

Interview with

Len Cory

December 28, 2004

by Lloyd O'Connell

for the

Highway 101 Association

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Interview with Len Cory on December 28, 2004. Interviewer: Lloyd O'Connell of the Encinitas Historical Society. Transcribed by Kristi Hawthorne

Lloyd: This is Lloyd O'Connell. I'm interviewing Len Cory at his home. This is December 28, 2004. Len, give me your full name and current address, if you would.

Len: Leonard R. Cory, 7535 Gibraltar Street, Carlsbad, California.

Lloyd: When and where were you born?

Len: I was born on Third Street in Encinitas. I can't remember the address and I don't think we had them when I was born. I was born December 4, 1929.

Lloyd: What are your parents' names?

Len: My father's name was Sam Cory and my mother's name was Lilly Cory. That's what they went by here. They had longer names, but that's what they went by.

Lloyd: How did your family come to Southern California?

Len: That's a good question. I asked my father that very, very question and he said he came through here and it was so much like Beirut that when he looked it, he just kind of settled and that was in 1924.

Lloyd: What period of time did you live on or near the 101?

Len: All of my early life, until I got married and then moved a little bit east of the freeway. But basically, all of my life.

Lloyd: Can you tell me any outstanding events that occurred that were meaningful to you, related to the Highway 101?

Len: That's a good question. There were so many different things. You know, the old Christmas tree on the highway, did you hear about that one? And of course the Buddha Temple down there that was, the Self-Realization. That was a very meaningful time in our life.

Lloyd: What do you remember about that?

Len: Well, I remember that they built a swimming pool down there that was absolutely magnificent and the only in town, I believe. And as a little boy I went down and decided to get in that pool, along with three or four other boys. The Buddha gentleman came by and he was very scary. He had long hair and looked down at us and said, "You don't belong in this pool." You never saw three or four guys get out of the pool faster in your life! But it has been built up down there over the years. It's been a real staple for the Encinitas community.

Lloyd: Were you aware of the fact that the chapel fell and did you see that at all?

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Len: Towards the ocean, you're talking about? Yes, I did see that.

Lloyd: How about your dad's business.

Len: He ran what you might call a "junior department store" in those days. He carried everything from thread to clothing to whatever, rubber boots for the farmer and agricultural people. He moved in there in 1924 and had a very nice store. He was a great guy. He and my mother both did a nice job in there.

Lloyd: Did he have any trouble at all when he was there?

Len: Well, he was robbed twice. They came in--actually we had no police department. We had a sheriff.

Lloyd: Do you remember the sheriff's name at all?

Len: There was one guy, I don't know for sure. I don't remember. There were two different guys but there was a sheriff's office next door to us, but they didn't do anything. They literally came in and parked truck and cleaned him out over night, twice. He had great credit and so the people who he bought from out of Los Angeles were very helpful in putting him back in business. He was a very honest guy. He was very, very happy to just be able to get back on his feet again.

Lloyd: What did he do about it?

Len: Nothing. They didn't do a thing about it.

Lloyd: Did he do anything, though, personally?

Len: No. What could you do? You couldn't do anything about it in those days. Nobody knew who it was. They came in with large trucks to do it. They literally took him out almost.

Lloyd: Afterwards, did he do anything to protect his property?

Len: Well, he would go down to the store at night and sleep in the store. He couldn't do anything else about it. My brother was a little older than I was and he would go down and sleep with him down there. They'd go down there at night and for weeks and weeks and weeks they stayed in the store.

Lloyd: That got pretty old, didn't it?

Len: Yes, it did. Of course I was used to him not being home very much. I mean, they worked seven days a week in the store. They were opened seven days a week. Our family life was basically built around the business. They never took vacations or anything like that. In those days, I don't think many people did. They didn't take the kind of vacations they do today. In those days it was very, very difficult. It was a struggle just getting through the Depression.

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Lloyd: That was a struggle.

Len: It was. He just worked himself.

Lloyd: How did he work it when people didn't have any money?

Len: Well, they did a barter system. They did that with a lot, the Wiegand's would come in, for instance, and they'd bring beans for shirts and pants. Somebody else--carpenters would come in they'd do work for him to get different things. So the barter system worked pretty well for him at that point. He was able to get some meats and some groceries. Sam Miller, I don't know how much you've heard about Sam Miller, but he was everybody's best friend. He sold meats. He had a charge situation there you would not believe. I think when they finally ended that business he probably had more money invested in charge accounts. It was a very different kind of life in those days. We'd go by as little kids and we'd go into Sam's and he'd come up and hug us and give us a wienie, you know, one of those raw wienies to eat. I felt that was the greatest thing in the world! Sam Miller was quite a guy. You weren't here then, were you.

Lloyd: No. I came in 1955, so he quit in 1960, so I was here for five years, but I didn't meet him though. I didn't really see him.

Len: You didn't see him in those days, but that time he was pretty much out of it. He was not doing good. His brother Charlie had the feed store. I was going to give you some of that information and some of the other people. Start off, well; the Miller Brothers was my favorite store. They were just absolutely great. He and his brother Paul ran that one. Then Charlie's Feed Store, he ran the feed store on his own. The feed store was right next to the railroad tracks. They just took it out a few years ago. Then there was Sturdivant's Drug Store and of course, our store, Cory's Store; then Danford's groceries; Ivan Tiedy, he had his appliance store; Halston Variety Store, which was there forever, way back; Westbrook's Hardware; Sid has his cleaners for a long, long time there; Encinitas Bakery which was first and then Home Bakery which Matlock's had that; and then Seeman Lumber was there for many, many years next door to the La Paloma theater, and then the Bank of America which was in that building.

Lloyd: Anything happen that you can recall that was kind of interesting with those stores?

Len: Not really. There were a lot of things that happened, but I'm not really sure it was anything that I was aware of. Mr. Sturdivant was quite a character. That ended up being Detrick Drugs. Mr. Clayton had the other drug store on the other end of town. I'm not sure that there was anything that was of any variety to discuss. The pool hall was right in the middle of town, but that was owned by half a dozen different people. I couldn't tell you who they were now.

Lloyd: Did you experience the prize fighting at the Daily Double?

Len: Oh yes, that was Morris Delay. I was asked to fight! I was a little tiny guy. They said for a steak dinner you guys could put on a show out there and I said, I don't know how to box, you know. But they had some good boxers that were there. It was quite a thing. That was Morris Delay that had that. That was interesting.

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Lloyd: When did they put that second story on there? Did he put it on?

Len: To the bar? As long as I can remember it was on there. There was a little house that came on later between the two, but the boxing ring was there first.

Lloyd: In that little house, what was in there?

Len: There was a barbershop in there. A barber and a woman in there, for a long time. I don't know how long, but a long time. Then the Johnston's owned the other barbershop, the one that's right there in the middle of town. In fact, that's the one I bought when I started barbering.

Lloyd: What side of the street?

Len: On the same side as my dad's store, the east side. It was right next to where the pool hall was. In fact, it was one of the four buildings that burned down. It would be the last one, south.

Lloyd: They burned that when? In 2000:

Len: Yes, it was about 2000, that's pretty close. It had a beauty shop in the back and a barbershop in the front. When I bought that it was mid fifties, I think. I had it for three years. My dad wanted me back in the business and I sold out. It was a barbershop for a long time, even after that. The La Paloma Theater, I've got to tell you about that. It was owned by the Keough Circuit in those days. It was owned by a group of people called that. Mrs. Keough had three sons and one of them was named Allen. He's the guy that I went to high school with. That was the town meeting hall, so to speak. They did everything there. They had war bond auctions in there, you name it. During World War II they sold bonds out of that theater. I worked there for at least five years, out of my high school days. I ushered. You had to open up at six o'clock at night. You'd go in there, go down through into the back and there were bats in there. I'll bet they're still there. I can't imagine they've done that much to it. They had a heater there and we'd have to light the heater so we'd get it warmed up in the wintertime. I loved that theater. It was a great theater. I think it's pretty nice, as old as it is. I worked across the street at the Shell Station for Rex Truax. Did you know Mrs. Truax?

Lloyd: Yes.

Len: She was my first grade teacher. It was Pacific View up there, but it wasn't called that then.

Lloyd: It was the Mission school.

Len: He had that many, many years, that was the Shell Station on that corner.

Lloyd: What grade did Mrs. Truax take you to?

Len: It was first grade, that's all I had with her. Then we went up to the Paul Ecke schoolhouse. It was called Central School and it started second grade there.

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Lloyd: Can you tell me what outstanding event that was related to the 101 that meaningful to you?

Len: There were all kinds of bad accidents during the war because you couldn't drive with any decent lights and it was a two-lane highway and it was the only thing going to LA. It was a terrible highway. They put the signal in on E Street and that was the first signal in town. It was there, I don't know how long. We used to go down there in the afternoon on Sunday and just sit and watch the traffic. I mean, they talk about the traffic now being bad. This was two-lane and they would go down to Tijuana on Sunday and then they came back and it was just cars from LA to Tijuana, bumper to bumper. It was bad.

Lloyd: What period of time was that?

Len: I would say it was in the forties. But probably '43 to '45. Actually, they had a stop sign first, and then they put in a signal. I don't think the signal was in then. It was just a stop sign. Encinitas Boulevard was San Marcos Boulevard, that's what it was called. And San Marcos had Encinitas Boulevard. So they switched them back, but that was a dirt road. It was a two-lane dirt road. We used to go out to Slim's Riding Stables out in Olivehain to ride horses and I remember walking from Encinitas to Olivehain to ride horses. There were four of us going out there to get a horse, and we never saw a car. You figure out how long it takes to walk that far. It takes you about an hour at least to walk that far, maybe a little bit more than that, and we never saw a car. I never thought I'd live to see this kind of traffic. I worked with Emilio down there and I tell him a lot of stuff that went on in the past. He likes the past. And I tell him, I lived, as far as I'm concerned, in a wonderful time at that point, as far as Encinitas goes. Now you look at it and it's a little city and it's beautiful, they've done some nice work down there, they've really fixed up the downtown area, but you can't hardly drive through there. You can't park anymore.

Lloyd: No. How old were you when you first rode on the 101 and where were you going, do you remember?

Len: When I first rode on it? Being born here, I was with him my dad, I have no idea. But that was such a long time ago. I'm 75. I don't know that he had a car early on. He didn't have a car that I remember until 1936, maybe. 1936 or 1937, so that's when I can remember driving on the road.

Lloyd: Do you remember where you went?

Len: We used to go to Oceanside all the time. I had an uncle in Oceanside and we would go up there once a week every week. It was like we had to pack a lunch to go up there, it took so long to get there, you know. I was a little guy, I used to sleep going both ways, back and forth because it was that far.

Lloyd: How old were you at that time?

Len: About seven, maybe. I'd sleep in the back. We used to go up there. My brother liked to fish and my uncle liked to fish and we'd go up there with him and we'd go out on the Oceanside pier and fish. But there were some really horrendous accidents on the 101.

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Lloyd: Do you remember any?

Len: I do. I remember one during the war. I guess it was in the later part of the war, maybe '45, or something like that. We heard about this horrible accident when it was foggy. In those days when you had fog, you had no vision. Today you're on the freeway and you have got lights all over the place. In those days you couldn't see through the fog. There was a passing lane. There were three lanes there. There was a car of young military people that were hit by a Greyhound bus. It threw the car almost over the cliff. But there was body parts all over the place, that's how bad it was.

Lloyd: About located where?

Len: It was just about where Cardiff is at, about where the parking area is.

Lloyd: They were really going fast?

Len: Yes, they were really rolling. They were both in the passing lane and the car went under the bus. That's how bad it was and it was a convertible. That one I remember vividly.

Lloyd: No as far as the other buildings, do you remember any of the restaurants or anything that happened at the restaurants?

Len: Nothing that was unusual, other than the fact that I knew who owned them. Ned Munsell ran the little restaurant right next to my dad's store. It was called Munsell's Café. Before that it was Wilson's, going back as far as anybody can remember. Anyway, Ned ran a really good shop in there, probably one of the nicest little restaurants that was ever there. They moved up on Rubenstein where we lived at the time. His wife drowned in the swimming pool, that much I remember. That was in the '60s. It was called Zimm's Café, owned by Harry Zimmerman. Then the Coffee Mill bought it out and they had a couple of guys that ran and they did a wonderful job with that restaurant. They had standing room only. You had a hard time getting in there to eat. The Encinitas Café is still a café, except that it wasn't as big as it is now. They took the other building which was a liquor store.

Lloyd: What about landmarks or unusual structures that you remember?

Len: On Neptune they had a couple of castles, I guess. The old building down by the railroad tracks, right across from the train station was. The Derby house was kind of an unusual structure at that time. All the things I heard about that I wouldn't want to repeat too much of it!

Lloyd: Anything you could tell?

Len: I don't think so. It was a house of ill repute, I think is probably the easiest words to use. That's what I heard it was. By the time I got to it, there were people living in it.

Mrs. Cory: A Lois Kirsch owned that old building right on the corner of San Elijo and Chesterfield.

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Lloyd: The old hotel?

Len: Yes, the old hotel. He bought that in the '50s didn't he?

Mrs. Cory: No, he bought it in 1947.

Lloyd: What was your dad's name?

Mrs. Cory: Kirsch. He bought that and the whole block.

Len: That whole stretch, there was nothing there. Cardiff had absolutely nothing.

Mrs. Cory: He bought that building for \$10,000.00. It was in October of 1946.

Lloyd: Was there a particular person associated with this stretch of the 101 that you remember? Or any actors or actresses that you saw?

Len: A lot of them came in and out of the store. We had a people that would come in during the racing season. There were quite a few of those fellows that came in, but I can't remember half of their names. Long gone and hard to find, some of these guys. I think probably the most notable, but he came to Lomas Santa Fe ...

Mrs. Cory: Wilbur Stone was one and the fellows that were on Gunsmoke.

Len: Yes, Doc.

Mrs. Cory: Every week they'd come in. And Victor Mature.

Len: Yes, Victor Mature came in our store in the downtown Encinitas store. We had a lot of people in and out of there.

Mrs. Cory: Desi Arnez.

Len: That's the guy. Desi Arnez was a customer, he and his wife.

Lloyd: Do you have any favorite memories of downtown?

Len: During San Dieguito football games, we played in the afternoon in those days and they would close the town on game day. They had all the rallies downtown. It was really fun. In those days they'd go down to Moonlight Beach and have a bonfire and then they'd come up and down. Up and down the 101 was a key factor there.

Lloyd: This was always on Fridays?

Len: Yes. The stores would close like at 1:00 or something and then open at 4:00.

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Lloyd: No kidding?

Len: No, they'd go to the games. Mr. Thornton, the flower grower, he had his flower business, his wholesale house, on Second Street and he would come to all of the games and he would serve Cokes and things for all of the players. They were really avid fans. We were good ball clubs, too. We played really good football in those days. That kind of thing is passé. They don't even think about it anymore. But the whole town would close down.

Lloyd: That's great! What about any favorite trips on the 101? You mentioned trips to Oceanside to see your uncle, any other trips?

Mrs. Cory: Go down to Del Mar to see the other uncle!

Len: My father bought a lot of his stuff in Los Angeles and I was little but I would ride with him and we'd go up the 101. If I would go, sometimes he would spend the night up there. If I didn't go, then he'd come back the same day. I went up with him several times and went up to the wholesale businesses with him. It was fun, it was different, but we used the 101 all the time.

Lloyd: How about stories of patrol officers or traffic cops?

Len: There was one guy who lived in Encinitas. I can't think of his name now. He lived on Second Street and he was the Highway Patrol, but his area was our town. He was the nicest man in the world. If he caught one of the kids out with too much in their belly, he would take them home. But I can't remember his name now, to save my soul; it's been so long ago. But, yes, there was one guy and his home station was Encinitas and he lived on Second Street.

Lloyd: Did you ever get a ticket?

Len: I got one in high school. The judge had his court in Solana Beach and I went down to pay the ticket. I was guilty; there was no doubt about it. I went through a stop sign or something. I know what it was--I was going 50 in a 35-mile zone. So I get up to pay it--you waited in court--and as I got up there. He knew me really well and he knew my dad very well and he said, "What are you doing here?" I said, "Well, I did this." And he looked at the paperwork on it and he said, "Well, you're guilty, there's no doubt about that." He said, "I'll tell you what, let's just settle for six dollars." I looked at him kind of funny and I said, "I don't have six dollars." And he said, "Well, what have you got?" I reached in my pocket and I think I had \$1.25 or something like that and he said, "I'll take the \$1.25." Was it Judge McLoflin? That sticks in my mind. Anyway, he was an older judge. He lived in Leucadia, that's what it was and his court was in Solana Beach.

Lloyd: Was there ever a celebrity in a parade that you saw? Were you aware of the flower parades or anything like that?

Len: I don't think they had flower parades. If they did, they may have had some, but they weren't like they are today. I don't know. You're talking about a Grand Marshall?

Lloyd: Yes. How about the President that you saw?

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Len: That was just standing on the street corner. There was no preparation for it or anything. There was a gentleman that was like the Grand Marshall and his name was Pop Allen. Did you ever hear about him?

Lloyd: No.

Len: I'll tell you about him. He came to all of the San Dieguito football games and all of the sporting events, he was always there. He came downtown and he stood on the corner and he waved to people all day long. That's all he did. He was the nicest old man you ever met in your life and he had candy in his pocket and he gave candy to all the kids, candy and gum and whatever. Pop Allen was an original in Encinitas.

Additional comments:

Pop Allen, 1948-1970. Pop would stand on the corner and wave every day at cars and people. Part of the time he would be in his Len's dad's store (Corey's Mercantile). Bill Stanton would take him around in his car. Pop would say he was 100 years old when asked. He loved kids.

Moonlight Beach had ten camping sites during the 50's and 60's. The beach manager would collect the rent. Mr. Hipsley ran concessions during the 1960's.

Some the gas stations were : Danny Vaughn, Chevron, E and 101; Gordon Leinhardt, Union, D and 101; Carl Keith, north from the dip at A Street, he also sold perlins.