

**Memories of Highway 101  
1936 to 2005**

**by Ida Lou Coley**

Ida Lou Coley was interviewed by Lloyd O'Connell of the Encinitas Historical Society and her interview was transcribed and given to her for changes and corrections.

She opted instead to submit her own written memories and requested that these be published in lieu of her interview.

## **Memories of Highway 101 ... 1936-2005**

My memories of Highway 101 could be quite a long story, for so many years of living now stretch out behind me. But before sharing my thoughts about that good old highway, I will first give a brief account of my early childhood years. I do so because the time deeply influenced my life to come, and my perceptions, and perhaps life long values as well.

I grew up from age six to nine years on a farm west of Ada, Oklahoma. Our family lived in Ada when I was very young and my memory of those years is dim.

We moved to a country community called Pickett, five miles west of Ada, when I was six and lived on Uncle Ike's farm. I loved it there, especially a creek, "Old Sandy", that ran through it. I had just started grammar school, and I walked two miles to and two miles from the small country school, along dusty, dirt, country roads.

There were a few cottonwood trees on the farm and lots of pecan trees, cotton fields, cornfields too, and Mother had wonderful vegetable garden. Daddy made a watermelon patch which we enjoyed greatly. But my favorite spot was where Daddy had made a swing for me, just a short distance from the house. The swing hung from a branch of a large cottonwood tree. I enjoyed the experience of living on a farm very much. However, it became quite difficult for my mother, because Daddy was not well.

Then, on Christmas Day of 1936, my father had a massive stroke and died at noontime. In those years, the country was in the depths of the Great Depression. My younger brother Kenneth had graduated from high school and had come to Encinitas, California, and lived with relatives here. I remember he had driven a car for someone, as a way to get to California.

Relatives in Encinitas loaned my brother money so he could return home for Daddy's services. He and Mother had a talk and he said to Mother, "Why don't you and Ida Lou come to California? We can have a better life there." That is what Mother decided to do. I also had a brother, Everett, and an older sister Artie. Both had graduated from high school.

Mother sold the livestock and farming machinery and with money received from the sale, she bought a Chevie sedan and a small trailer. Mother, Everett and I came to California in the spring of 1937. My sister Artie would come later and settle in Burbank where she worked in a doctor's office.

So now, having introduced my family and our circumstances, I will focus on my earliest memories of experiencing Highway in 1937.

What I remember most vividly, after we reached San Diego and started north along the coast, was the stretch of 101, down the Torrey Pines grade. There were trees on both sides of the highway, ones I had never seen before. Down below, so far down, was a stream of water that I learned, in years to come, would be called “wet lands.” But the most thrilling scene was the Pacific Ocean, as the Chevie descended Highway 101 at the Torrey Pines grade. Beyond, as the highway rose up again, was a bridge passing over a lagoon at the south end of the community of Del Mar. It was such a beautiful scene, framed forever in my mind.

There was another panorama along Highway 101 that impressed me. It was the gentle descent at the north edge of the Solana Beach community, again with a lagoon to the northeast, a view of the Pacific as well, and the hills of Cardiff by the Sea, then covered with only a few homes.

The Cullen Building was the most prominent structure on the horizon, but at that time, Cardiff was not densely populated. We would live in that community for our first year in California, so that community has a special place in my heart also.

Soon we were about to enter the town of Encinitas for the first time, and I was filled with an excitement that only a child can feel. Of course, the first thing to catch my eye was a point of land that jutted westward at the town’s entrances, but at that time, the beautiful temple that would rest there for a number of years was not yet completed. Sometime later, my brother Kenneth, Mother and myself would attend an open house to celebrate its completion. I thought the temple was breathtaking.

But on that first arrival day, there was another downtown Encinitas' building along Highway 101 that caught my young eyes. It was the filling station on the right side, as one enters downtown.

I had never seen a building like it, with its arches and windows. I thought it was pretty enough to live in, even if it was a filling station.

As the Chevie came nearer to the heart of downtown Encinitas, my brother Everett pulled to a sheet iron building on the right side of Highway 101. The Pacific Irrigation Company was standing pretty much alone, in the area of today's "Lumberyard". Immediately, I saw my brother Kenneth, and I quickly rolled down the window to reach out and throw my arms around his neck. It was such a happy moment. And soon my sister Artie would come to California as well, and the Coley family would be together again.

For our first year in California, we lived in Cardiff by the Sea, but we came to downtown Encinitas to buy groceries at the Safeway Store, then located where Artistic Floors is today. My brother would park along Highway 101, as near the store as possible, and Mother would go in and buy groceries. Not many vegetables though, because she liked to make a garden, as she did in Oklahoma.

While waiting for Mother, someone might pass by who knew my brothers and stop and talk. That reminded me of Oklahoma, too. Perhaps it was a simple small town custom, but it also made one feel a part of the community.

My brothers would also often take Mother and me with them to Oceanside on a Saturday night. We might go to a movie or just shop. The drive along Highway 101 was quite different then, because much of the land along the highway was bare, except for the town area of Carlsbad with its Inn and the rooster statues and a nice hotel.

But I always thought of Oceanside as a true “city.” After all, it had two movie theaters and a J.C. Penny Store. For me, going to Oceanside was somewhat like going to Ada. Highway 101 went through Oceanside’s heart as it did in most coastal towns.

I remember that my brothers took Mother and me with them to see a Sunday matinee of the movie “Gone With the Wind”, that everyone was talking about. The theater was packed! It was a big event, something to remember, especially when Rhett Butler (Clark Gable) said to Scarlet, “Frankly, my dear, I don’t give a damn!” I don’t think Mother covered my young ears with her hands. Most likely she was smiling. But I’m sure that a swear word had never before been heard from the silver screen.

After about a year of living in Cardiff by the Sea, we moved to downtown Encinitas. I loved this town immediately! There were so many children my age with whom I could play by the hour. And there was so much to explore. We had bluffs, Moonlight Beach, Cottonwood Creek, the Point (today's Swami's), tide pools, and sometimes we went for walks in the country, such as walks along Saxony where we would see Mr. Sugimoto's strawberry fields and Mr. Ecke's poinsettias.

It was a wonderful experience for me to live in what seemed more than a town. It was a "city" to me. I remember that many of the merchants lived in downtown, so it was also "home" for them as well. In the mornings they would be out on the sidewalk in front of their stores, before opening the doors, washing the sidewalks with a hose, or sweeping it ... the Sturdivants, Halsteads, Corys, Westbrook, and others.

Some of the businesses along Highway 101 that I remember include Lutrell's Drug Store, great milk shakes there; and Sturdivant's Drug Store, where the kids went to sit on the floor and read comic books. Mr. Sturdivant didn't seem to mind. We had three grocery stores, a dime store, and cafes ... Wilson's, Zimm's. There was Ivan Tiedy's Radio Hospital, Halsted's Five and Dime, Westbrook's Hardware, and Cory's Dry Goods. There was Al's Barbershop, and not to be left out...the Pool Hall and the Village Rendezvous. There was a gasoline station on almost every corner in downtown during those years, for Highway 101 was the major route between Los Angeles and San Diego.

There were also two lumberyards and at least one beauty shop. But when it became time to buy new clothes for school one usually went to Oceanside or Escondido.

I shall always remember the morning that President Roosevelt drove along Highway 101 on his way from Oceanside, where he had visited Camp Pendleton, soon to be opened. Now he was to visit bases in San Diego.

Somehow, my childhood friend Shirley Maas and I learned that the President would come through Encinitas at any moment. We quickly ran to Shirley's house, which was along the highway, as fast as our young legs could carry us, then rushed to the second floor's balcony overlooking Highway 101.

At the north end of downtown, we could see an open convertible slowly approaching. We jumped up and down with excitement and waved our arms, hoping the President would see us...and he did!

President Roosevelt looked up and saw our young, excited faces and smiled to us and waved back to us. He was in the back seat of a convertible, sitting alone. He wore a Panama hat and a light colored suit. It was a brief moment in time that we two young girls would never forget.

Those moments, with President Roosevelt smiling to us,  
seem an appropriate ending for this memory trip along Highway 101,  
so many years ago.

That good old Highway ever brings the past ... to the present

Ida Lou Coley

From left to right:  
Ida Lou Coley, age 10; sister Artie and brother Kenneth. We are standing beside the Chevie sedan that brought Mother, my brother Everett and myself to California in 1937. The Chevie is parked along F Street in front of the duplex at the northeast corner of Third and F in downtown Encinitas

