Los Angeles or Las Vegas. But during that time they did

Interview with Don Terwilliger, March 15, 2005

have a parade sponsored by the Chamber of Commerce and the Del Mar Fairgrounds. I don't know how long that lasted, but they did have a parade.

Kristi: Did you see President Roosevelt when he came through town?

Don: Yes, I saw him. He came down Highway 101. At that time they had soldiers stationed all along the highway on both sides, certain distances, but not that far apart. He came down and the rumor is—I saw his entourage—the rumor is that he stopped at the drugstore and had someone go in and buy cigarettes for him because he was a chain smoker. I heard that, but I didn't see that, but I heard that he did stop during that trip.

Kristi: How old were you then?

Don: I think it was about 1938 and I was in school where the city hall is. I was in about the third or fourth grade. I remember it pretty clearly. He was one of our heroes at the time. He was a good president. He had a terrific wife. She had a hell of a life, I guess, but she was a brilliant woman. Everybody looked up to him because he rescued us from the Depression and the war that went on. He was saving us from the Depression and instigating Social Security which is under attack right now that has saved a lot of peoples' lives, rather than having the money early and spending it. I would have spent it on records and clothes. Nobody could have told me to put money away at that age. So he started social security, which was fabulous. He also started the WPA, which my father was a part of. My dad got a degree in college but then he got in a really bad accident. After that accident he did work for the WPA and his particular job, he was a foreman in Rancho Santa Fe and they did a lot of the rock culverts. But back to the President, the things I remember, how he dressed: he dressed like Oscar Wilde, actually. He was a very great man for all of his troubles and polio.

Kristi: What about celebrities on the 101?

Don: Mother and I were eating at the La Tienda, she and I and my Aunt Mae. We were in the patio. The La Tienda is En Fuego, now. The patio area down below we were having dinner. Two tables away there was this actress, Merle Oberon. She was a very beautiful and well-known actress. She was there having dinner and mother said, "Don, go tell her you want to be in movies." I said, "Oh, no, come on." In fact, I have the card in my desk. She said, "Go ahead and ask her for her autograph." So I said, "okay." So I went over there and I said, "Pardon me, Miss Oberon, but may I have your autograph." She said, "Oh yes." She wrote Merle Oberon on this card that I have. I said, "Oh thank you very much." So I went back and mother said, "Did you tell her?" "No, come on." So Merle Oberon was one.

Kristi: How old were you?

Don: This was in 1940. Of course I did see Lucy and Desi. They lived here. Desi died here. Lucy had cleared out in 1960. We'd see Lucy and Desi. Everybody would go to that drugstore and the market. There was nothing here so they'd go to those stores. Lucy, Desi, and Betty Grable. Betty Grable was one of my favorites. I adored her. In fact, I worked with her in her last movie. I just thought she was the most wonderful, and she was. She was great. She was cute and everything but beyond that cuteness she was a good person and a free spirit. She was really a

Interview with Don Terwilliger, March 15, 2005

nice person, it's too bad she had to die so young with all of her indulgences, smoking and drinking. I saw Dorothy Lamour. I used to hang out at the hotel during the times my aunt was living there. Mother was either there or at the bar because she liked cocktails. She didn't get drunk or anything, she just loved to socialize. She was cuter than hell. My father was kind of anti-social so she would just take off and my father didn't care. During the war years my father was working at night, then he was working at Consolidated. So I would see all these people, Margaret O'Brien, the Marx Brothers, all of them. I saw Al Jolson. In fact, I happened to be lucky enough to be at the hotel with Aunt Mae and we were living here, in a little house on the property, so mother and I and my aunt and a couple of other people were at the hotel. Al Jolson got up and they had an outdoor patio in front of the hotel and they had a band there, and Al Jolson did a performance. It was very thrilling to see him. Ruby Keeler was a tap dancer with Dick Powell in 42nd Street, that was one of her earliest movies and made her a star. Actually at one time they had a nightclub at the Hotel Del Mar. This is later, this in 1949. The owner opened up a nightclub and I saw Carmen Miranda. Carmen Miranda opened the nightclub. The cover charge was \$2.50. During that run of the nightclub, Dean Martin and Jerry Lewis, Nat King Cole, Liberace, Penny Singleton.

Kristi: What was the name of the club?

Don: It was at the hotel. It was a cabaret at the hotel and they had all these people and a marquis out on the front "Now Performing, Liberace."

Kristi: And they couldn't make a go of it?

Don: No, no. They couldn't make a go of it. They would do some of this in the Spring and there was no one around. It didn't last. Actually, the hotel used to show movies on their lawn in the summertime. For a quarter you could see "42nd Street" or any movies during that time. They put chairs out and I'd go to the movies. Mother would give me a quarter and I'd go up there. We were living down on 20th Street by then. It was so dark coming back from the movies. There was no light out here because people didn't live out here so there were no lights on houses, even. Everything was pitch dark. I was running on the middle of Coast Boulevard as fast as I could home because I was actually always kind of scared of the dark.

Kristi: When was the first traffic light in Del Mar?

Don: We didn't have a stoplight for years and years and years AND years. More people got hit crossing the street during the early times of the races. In fact, one of our priests got killed crossing from St. James Church across and he got hit and killed. The stoplight didn't come in until probably around 1949 at 15th Street, that was the first one. Then of course we had another one at 9th Street and then 4th Street or Del Mar Heights Road, but they came later.

Kristi: You briefly mentioned the service stations, the Richfield and the Standard, what corner were they on?

Don: 14th Street on the east side.

Kristi: Do you remember who owned them?

Interview with Don Terwilliger, March 15, 2005

Don: I don't know if he owned it but a man by the name of Jack McLaughlin was working at the Richfield. I can't remember who owned the other one.

Kristi: You also mentioned the Del Mar Garage. Was that a gas station?

Don: Yes. It was a gas station of some sort.

Kristi: Do you know who managed that?

Don: Yes, Kenneth Fitzhugh. He managed it for years.

Kristi: That's all of my questions, but do you have anything that you feel might be pertinent that you would like to add?

Don: I was talking about accidents happening, our little house was right on 20th and the highway was up there and let me tell you, in the middle of the night, I was still living here, going to school and the drunk Marines would come flying down going back to the base and there was a turn there and they would come straight down that bank and you'd hear in the middle of the night "crash!" and then moans. That happened several times, half a dozen. Another one went off, this was in about 1954, there were two buildings right there and one of them came flying off and went into the upper apartment. It was going really fast. It flew across. No one was hurt because no one was there. What else about the highway... the Bells, the Mission Bells.

Kristi: Where were they located in Del Mar?

Don: There was one in front of the church, there was one down near 4th Street and one time, we have a picture in our archives at the historical society, there was one on the corner at the Stratford Building. There was a house there at that time and they moved that bell to the church. There were two or three bells on the route during the 1930s and 1940s.