

Interview with

Robert Hernandez

January 17, 2005

by Nancy Gottfredson

for the

Highway 101 Association

Interview with Robert Hernandez, January 17, 2005

**Interview of Robert Hernandez, Solana Beach, California, on January 17, 2005.
Interviewer: Nancy Gottfredson. Transcribed by Kristi Hawthorne**

Nancy: My name is Nancy Gottfredson. I am interviewing Robert Hernandez. Robert, could you please state your full name and current address?

Robert: My name is Robert G. Hernandez. My address is 825 Genevieve Street, Solana Beach, California, 92075.

Nancy: When and where you born?

Robert: I was born June 6, 1927. I was born at the San Diego County Hospital.

Nancy: What were your parents' names?

Robert: My mother's name was Juana, which is Jennie. My dad's name was Santos, which is saints, Hernandez.

Nancy: How did you or your family come to Southern California?

Robert: Dad was looking for work with the Japanese farmers, which was there south of Solana Beach. I was really, really young, but I can remember some of it because my dad would leave early and my mom would feed us and then we would walk with her to where my dad was working. She would go in and help harvest the vegetables that were growing there. That was between Cliff, which is now Solana Street circle, so it was south of Solana Beach, south of Cliff Street, all the Japanese farmers were there.

Nancy: Where did your family come from?

Robert: My mother was born in Norwalk, California and my dad was born in Beaumont, California.

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

Robert: Well, I don't remember because I was only six days when I got to Solana Beach. My mother had to stay in the hospital a week before they would release her. I believe about 1927. In 1933 or 1934 when they were at Solana Beach.

Nancy: Can you tell me what outstanding event occurred that was meaningful to you related to US Highway 101?

Robert: No. I don't remember too much because I was awfully young at that time. I remember the traffic and I remember the railroad. I remember the trains going by, because the trains went by right behind our backyard. I can remember that, but famous things, I don't remember none of that.

Nancy: How old were you when you first rode the 101 and where were you going?

Interview with Robert Hernandez, January 17, 2005

Robert: I don't remember that either, but I remember the times that my dad would take us to Cardiff and we'd go up on Manchester or Birmingham, that was our joy things on weekends. He'd take us up there and then he'd bring us down the hill and we'd get the ticklies in our stomachs when we were kids. I remember being on the 101 but I didn't know what it was, the cars went by. Another thing, I don't remember but I was only six days old, but there was the old Torrey Pines Road, not the one now, but the old one. I know I was on that when I was six days old.

Nancy: Yes, the old grade. Do you remember any of the buildings or businesses such as restaurants?

Robert: Okay, I remember the bank and I remember the post office. I remember Jack's Gas station. I can remember the Greyhound bus depot was right next to Jack's Gas Station. The bus depot was only a little building. I remember the Standard Gas Station there in the corner. I think it was a Ford Agency at that time.

Nancy: That was on Lomas Santa Fe.

Robert: Lomas Santa Fe now, don't know what it was called then. It was right there where the little coffee thing is now. Right on that corner there, that corner on the plaza. I remember the grocery store, Conner's Grocery Store. I don't know if it was Conner's when I was a little kid, but I know there was Conner's Grocery Store. I remember Merfin's Gas Station. I remember the train station. I remember how they used to drop the bags of mail and how they would pick it up. They had a post and they would hang it on there and when the train went by they would hook it up and get the mail, the other one would drop on the ground, they would just dump it over.

Nancy: What landmarks or unusual structures come to mind?

Robert: The Bank of America.

Nancy: Do you remember what year that building was built?

Robert: No, it was already built when I was growing up.

Nancy: There were mostly flower fields around the south end of the bluffs.

Robert: The flowers? Yes, on the west side, where the post office is now, all of that was flowers. I don't remember the name of the flowers, but I know what they looked like. The rest was avocado groves, east of the railroad tracks was a lot of avocados and oranges, but mostly avocados, all the way up to Nardo.

Nancy: Was there a particular person associated with that stretch of the road?

Robert: No, I don't remember.

Nancy: Do you have a favorite memory or a favorite trip or destination?

Interview with Robert Hernandez, January 17, 2005

Robert: I guess it would be the one to Cardiff.

Nancy: The one to Cardiff when you were young?

Robert: Yes.

Nancy: Do you remember any bad accidents that happened?

Robert: No, I don't remember any of that.

Nancy: Someone mention a train wreck at Del Mar, do you remember that?

Robert: No.

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

Robert: Well, you know when I was young, I don't remember, but as I was growing I knew, what they were supposed to do is take care of us. We didn't have too much of that. They really didn't care for us. When I was thirteen years old and I got beat by the sheriff, but I don't want to mention any names. A little later the son of that particular sheriff knew that I was talking about his father and he invited me and we had lunch at Tony's Jacal and he said, "Bobby," he called me Bobby. He was an educator at San Dieguito and he knew at the time that when this happened my dad knew someone up here and he knew that the politicians were not working together with the community. They were working among themselves. So my dad went over to him and told him what happened. Well, he knew of this particular sheriff, he was always trying to get someone to straighten him out or get him out. He told my dad that if he wanted him to help he was going to be harassed and if anything we were going to be in trouble because of being Mexican. My dad kept asking me, "How do you feel? How do you feel?" Well, little by little I was feeling better. I have a bone here, sticking out, this is where he hit me. My dad decided to just drop it because it was not going to be any good. We had already moved from Solana Beach to here, Eden Gardens.

Nancy: Those things happen. Well, do you remember the speed limit through town?

Robert: No.

Nancy: Did you ever get a ticket?

Robert: No.

Nancy: Was there ever a celebrity in a parade route or a US President?

Robert: No, I don't remember.

Nancy: Do you remember the first traffic light that was installed?

Interview with Robert Hernandez, January 17, 2005

Robert: Well, I don't remember that either.

Nancy: You told us about some of the service stations along the route, do you remember anything else?

Robert: I remember Mr. Marquez, he used to go fishing off Solana Beach. There was nothing there at that time. There was nothing there but there were streets and sidewalks already, I remember that. There was one street, I don't know which one it is and there was a stairway. A stairway going down to the beach and that's where Mr. Marquez would go. From there he'd go out fishing and then he'd come to that spot. He used to tell my dad when he'd be in and my dad used to take me there to go get fish. He would give my dad fish. Mr. Marquez was one of the oldest families in Del Mar, there was Magana, Arballo, Martinez and Rojas. Those were the oldest Mexican families in Del Mar.

Nancy: You said you had some stories to tell. Do you want to tell some stories?

Robert: When I was six years old we lived in Solana Beach and that's when you go to school and you get into the kindergarten. This area here is where we used to play softball. My garage is at home plate. This was our school grounds, right here. To us, we didn't know the reason for us to come to school here, because we lived across the street from the school but we couldn't go there.

Nancy: Oh, that's when it was Central School?

Robert: Yes, it's still there. We lived across the street. To us, at the time, it was fun to get on the bus because the bus would come pick us up. There were like eight of us; I remember the families. It was fun for us to get on the bus and Mom would pack a lunch for me. My grandma used to live right next door here and I'd go over there and eat my lunch. It was fun to carry a lunch. We didn't know why. Years later we knew what the reason was. But that doesn't exist anymore and probably people don't like it, but it doesn't exist anymore. I'm really proud of my kids being able to get an education. All three of them graduated, which I didn't graduate. I left in the 9th grade in the first quarter. We had to have a permit to go to work, so they would release us from school, that was in San Dieguito. Half a day we'd go to work and pick avocados mostly in Rancho Santa Fe. Then it got to a point where I had money in my pocket so I decided to just forget going to school and go to work. I'd give it to my mom and whatever. But that's the reason why I didn't finish school. I went into the service and I learned how to take care of myself and how to do a lot of things this is probably why I am able to help my wife so much is because I know little things you have to do when mom is not there. My dad never taught us to hate anybody. Always treat people like you want to be treated. My dad worked. He worked so hard. There were nine of us. There were ten of us but then one of them died. I think he was number three out of ten.

Nancy: How about Eden Gardens, have you seen changes in that?

Robert: Yes, there's been a lot of changes here, yes, absolutely. We knew everybody. Everybody knew each other. There was a time we didn't need to lock our doors. We were all friends and a lot of relatives. I have a lot of cousins here. But then things change. Little by little

things were changing. Some for the worse when you have people come from the outside and start doing things in the community that are not supposed to be done and then the community gets blamed for it. This happened many, many times. I remember the dirt streets. I remember when it rained right out here you couldn't walk across and sometimes the car would get stuck in the middle. When I was 13 years old, maybe 12, we used to live on Stevens, and the Renterias—do you remember Terri Renteria? Terri was a little girl then. They lived on the other side of the academy here and I used to go in the mornings and walk sometimes in the wintertime I'd go barefooted because I'd have to cross the creek to get over to their house to get the milk. We'd go get milk. I remember Terri's mom, she would give me a glass a milk and it was still warm. Every morning I would drink the glass of milk she would give me, I remember that.

Nancy: They had a cow?

Robert: They had a cow, yes, yes. I remember the big ditch coming in here where the water used to run through here. Lima beans, all these fields were lima beans, all that over there on the other side of Stevens where all the storage places are now, those were lima beans fields. I remember after the trashing after they picked up the beans, we'd go over there to what was left and we'd go over there and spread them out to find the beans that didn't get in the sacks and I would bring them home. That would help with getting some food. I remember my school days when I was coming to my school in Eden Gardens. I didn't realize at the time like kindergarten, first, second, third and even fourth grade what was going on, but I remember that we used to play with clay. That's what they were teaching us to do, was making animals with clay. Then when I got to fifth grade they were teaching me, not only myself but others, how to make hard boiled eggs to make deviled egg sandwiches. That's what we were doing, because the teachers, they didn't want us to learn. We realized later on they didn't want us to learn. I had a teacher, her name was Mrs. Gonzales. She wasn't Mexican but she was probably married to a Mexican. She tried to help us a lot. Not only me, but a lot. But she was going to be transferred because she was working too hard to help us. The other teachers they didn't care. It got to when she was going to be transferred and she went to La Jolla. This was when I was in the sixth grade. She came to my mother and asked my mother if there was anyway I could go to seventh grade in La Jolla because there was potential to learn something. There were four of us. One was Julian Castro and there were two girls, Erlindo Muro and Virginia Villa, which were my cousins, and myself. They used to always check our nails to see if we were clean and we always had our fingernails clean. Anyway, she wanted me to go to La Jolla to continue school in the seventh grade. Well, my aunt lived in La Jolla and this is where I stayed and I went over there. Then she was my teacher in the seventh grade. So I stayed with my aunt from Monday morning till Friday night and my dad would pick me up after work and bring me home for the weekend and he'd take me back Monday morning. That's the other thing that I remember, that they didn't really care whether we learned anything or not.

Then some of the kids were barefooted. I used to go barefooted myself because my dad couldn't afford any shoes. I'll never forget, I had my cousin on my back, like piggy-back and I went into some hot ashes and I burned my feet. The neighbor that my mom had at the time she had some remedies that the old Indians used to have. They got a shoebox and we would pour in raw eggs and I remember sticking my feet in raw eggs so it would cure the burns.

But going back to the hardboiled eggs, I learned how to make deviled egg sandwiches really,

Interview with Robert Hernandez, January 17, 2005

really well. We had a kerosene heater. We didn't have a stove or nothing. We used to boil the eggs on the kerosene heater.

Back to the time that the sheriff beat me; the reason for that was my cousin and I used to go to Pancho's, the grocery store on the corner. I used to go and sweep the pool hall and they would give me a quarter. That's what I would get before I went to school. So in the afternoon when we got out of school, my cousin Richard and I, who lived on the next street, we'd go down to Pancho's and I spend my quarter there. We'd get a nickel ice cream bar and on the little stick, if it said "free" you'd get a free one. So we would do that. I'd go in there with him and I'd buy the ice cream. Well, this time we were sitting there and this was almost every day. And there was a guy by the name of Ray Wilhite that used to come to the pool hall and drink beer. He used to farm over here on Glenchrest. In later years he had a lawnmower shop and he repaired lawnmowers, but at the time he was farming up there. Well, that particular day, I remember his car, it was a 1935 Ford two-door sedan, and he had a little dog and you couldn't get close to that car because the dog wanted to eat you up. Well, anyhow, he walked out of the there and the story that I am telling you is because I knew later, I didn't know at the time what was going on--He went to his car and apparently he was missing a portable radio. So he went back in and told Pancho to call the cops that they had stolen his radio. Well, we're sitting there and the cop, he was the only cop in the area, and he wanted to know where that radio was and we didn't what he was talking about. We said, "What radio?" and he said, "The radio that you just took from that car." I didn't think about telling him about the dog because we were surprised that he was blaming us for a radio. That's when he put us in his car and took us down away from the store and took my cousin Dick and threw him on top of the hood and got me and stuck the billy club in my stomach because he wanted to know where that radio was. Well, we didn't know anything about a radio. So then we walked back, and I'm hurting, I'm hurting. The next day we came to school and I'm hurting. We still went over there. I didn't go to sweep the place that time because I was hurting. But we went for the ice cream. Ray Wilhite, he used to be there all the time, and he saw us there and he came over there and he said, "I apologize, I found my radio at home." A week or so later I'm walking in front of the Bluebird and here comes the cop. He was the only cop between Encinitas, Cardiff and Del Mar. I asked him, "Did you ever get a chance to find that radio?" And he said, "Don't get smart with me you dirty [expletive] Mexican." But I didn't say anything more but he was coming up there to see me. Later on, as years went by, I was told that he was coming for the take under the table. There used to be gambling. I have a picture of where they used to gamble, the pool hall. They had a poker table. He knew about it and there was a buzzer that he had when they showed up and that gave them time to clean up and then he could walk in. I didn't know this until not very long ago, until Mr. Rincon told me that he would ask his dad if he could use the phone and the phone was in the back in a little store room, well, that's where he went to get his money and then he would leave. All these little things were going on.

Nancy: How do you spell Wilhite?

Robert: I don't know. But in later years he was in Cardiff and he had a lawnmower shop and he used to work on lawnmowers. He remembered and he felt bad about it, but nevertheless it just happened. That was when I was 12 or 13 years old.

Nancy: This is a very important road.

Interview with Robert Hernandez, January 17, 2005

Robert: Yes, yes it was. I remember in Cardiff, before you get to Solana Beach, it used to go down to the cliff there and then come back. It didn't go straight like it is now. It went in like where the surfers are, where they go now. Okay, there was a street and it came around and there was some little cabins there.

Nancy: I remember the cabins, I've got a picture of them.

Robert: I remember that.

Interview with Robert Hernandez, January 17, 2005