

Interview with

Phoebe Borden

October 6, 2004

by Kristi Hawthorne

for the

Highway 101 Association

Interview with Phoebe Borden, October 6, 2004

Interview with Phoebe Borden on October 6, 2004 at her home, 2025 South Ditmar Street, Oceanside CA 92054. Interviewer and transcriber: Kristi Hawthorne.

Kristi: Okay, it's October 6, 2004. I'm Kristi Hawthorne and I'm at Phoebe Borden's house in Oceanside on Ditmar Street. Phoebe, give me your full name and when you were born.

Phoebe: My full name is Phoebe Katherine Irwin Borden. I was born March 7, 1920.

Kristi: What are your parents' names?

Phoebe: That's quite a story, because their names were the same before they were married. Bessie Faye Irwin and Fay Mason Irwin.

Kristi: Where were you born?

Phoebe: Waterloo, Iowa.

Kristi: What year did you come to California?

Phoebe: That's where I grew up, Waterloo, Iowa. Actually I was born in Cedar Rapids.

Kristi: Okay. When did you move to Waterloo?

Phoebe: I don't know when my parents moved to Waterloo. Each one us children, there were five of us, we were born in a different town.

Kristi: Okay. When did you come to California?

Phoebe: In 1937.

Kristi: Do you know why your parents moved out here?

Phoebe: Yes. My dad just got sick and tired of the cold and the rain and the snow. The story goes, I don't believe it, but he said he flipped a coin, California or Florida. Thank the Lord we got to California instead of Florida. Look what's happening now! I really think my brother being in the Navy and stationed in San Diego had something to do with it.

Kristi: So your brother was already out here?

Phoebe: Yes. My other brother decided to stay back in Iowa and go to pharmacy collage in Des Moines, Iowa.

Kristi: Now the brother that was stationed out here, what was his name?

Phoebe: Robert Stanton Irwin.

Kristi: When did he join the Navy?

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Phoebe: It was about a year before we came out.

Kristi: Had he written your parents and asked you guys to come out?

Phoebe: No. Dad just decided to come.

Kristi: What do you remember about the trip from California to Iowa?

Phoebe: Oh boy. We left Waterloo, Iowa January 1st, New Year's Day, the streets of Waterloo were just like ice. I don't know how we got out of there. My father never owned a car in his life, but he had a buddy that bought a brand new car and he told his friend, "If you will drive us to California, then I will pay all of the expenses; the gas and the hotel, the food and all that." That sounded good to him. So my dad had absolutely no promises of work out here, he knew no body in California, it was just like he was blindfolded and here we came! My three sisters in the backseat and mother and dad and the driver in the front seat. My little sister Helen threw up all the way to California, she was so car sick.

Kristi: How did you feel about it? Were you broken hearted to be leaving Iowa?

Phoebe: No, not really. I really felt bad, though when my dad sold off all of our things. We had a great big 11 room house and he sold that for I think it was \$2500.00. I remember going to this place downtown where they auctioned off furniture and we went down and watched all of our furniture go. We didn't bring one piece of furniture with us except mother's little old fashioned sewing machine. That's all we brought with us. We were told that you never even needed a sweater out in California! So we didn't bring any! We found out that that wasn't the picture.

Kristi: How long did it take you to make the trip?

Phoebe: I don't remember exactly. I think it was probably at least four days.

Kristi: Do you remember any of the stops you made along the way?

Phoebe: No, but I remember in Texas we got lost in a snowstorm, and I mean lost. I don't know how we ever found our way out, but Dad and his friend did, so on we went. But I remember coming through desert and seeing the big cactus.

Kristi: So you came to San Diego, what were your first days like?

Phoebe: When we came to San Diego Dad found this old hotel room downtown San Diego. Can you imagine what those old hotels were like? So we lived in this old hotel downtown until Dad – I guess he just took a street car --- and tried to find a house for us to live in. So he found one of those little courts, so we lived there for a little while, with the cockroaches. Then Dad found a darling little granny house in the back of a great big home. It was a darling little house, so we lived there. I lived there when I graduated from high school and went into nurses training. My sister graduated and went into nurses training, my younger sister.

Kristi: Where did you graduate from high school?

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Phoebe: San Diego High School.

Kristi: How did you get to school?

Phoebe: There was either a street car or we walked a lot of the time. It was cheaper.

Kristi: Do you remember what part of San Diego that was?

Phoebe: It was Campus Avenue we lived on. There was a school right across the street from us.

Kristi: So you graduated in 1937 or 1938?

Phoebe: I graduated in 1938. I had to finish my junior year and then it was my senior year. I was dating half of the Navy about that time! My date and I didn't want to go to the prom so we went out to Pacific Beach to the roller skating rink. That's what we did on my senior prom night!

Kristi: Who was "he"?

Phoebe: Bernard Francis Stankowitz, a Sailor.

Kristi: Just think, you could have been Phoebe Stankowitz.

Phoebe: Yes, but he was Catholic, that was one reason. We dated for six months or something like that and he went overseas and was going to be gone for six months so I said, "well ..." I couldn't imagine being tied up for six months! So I said, "Why don't we just see somebody else while you're gone and then come back and see how things work out." Because he wanted to marry me. Then along came Les. I was in Nurses training. And this friend of mine, another student there, she said one Sunday—because I didn't have a date that Sunday—she said, "Why don't you come along with us? I'm going with this fellow called Les Borden and we're going to rent bicycles and just take off for the afternoon." I said, "Oh, that sounds good. I'll go along if that's okay with him." And it was. He never looked at the other girl again! We kept on dating and fell in love. But it was a three-year school in those days. Nowadays of course, it's four years. You couldn't get married and stay in nurses training. So I just had one year and had my cap and cape and all the good things. So anyway, we didn't want to wait two more years. They didn't allow you to be married and stay in school. Nowadays it's different. So I quit Nurses training and we got married.

Kristi: While you were still single or in school, did you ever go any where besides San Diego? Did you ever go down to Tijuana? Did you come up to Del Mar or Oceanside?

Phoebe: We came to Oceanside several times. He wanted me to meet his father. This is where his father lived.

Kristi: Did you drive or take the train?

Phoebe: Drove.

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Kristi: You would have taken the 101 then to Oceanside.

Phoebe: Right.

Kristi: What kind of car was he driving?

Phoebe: It was a Ford. It was a new one and he was so proud of it. We'd drive up and have all the windows down and the air blowing us to pieces. So we'd drive up every so often?

Kristi: Did you stop along the way? Do remember any of the little towns you drove through?

Phoebe: I don't remember that.

Kristi: Your first time to Oceanside was with Les?

Phoebe: Right.

Kristi: He was from Oceanside and he wanted you to meet his father?

Phoebe: Right. He was born and raised here.

Kristi: Where did they live at?

Phoebe: They lived on Fifth Street. Two blocks south of the hospital there on Fifth.

Kristi: What was Oceanside like in the late 1930s?

Phoebe: Well, it was just exactly where we wanted to live, a little bitty town. There were 3000 people. Walk downtown and he knew everybody he came face to face with. I just loved it. His dad was renting this house and this woman he was renting from, she didn't know that we were living there, too. And when she found out! She only wanted him to live there, for some reason. She was just a witch. She really was. And when she found out that Les and I and Gidgie were living there, too, she just would pound on the door. She wanted in. I had remodeled almost the whole thing, painted and papered, just had that house spic and span and when we moved in there, Pop Borden, he had all of his shirts hanging from the chandeliers. He had washed them, they were clean. There was one bathroom but it didn't have a toilet in it. On the back porch was like this tiny, like an outhouse, only it had a toilet in it. Wasn't that strange? It was scary to go out there in the night.

Kristi: What was the address?

Phoebe: 710 Fifth Street. I'm pretty sure that was it.

Kristi: You don't remember the name of the landlady?

Phoebe: Oh no. I had never seen her before.

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Kristi: Did she live next door?

Phoebe: She didn't live in town. At one time, I always had to keep the doors locked and everything after she came to town and wanted us to get out. One time she got in and she just went stomping through the house, just screaming, really, it was scary. I finally got her out and she just walked down the street screaming.

Kristi: Did you move after that then?

Phoebe: We started looking, it was right after the war, right after. There just weren't any places. We looked all over town and this was the only place we could find. It was way too small, only five rooms. Two bedrooms, and we already had a boy and girl. But we could add on. And Pop Borden, we fixed him up a nice bedroom for him. Half of the garage had been made into a room and he lived with us for 15 years. It was just really nice except that it didn't have enough windows. One time he was ill with pneumonia or something and in those days, doctors came to the house, and he came out and he said, "You know, this is just too damp out here. You're going to have to take him in the house." We added that big bedroom.

Kristi: Who was the doctor?

Phoebe: It was Doctor Hal Thatcher. Good old Dr. Thatcher.

Kristi: What year was it that you moved to Oceanside?

Phoebe: 1940.

Kristi: Right before Camp Pendleton.

Phoebe: Yes.

Kristi: Oceanside was still a pretty small town.

Phoebe: Very small.

Kristi: What do you remember about downtown? Do you remember the stores?

Phoebe: Oh yes, Huckabay's and Penney's. I was fascinated with Penneys', how they'd shoot that money up with that thing to the balcony.

Kristi: Do you remember the gas stations?

Phoebe: Well, there was a station right down Fifth Street on the 101, there. Les knew the fellow, I think he'd gone to school with him. His name was Jack something.

Kristi: So at Fifth and Hill there was a service station.

Phoebe: It was across the street, on the west side.

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Kristi: Do you remember where you bought your groceries?

Phoebe: Well, we usually bought our meat down at Martin's Market. I would walk down there with a basket on my arm, holding Gidgie's hand. In those days, it was during war time, and they wanted everybody to bring their own baskets. They couldn't afford sacks or didn't make them or something. Later on, Martin's Market moved up right close to the Methodist Church there and that's where we traded. We wanted to trade at one of the more inexpensive places, like Safeway, which was down on Highway 101 there. But Les' dad said, "No, we should trade with our local people." So we traded with Martin's Market.

Kristi: What did you trade?

Phoebe: I meant buy our groceries. That's where we went even though it cost a lot more.

Kristi: Do you remember the traffic on the 101 or Hill Street? Was it busy?

Phoebe: I don't remember that at all. I don't think it was.

Kristi: When did you start driving?

Phoebe: Les was teaching me to drive. He didn't want to, but he did. This was before I was married, actually. One night, a beautiful night, we started up, we both lived in San Diego then, and I was starting up towards Alpine. We got as far as Alpine and I was driving too fast. We came to a curve in the road. All of sudden, there was another car coming around and I knew I couldn't make it. I put on my brakes and they just screeched and we flipped off of the road and it was a hundred feet down there but we lit upside down on a big manzanita bush about two feet off the road. We finally got out of the car and the radio were still and the lights was still on. It was dark then. We weren't hurt, just dazed, you know. We thought, "What in the world are we going to do now?" And all of sudden, here came a truckload of CCC boys. Do you know what they were?

Kristi: California Conservation Corps?

Phoebe: Yes. So they came, they were coming down the mountain and they were standing up in the back of the truck so they could look over and see our headlights down there. We couldn't believe it, I tell you. They stopped that truck and they jumped over the side and came down to us and they lifted that car on their shoulders and got it up to the road. Because you know, those Fords weren't very big in those days. They picked it up and put it on the road and pulled the fenders out and made sure it would run and then they got back in their truck and told us good-bye. So we were able to—the top was pushed way in—so we both had to scrunch way down and we drove back to Alpine and he called a friend and his friend came and got us. That's when Les proposed. He said, "You've ruined my car, now you've got to marry me!"

Kristi: Did he get the car fixed it?

Phoebe: Oh yes, he got it fixed. One good thing I thought, it was brown and I just never liked the color of it so he painted a really pretty gray. He didn't know that but...

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Kristi: When did you get first driver's license?

Phoebe: Well, I went down to take it one day and he didn't think I was ready, but I did. So I went down there to get my license and I got in the car and we drove around and everything and I did just fine, until we got back to the station and then I ran up over the curb.

Kristi: Where was the DMV station then?

Phoebe: It was a block down—do you know where the 101 Café is?

Kristi: Right.

Phoebe: It was the next block down.

Kristi: On Wisconsin.

Phoebe: Yes. So I ran up over the curb and he said, "I don't think you're quite ready yet." So then I didn't get my license until Les was in the Navy then. He joined the Navy because he was going to be drafted soon and he didn't want to be in the Marine Corps or the Army so he joined the Navy. He had been in two or three or four different schools, they were teaching him how to be a fire patrolman. Do you know what that is?

Kristi: No.

Phoebe: A lot of people think it has to do with putting out fires and stuff and but he's clear down in the bowels of the ship and he sits in front of this board and he fires the big guns. He was sent to Treasure Island and he knew this was his last school and he'd be sent overseas. He just begged me to come with Gidgie. Gidgie was ten months old then. I didn't know have my license or anything, but I went right down and got it and I drove all the way down to San Francisco. Pop Borden went along to show me the way. But he was a terrible driver. He was! He didn't stop at stop signs or anything.

Kristi: Well, how many stop signs were there in Oceanside?

Phoebe: But that's just it, he didn't bother.

Kristi: We probably didn't even have traffic lights on the 101 in Oceanside then.

Phoebe: No, I don't think we did.

Kristi: How was the trip going up there?

Phoebe: I went up naturally on the 101. I drove in the rain and everything. It was something else. We had Gidgie's stuff piled right to the back of—you know, here's the front seat and we had her stuff piled right in the back and then her little mattress on top of that and then she laid on top of that. All the way up there, can you imagine that? And she was so good. All I did was take a few pots and pans and blankets. I didn't know what to take. We did take her little crib.

Kristi: How long were you in Treasure Island?

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Phoebe: Four months. She had her first birthday. Do you know, for the life of me, I can't remember coming back. I don't know how we got back.

Kristi: Did Pop Borden stay up there with you?

Phoebe: No, no.

Kristi: He drove back in the car?

Phoebe: I don't know if he drove back ... no, he didn't take the car back. We needed the car. I don't have any memory of it, I've often wondered.

Kristi: How long was Les gone?

Phoebe: He was gone thirteen months.

Kristi: You were living with Pop Borden?

Phoebe: Yes.

Kristi: After Les came back, when did you buy this house?

Phoebe: I think it was within six months, because we were asked to leave at the other house. About 1945. We were married in 1940 and we lived up town for about five years. He was gone a year and a month.

Kristi: This neighborhood is called South O. What was along this part of the 101?

Phoebe: Nothing. There were five house on this block, that's all there was. Nothing across the street, nothing on either side of us.

Kristi: Were there any businesses along this portion of the 101?

Phoebe: I don't think there were in those days.

Kristi: Going through to Carlsbad, what was the first thing you came to on the 101?

Phoebe: I think it was the boy's academy.

Kristi: Did you ever go to Carlsbad?

Phoebe: I don't remember going.

Kristi: So you just went from here to downtown Oceanside?

Phoebe: Right.

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Kristi: Were you walking or driving?

Phoebe: I was always driving.

Kristi: How did Les get to work then?

Phoebe: He had his own car.

Kristi: Wow, a two-car family back then? How would all the kids get to school?

Phoebe: All of them went to South Oceanside School. It was new then.

Kristi: It was already built?

Phoebe: Yes. Gidgie was the first one in there and our four boys went there. They just walked. When Mark graduated I told them, "I want you to know this is the last Borden you're going to have to put up with in this school!" Then Tim and Jackie moved here and their three children went there.

Kristi: Along this part of the 101 in South Oceanside, was there a gas station down here? Or was there a market?

Phoebe: I can't remember. We always just drove into the downtown. Vista Way was just a little dirt road. Of course, I-5 wasn't there. But pretty soon we were really boxed in.

Kristi: Do you remember any of the policemen?

Phoebe: Just the one, but I can't remember—Harold Davis, he lived right over here. We knew them and their daughters.

Kristi: What about traffic accidents?

Phoebe: Well, just one, but it wasn't bad at all. We ran into a school teacher. It was early in the morning and Les and I were driving, and it was so foggy we couldn't see and we ran into her at an intersection, but nobody was hurt.

Kristi: Was that on the 101?

Phoebe: No, sorry!

Kristi: So no one was hurt.

Phoebe: She was very nice about it.

Kristi: What about your sons, did Les teach them to drive or did they go to driving school?

Phoebe: No, I don't think they had them in those days.

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Kristi: Was the DMV still down on Wisconsin?

Phoebe: I think it was still downtown.

Kristi: When the new 101, or the I-5, what impact did it have on your neighborhood?

Phoebe: You mean that was the 101?

Kristi: Yes. It was the 101 until, I think it was 1968, and then changed it to Interstate Five.

Phoebe: I didn't remember that.

Kristi: Do you remember how that impacted the neighborhood?

Phoebe: I know down here we were just horrified. We didn't want that freeway there.

Kristi: Well, the freeway was right here.

Phoebe: I know, but that wasn't a freeway.

Kristi: But you were still getting all of the traffic?

Phoebe: But it wasn't that much. Everything was growing. Oceanside was growing from Camp Pendleton and the neighborhoods were all growing and so it made a lot more traffic.

Kristi: You didn't think the traffic on the old 101 was bad?

Phoebe: No. Never did. Maybe during the races.

Kristi: Did anyone protest the new 101?

Phoebe: Not that I know of.

Kristi: Did you notice a change then in the traffic of the 101?

Phoebe: Oh yes, it wasn't near as bad. Not that it was terribly bad before, but ...

Kristi: Do you remember driving the new freeway?

Phoebe: No.

Kristi: What was the legal age for driving when your boys started driving?

Phoebe: It was sixteen.

Kristi: Did your boys have any accidents?

Phoebe: No.

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Kristi: Boy, weren't you lucky!

Phoebe: No, nothing to speak of. I'll never forget, Johnny had been out and been gone and kids come home, you know and we were talking and they tell you things that you never knew when they were growing up. He says, "Mom, I bet you didn't know that your little car ... I bet you didn't know that thing would go 110 on the freeway, did you, Mom!" Oh I was horrified! I didn't think he'd do that in the first place! Second place, I didn't think my car would do that.

Kristi: What kind of car did you have?

Phoebe: I don't remember. In our entire life we bought two new cars.

Kristi: Did you buy them here at a local dealer in Oceanside?

Phoebe: I don't remember that, it was here or in San Diego. Pop Borden had a good old Dodge, I remember that. That's the one he used to drive to work every morning.

Kristi: Did he know he wasn't a good driver?

Phoebe: I don't know. He just drove slowly and took his time and didn't stop at stop signs, stuff like that. He never had an accident.

Kristi: Was Les a good driver?

Phoebe: Yes, he drove that telephone company truck, I forget how many miles, it was in the millions of miles, in his career as a telephone man. They told him how many miles he drove and he never had an accident. One time, right here at this intersection, somebody ran into him but he never had an accident.

Kristi: Where did he go to do his job?

Phoebe: He went all the way to Palomar Mountain. He was the best troubleshooter in the county. That's what they told him at his retirement dinner. That was an event. If they couldn't find the trouble, they would come to him and he always found it for them.

Kristi: Where did your kids go to junior high?

Phoebe: Lincoln Junior High.

Kristi: How did they get to high school?

Phoebe: I think they went on the bus. Andy went to El Camino. He was the first one to go to El Camino. It was new then.

Kristi: Do you remember going to the restaurants like the Acapulco?

Phoebe: We didn't eat out. Les and I and Del and Myrtle, they were our best friends, we'd go

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down to San Diego or on the way to Palomar we'd stop at a restaurant. I don't think we ate out in Oceanside, I don't remember it anyways. Oh yes, we ate at the Twin Inns in Carlsbad a couple of times.

Kristi: Did you ever work outside the home?

Phoebe: Well, once. I worked for six months and that was all, my entire life and that was at the Chocolate Factory right there in Carlsbad. Do you know where that was?

Kristi: No.

Phoebe: You don't? It was on Elm Street close to the Twin Inns. I don't know how anybody could not know it was there! You know the big restaurant that used to have the rooster in front of it, the Twin Inns? It was across the street that way, almost directly across the street there's this interesting looking building, very interesting building. I think it's about the second building from the corner. It was the Chocolate Factory for years and years. It was called Runzos ... just Runzos.

Kristi: Did you make the candy or sell the candy?

Phoebe: No, I made it. There was a man and he and his wife owned it. She sold the candy in the front of the store.

Kristi: What were their names?

Phoebe: Gene and Frank Runzo. This friend of mine, who worked down there, she knew I had taken a cake decorating class and could do things, you know, work on Easter eggs and all that. So she kept pestering me and pestering me so I went down there and he hired me. He wasn't a nice man.

Kristi: Was his wife nice?

Phoebe: Yes. I really loved working down there, when I could keep away from him.

Kristi: What was the time frame?

Phoebe: In the 1970s. They mailed candy all over the United States. In six months I gained five pounds. I couldn't touch chocolate in those days. That was the only time I ever worked and that was only for six months. I ate the candy before it was chocolate coated.