

Interview with Louise Getze Curley
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Interviewers: Susan Gutierrez and Ann L'Heureux (Int:)
Transcriber: Dee Morning

Int: When did you move to Carlsbad?

Curley: In November of 1926. I was eleven years old, we came out in a car, a Chevy. (It was) not very wide, three kids in the back seat, mother and daddy and the little one in the front.

Int: Where did you come from and why?

Curley: From a little town in eastern Ohio called Andover. It had white churches, a square in the middle and the farmers came in every Saturday to tie up their horses around the square and do their shopping. And why did we come here, I guess because my father was not happy in Pennsylvania so then we went to Ohio. He got terrible pneumonia one year and we came to California when I was about seven. We stayed in Riverside for about ten months and then went back (to Ohio). When we were in Riverside we came down to Carlsbad and bought a piece of property up where the high school is now. That's where we went on the day we arrived (the second time). We had built a garage – in those days people built a garage, lived in the garage and then built the house.

Int: What did your father do?

Curley: He was a physician, the first doctor in Carlsbad.

Int: What is your first memory of Carlsbad?

Curley: That first winter when we came down to buy property we went to a man's avocado orchard and he picked an avocado. It was the first time I'd ever eaten one. They called them alligator pears; they didn't have them in Ohio. One of my first memories was going to that garage and mother realized that we could not possible stay there – even though others in Carlsbad were doing it. So we rented a little three-room house for one month, then we went to a larger house and then built (our own). On the corner of Jefferson and Grand. It's white with green trim. At that time it was called Fourth and Grand and none of those streets were paved. I think only State Street was paved. When we first came that was where the highway was, right through town and then turned sharp right up by Twin Inns, then left to down about where Carlsbad Boulevard is now.

Int: What did Carlsbad look like at the time?

Curley: Through the eyes of a child, my brother and I were absolutely ecstatic about Carlsbad. We had never seen the ocean before (well, we had seen the Atlantic as we had

been to Coney Island) but the Pacific in November, it was really something to see. We'd never seen eucalyptus trees and the whole town smelled of eucalyptus. In fact, all our senses were being assaulted. The flowers – we'd never seen bottlebrush before, it didn't look like it does now, it was a pale yellowy pink, a native from Mexico. And the fields between Carlsbad and Oceanside were filled with flowers. There were sweet smelling freesias, field after field, it smelled so wonderful in the spring. The town was full of eucalyptus; we have a few left, big ones. But all up and down Grand Avenue and along Elm, everywhere you went, eucalyptus. Of course there were the avocados. We were called "The Home of the Avocado" then. It's kind of funny because they found out later that Carlsbad is not right for avocado trees, they like rocky soil with better drainage than we could provide.

Int: Did you ever go to the Avocado Festivals?

Curley: All the time! That was wonderful. Incidentally, my brother and I went to everything, we didn't miss a trick, we were on a high! The Avocado Days wasn't so great when I look at it now. It wasn't the state fair for instance. It was pretty dim. But they had avocado ice cream, which was just wonderful, and they had pony rides, something like that. Mostly I can remember a big tent. Carlsbad only had 1500 (persons) and you knew everyone in town and everyone was there. I suppose they came from Escondido too. Escondido had Grape Day. Oceanside had Fourth of July celebration. They brought two destroyers up from San Diego which was a big navy town. They had those destroyers at the end of the pier and the sailors would come. My father would say, "Don't you speak to those sailors". We were rolling our eyes at them because they were such cute boys. Oh and we had a Miss Carlsbad. That's when we chose Miss Carlsbad. We were great on Bathing Beauty Contests in those days. Wool bathing suits – clear up to here (gestures across chest) – weren't like my mother's kind. They were pretty uncomfortable after sitting on the beach all day which was our favorite summer occupation, very itchy and full of sand.

Int: Did you go in the water?

Curley: Oh, heavens yes. We went at 9 o'clock in the morning as soon as the chores were done and stay until four or five o'clock. Everyone would take their lunch. We'd lie around in circles with our heads to the middle. Your own little group would be in that one circle and there'd be another over there. We swam constantly and our fingers were like washboards.

Int: Where did you find your friends?

Curley: At school. The first little house we lived in was right across from Pine School. My brother, coming from Ohio wore knickers, brown stockings and high top shoes, and he was so humiliated because all the boys were running around in jeans. This was jean country. It was the thing for the boys to put a long red handkerchief in their hip pocket

and have it trailing along behind – this was very chic. My brother had a jacket, shirt and tie too. That lasted one day, daddy had to take him to Oceanside at noon and buy jeans.

Int: Did you have any trouble fitting in with social customs?

Curley: Not at all. At recess all the kids did the Virginia reel. We jumped right in. In fact two new kids in such a small town, well, we were very popular for a while.

Int: Were the other kids born here?

Curley: I don't really know. This was an English Colony at one time. We had several English families. We had lots of Mexican kids and I had never seen any Latinos before. I thought they were lovely, lovely, sweet people. Where I'm living now is the Barrio. It was fields (before). The Mexican youngsters stuck together and as they got older they included themselves with us. Well, they weren't being pushed out so much as some of them didn't speak English. It's a terrible commentary on our teachers that they should have been making us learn Spanish because here we were.

Int: Did you have parties at your house?

Curley: After a few years we got acquainted with the Ramsay's, Fred and his wife. On the Ramsay's big back porch we had a dancing class. Our parents got together and hired a dancing teacher so every Friday we had a party. We had an old phonograph, wind up, all the popular records. There were maybe 20 boys and girls. So that was our social life, that and going to church.

Int: What were the popular dances?

Curley: The Fox Trot. Anyway that was our dancing – at school the Virginia reel and Friday lessons. A party every week, wasn't that wonderful? The parents didn't go, just the kids.

Int: Did you drive or need a driver's license?

Curley: Oh, I don't know. I didn't learn to drive till I was thirty. My father's idea of driving lessons was to sit in the back seat and scream in my ear, "stop!" I'd get so rattled. When I finally knocked the garage off its foundation, he told me I had to stop. His livelihood depended on his car and he wasn't going to have a darn kid wreck it. What they really thought was that no woman in the family knew how to drive so what does she have to learn for anyhow? But I learned later. I'm trying to think of some of the other things that made such an impression on us when we came. I remember they used to have big parties in the packing sheds down by the railroad track where Bauer Lumber is. These were big sheds where they used to ship avocados. They had potluck dinners, everybody came. I don't know who was (in charge), maybe Chamber of Commerce. And

that's another thing – new food – I never had tasted tamale pie and I was entranced. There was no exotic food in Ohio.

Int: Were fresh fruit and vegetables a novelty?

Curley: Well, having them all year round was. When we came in November our garage on the hill was not suitable for us because my father had rented it to a farmer who was doing dry farming. He was raising zucchini. We had no irrigation then. Dry farming is when you take advantage of the autumn and winter rains and in the spring you have your crop. Mother didn't have to do canning like she had to in the East. Another thing she didn't have to do was spring and autumn house cleaning.

Phone rings, Curley answers it and returns.

Curley: That was my beau, he calls me every Wednesday. He was George's friend when they were in high school. He used to work at the Blade (newspaper).

Int: Tell us his name.

Curley: Lionel Van Buren. We were in a play together and he was my beau in high school.

Int: Why didn't your mom have to do cleaning?

Curley: I don't know, nobody did it. Besides it didn't get so dirty.

Int: They were heating with coal there (back East), did you have heat here?

Curley: No we didn't. In fact when we built that house we didn't put a furnace in it because we thought, gee, we're in California, we don't need a furnace, it's a tropical island. But we had moss growing in our shoes that first winter so daddy put in a furnace. We certainly had to learn.

Int: What were some of the games you played?

Curley: You mean games in school? I guess we did the regular stuff like, well the only thing I can remember was the Virginia reel. Oh, later on we did a lot of kick ball or something like rugby. And any thing goes – the nice girls stayed out and stayed clean but I was right in there pitching. We also discovered the forest. There was a big hill on that corner as you go around Marron Road. We wore everything off it as we rode right down it on cardboard cartons. We had a wonderful time. It was awfully messy but we spent a lot of time in the forest. George and I thought we were in Paradise.

Int: Do you remember the Twin Inns?

Curley: The other twin was there when we came but they tore that down. Mr. & Mrs. Kentner were friends and patients. Toots (Katherine) was my good friend. We used to go there after school and Mr. Kentner would make us one of those scooped out loaves of bread with chicken inside of it. Later on when I was in high school they built the Carlsbad Hotel, which is now being fixed up. That became a meeting place for Chamber of Commerce and things like that. Much later on when we were all grown up we used to all go there and dance during the war. My sister had her wedding reception there, it was a very nice place. All the fields here were gladiola and string beans.

Int: How did the depression affect Carlsbad?

Curley: No body had any money down here. My father instead of being paid got lots of avocados, fruit and vegetables. Every body bartered. We were better off than others because we had something but some people just didn't have any cash flow at all. Anyway we were at the age where we would have a good time no matter what.

Int: Did they have soup kitchens here?

Curley: I don't know but my mother was constantly feeding people. Men would come by and ask for work. She'd give them something to do and then give them a meal. Mexico was in worse shape than we were, they were very poor and they would get here any way they could. One day my father came home and told my mother he needed soup. He was delivering a baby in a little shack and there were children there that were hungry. He had the kids poking strips of old sheet between the floorboards to keep the wind out. He stirred the soup and delivered the baby. Everybody shared. We didn't have very many clothes – but we always had the movies. We went once a week, frequently as a family. They had talent nights, gave away dishes, held drawings, and there was singing.

Int: Were there sidewalks downtown?

Curley: Not when we first came, but later, yes, they paved them.

Int: Where did your mother go to shop for groceries?

Curley: There were several little grocery stores, Mr. Nash had one. There were two on State Street. When we wanted to get a lot of supplies we'd go to San Diego. We went to San Diego a lot, that was one of our family recreations. We'd go to a movie and go to the Pullman Cafeteria for lunch. We drove. Of course, we could go to Oceanside on the train. The old train lumbered up and down and stopped at every little place along the way. My mother and her friends would take the train to Oceanside and back.

Int: Where did you go to high school and how did you get there?

Curley: Oh, they had buses. In fact, Oceanside-Carlsbad Union High School took in as

far down as Del Mar. (We had) Oceanside, Encinitas, Leucadia, Del Mar and Vista. We had about 500 students and you knew everybody.

Int: You mentioned that you worked for the newspaper.

Curley: George did, for the Blade. I helped Mrs. Mitchell out whenever I could. I wrote articles. As I told you, I was a librarian. We didn't have a library, we had one bookcase down in the Journal office. I had a card index and kept track of the books. It was very popular, especially with the kids. In retrospect, I think it was very lovely of her (Mrs. Mitchell) to do that, especially for the kids.

Int: Did your family bring all their things with them from the East Coast?

Curley: Well yeah, I remember that (points) when I was a little kid. Mother brought everything. Then she picked up a lot of things (here) at sales. This chair (pats arm of chair she is sitting on), tables, that chair (came with us). We had a lot of stuff we brought with us. We brought everything. We had a big house in Andover, then we came to a little house, three bedrooms and one bath. It was difficult. But we were outdoors all the time. Back East for four of five months out of the year we didn't spend much time outside. The whole time we were outside (here). I wonder sometimes if that isn't why the kids get so big in California.

Int: Was church important with your family?

Curley: Not particularly. Mother and Daddy had a relaxed attitude. They always sent us to Sunday school but they didn't care which church we went to. I can still remember getting ready for Sunday school (back East) in an organdy dress. All four of us would go to Sunday school, sometimes not to the same church. When we came out here one of the first things we did, some of the kids that lived nearby took us to the Union Sunday School. We belonged to Christian Endeavor; there were lots of activities, parties, picnics, things like that. Another thing, one of the things that entranced us so were the field trips that classes would go on, frequently to the zoo in San Diego and the art galleries in Balboa Park. Maybe two classes would go on a bus, you'd take your lunch, spend the whole day and come back in the late afternoon. We didn't have anything like that in Ohio or Pennsylvania. And the California schools provided books, paper, pencils, and things like that. In Ohio the students had to buy books every year from the first grade on. Ohio did not provide. So this is another thing we thought was wonderful besides the glamorous beach and the forest. I'm jumping around, but speaking about the Twin Inns, the Hollywood crowd would stop by. By this time Agua Caliente was open and they had gambling and the horse races. They would stop on their way down or up. It was a very, very busy place. You did see famous people. My brothers both worked there as bus boys.

Int: What about prohibition?

Curley: We were absolutely unaware of it, well we knew it was going on but nobody drank anything anyway. I remember one time I had a sore throat and I had to drink whiskey and water and sugar and I refused it. So Mother had to persuade me to drink whiskey. Oh that's another thing, speaking of churches, they had a great big camp meeting every year down by where the Academy is now. There was a big white building, it might still be there, that was the main dining room. There were long rows of tents, lots of people would come down from Los Angeles I guess and spend two or three weeks on the beach. We would go. One of our Sunday school teachers had a tent. It was a real revival meeting too you know. Her husband was "saved" every year and always threw away his canes (laughs) – every single year! Mr. – he shall remain nameless – would get worked up (waves her fists in the air and laughs heartily)

Int: Did all four of you go?

Curley: George and I did but Eleanor and Jim were post war babies so they were four and one half years younger than I so we just couldn't be bothered with them. I'm sure they were with their own crowd.

Int: What did you do when you finished high school?

Curley: I went to UCLA for one year, the next year I went to Stanford, stayed there for two years and then got married. My husband was starting his internship and I went with him.

Int: Did most of your friends go to college?

Curley: Yes, most of the friends that I went around with did. It was always amazing to me to come home and see some of my high school classmates still here, married, raising a family. I couldn't wait to get out and see the rest of the world. If it hadn't been for my mother and her determination we wouldn't have gotten educated because it was right in the middle of the depression and daddy had \$50 in the bank. So mother took us all up to West Los Angeles, rented a little house and we all went. Mother kept house and George and I went to UCLA and the little kids went to school. We came home on weekends. Daddy stayed home and kept the office running – pretty lonesome, but that's how we got going. Second semester the little kids were pretty unhappy up there so mother came home. George and I got a cottage in West Los Angeles in a little court.

Int: Your husband was a doctor?

Curley: Yes. We went to University of Pennsylvania for graduate work in psychiatry and neurology. I worked downtown at Wanamaker's. I was a model and of course I had to sell too. They didn't have any California girls and I was a corn fed country girl with curly blond hair. I didn't wear any makeup except lipstick, always had a tan. That's how we got through the University of Pennsylvania. Then we went up to Hartford, Connecticut and Ray had a residency in psychiatry. We came back to California and Ray went into

practice in Sacramento. He was the first psychiatrist in Sacramento and that was hard, boy! Everybody was very suspicious of psychiatry in those days. That was just before the war.

Int: When did you come back to Carlsbad?

Curley. Twenty years later I brought the children down to Pasadena and went back to school. I came back to Carlsbad to live in 1973. I had a little house up on Jefferson Street. I didn't come back until my kids were all grown.

Int: Did Carlsbad seem different?

Curley. It was still very peaceful, but it had grown a lot. During the war people were living in chicken coops. My mother had a little studio beyond the garage and she rented that to a couple. She had schoolteachers as boarders. There was no place to put people.

Int: So your brothers and sister all left Carlsbad also?

Curley: My brother George came back to Carlsbad and taught at the same school that we went to for maybe five years. He was married and had a child. Then he got an opportunity to go into journalism, which was his field, and his career came from that. My sister went to school and she never came back, went to Oregon. George came back in 1972 and has a house on the beach. Jim went to San Francisco.

Int: I think we've covered this Louise!

Curley: Well I still don't think I did a very good job of pulling it all together. But it's an impression.