

Interview with

**Jim King**

October 15, 2004

by Richard A. Moore

for the

Highway 101 Association

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**Interview with Jim King on October 15, 2004. Interviewer: Richard A. Moore of the Solana Beach Historical Society. Transcribed by Kristi Hawthorne**

Richard: My name is Richard Moore. I'm with the Solana Beach Civic and Historical Society and I'm interviewing Mr. James King of Solana Beach, a long time resident. Today's date is October 15, 2004. Okay, Jim, please state your full name and current address.

Jim: James D. King and I go by Jim. 517 Ford Avenue in Solana Beach, 92075.

Richard: When and where were you born?

Jim: December 14, 1926 in Mercy Hospital, San Diego.

Richard: Have you lived here in Solana Beach since that time or were your parents in Solana Beach?

Jim: My parents lived for a short period of time in Escondido and then moved to Rancho Santa Fe. We moved down here in 1930.

Richard: What were your parents' names?

Jim: Ernest and Lillian King.

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

Jim: Well, they came by train. They were from Canada and they left Canada in 1923 and went to New York City for about a year and a half, and then came out to California by train. My brother Bob was born in Canada and my sister Pat and I in California.

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

Jim: From 1930 to 1940 we lived on Rios Street before moving over to 440 Lirio Street, where our daughter still lives.

Richard: At that time Highway 101 was the only highway north to Los Angeles, as I recall, wasn't it?

Jim: That's correct.

Richard: Do you remember any outstanding events that occurred that made an impression on you relating to US Highway 101?

Jim: There are several, but I think one has always stood out that I can vividly remember. At the time of the Charles Lindbergh son's kidnapping in 1932 and San Diego newspaper carriers came out through town after dark and were calling out "Extra! Extra!" as they do for special event newspapers.

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Richard: That was unusual for them to be roaming that far north for the “extra”.

Jim: It was pretty extreme at that time.

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

Jim: I guess I was an infant because we used to go to Balboa Park for a Sunday outing in San Diego, so that would have been in the 20’s in my folks’ Model T Ford.

Richard: When you started driving yourself, with a license, do you remember your first trip on the Highway 101 or generally this area?

Jim: Well, you said “with a license” and it was without license. I do remember when I was about nine or ten years old and I drove my friend Jerry Ward’s Model A from the plaza, we had a softball diamond there, down to Murfin’s Mobile Station, which is now Solana Beach Automotive.

Richard: There were a number of gas stations along here, I know. What was the name of the one at the far north end of Solana Beach, on the east side of the road? Was that a Union station or was that a Shell station?

Jim: That was a Union station. But, when we were young, at the extreme north of us on the west side of the road, a man by the name of Jack Emblem had an independent station.

Richard: Do you remember some of the other buildings or businesses, such as restaurants along here?

Jim: Yes. One that I remember was the Solana Beach Café and that’s where the Pizza Port is now. There was the Teddy Bear, that was another café. That was a couple of blocks south of the plaza on the west side of the road. There was a post office/store. The first post office was where the Harker building is now on the plaza and Conner’s grocery store was right in the middle of town. Kurtz and Witmer’s, two drug stores, were right on the main block of old Solana Beach.

Richard: Were they the predecessors to Bebe’s, I wonder?

Jim: That’s correct.

Richard: I remember Bebe’s but I didn’t know the Kurtz. When did Joe Beed come here? Do you remember? He had a hardware store somewhere along there.

Jim: I think that was after World War II in the late 50’s or early 60’s. I’m not sure on that.

Richard: I remember Joe Beed but I don’t remember what was across from his store. He was in the store, I think there’s a hair salon now or a beauty shop.

Jim: A barbershop.

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Richard: Let me return to the restaurants. I remember something about a Fire Pit. Was there a Fire Pit here? I vaguely recall having gone there.

Jim: South end of town and I think it was the same property where the city hall is now. Previous to that in the earlier days it was called Payon's Grill. There was a family by the name of Payon.

Richard: What landmarks or unusual structures come to mind that you remember along the highway?

Jim: The Solana Beach Hotel on the Plaza was one of the early ones. Then, the old original train station which, of course, was right along the tracks, in the middle part of town. The Solana Beach Lumber Company, which was built in 1922, then on to the south was McKenna Construction Company which is still there on South Cedros Avenue. That business was started in the early 20s also, by the Bob McKenna, Sr. family.

Richard: McKenna's been around for a while.

Jim: Then we had two big gasoline supply depots. They had some enormous tanks and they were Union and Standard. They were along South Cedros, too.

Richard: The railroad station, was that along the site of where Solana Lumber used to stand?

Jim: No, south of what is now Loma Santa Fe Boulevard, just across from the old Bill Jack plant, which is now called Solana Trade Center (and Belly Up Tavern).

Richard: So it's basically not far from where the current station is.

Jim: South of that.

Richard: I don't remember the old station. I don't think I was here when the old station was around.

Jim: It was taken in the 50's or 60's.

Richard: Any particular person associated with that stretch of road? Was it named after anyone? Was there anybody who was famous who christened or dedicated or anything like that, that you recall?

Jim: No, not that I ever heard of. An early name in town that sticks out in my mind is Eric Murfin where the Solana Beach Automotive is now. It's still in the Murfin family. Eric was owner of that, and built it in the early 20s.

Richard: Was Roy Murfin his son?

Jim: Roy is his son, yes.

Richard: I talked to Roy and I'm told he has a quite a few memories.

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Jim: He would, too!

Richard: Do you have a favorite memory, trip or a favorite destination?

Jim: One era that sticks out, the San Diego Expositions were in 1935 and 1936. I think the trips down there that our family made were outstanding parts of our youth. I happened to have been in the first ever soapbox derby down there in 1936, so that sticks in my mind.

Richard: Soapbox derby, that was held down in Balboa Park?

Jim: Yes, at the Exposition.

Richard: Do you remember any particularly bad or unfortunate accidents along the road?

Jim: There are a couple that stick out in my mind. One was a close family friend, Jack Dawson, one of the early families in the San Dieguito river area here, was killed in what they called “the cut”, at the north end of town just before you get to Seaside Beach. A head-on collision, as I recall. Then another friend, Ned Broo, was killed crossing the railroad tracks, a nighttime accident right on what is now Lomas Santa Fe.

Richard: What kind of warning signals did they have across the track there which ran parallel to the 101?

Jim: They had what they called the old “wig wag”. They didn’t have the drop down bar in those days. That’s why they were easy, if people weren’t alert, to run through in the path of the train.

Richard: How about patrol officers or traffic cops, including any that might have checked you out?

Jim: Well, there was one in particular that was notorious back in the 30s and early 40s. His name was William “Red” Thompson. He lived in Del Mar. They used to say he would write his own mother a ticket! We had another close friend called “Grandpa” Knowles. He was the grandfather of the Larrick family who built the original Solana Lumber Company. He had a 1929 Essex car that he bought brand new and he would never, or hardly ever, stop at the stop sign which was on the 101 and Plaza Street, we called it then.

Richard: That was at Skyline?

Jim: Later, Skyline, yes. And Red Thompson seemed like he was just there waiting for him every time Grandpa Knowles would go downtown. So he finally couldn’t drive anymore and his car wasn’t really that old, it was early 30’s and Grandpa Knowles gathered up his grandsons and my brother and myself, and he said, “Well, if I can’t drive this car anymore, nobody’s going to drive it.” So we pushed it from their home on Barbara street down to the end of Rios Street and he said, “Okay!” and we pushed it over and it went tumbling down into the lagoon and it may still be buried down there!

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Richard: Grandpa Knowles?

Jim: Grandpa Frank Knowles.

Richard: Do you remember the speed limit through town and did you ever get a ticket?

Jim: I think it was what the highway speed limit was. I'm pretty sure I'm right, was 35 and maybe up to 45 in those days. Probably George Wilkens would recall better but I don't think it was reduced coming through Solana Beach in those days. No, I never did get a ticket of any kind in Solana Beach that I can recall.

Richard: Do you remember if there were ever any parades along here with a celebrity or maybe even a president?

Jim: Very definitely. President Roosevelt came through town in, I think 1935. It was the mid-30's. My brother and my little sister and I and some other friends rode our bikes, when we knew it coming to the south end of town and there were some big eucalyptus trees that used to hang over the highway. We crawled up those trees and actually looked down on the president, waving and yelling as he went by with his convoy. It was a big event.

Richard: I can imagine. I guess we have four traffic lights now along the Highway 101. Do you remember when the first one might have been installed? I'm assuming it would have been at Skyline.

Jim: There was one a Skyline Street there and I don't remember the year. The highway was increased from a two lane to a three lane highway, which was a death trap, I think in the late 30's or early 40's. But I don't recall a light there before the end of the war.

Richard: What service stations were along the route?

Jim: There were two independent stations at the extreme south and north end. The north end one, this is prior to the 76 station, which we talked about earlier, was right at the corner of Cliff Street on the west side of the highway and 101. A man by the name of Jack Emblem owned that. The one at the south end was owned by a family named Moreno, Julio Moreno; and then there was a Union station right about where the Beach Grass Café is now and then there was a Standard station right on the Plaza which closed in recent years. Then Murfins' Mobile station down where the present Solana Automotive is. In later years, there was one on the corner of South Cedros and Loma Santa Fe and another up at the corner of North Rios and Loma Santa Fe.

Richard: It was gasoline alley.

Jim: There was plenty of gasoline!

Richard: You mentioned Julio Moreno, was it?

Jim: Yes. They also had a little trailer park there. This was just south of where the present Bank of America is. It was all taken out when the Beach Walk went in. Then in the mid 30's, I think

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about 1936, I was about ten years old, my brother and I had the opportunity to help Mr. Moreno and their son, who was my brother's age, build a little auto court there. We worked all one summer and built a single wall construction board and bat auto court. We were actually hammering nails and helping with the cutting of wood. We were paid seventy cents a day plus an outstanding Thanksgiving-like meal that Mrs. Moreno prepared every day, so we felt we were really living high!

Richard: Are there any other things that would be useful to talk about for the interview?

Jim: I remember vividly just 200 feet off the 101 was our original softball diamond and that's where the theater was later, and where the parking lot is across the road from the present post office. There were lights up to there. Most of our summer nights were spent down there watching softball games. In 1937 when Bing Crosby and Pat O'Brien built the race track down there, they used to come and attend the games and I can remember they started offering the first player to hit a homerun five dollars, which was a big amount of money in those days. That was one of our main recreations in the summertime.

Richard: Anything else I haven't covered?

Jim: A close friend of ours, who was kind of a self-appointed, non-paid youth director. His name is Jerry Ward; he is still alive at 91 and still going dancing several nights a week. An outstanding young man at the time who taught us how to swim and how to be lifeguards and how to dance. He was one of a kind. The old-timers, like the Wilkens brothers, remember him fondly and some of the other earlier people around here. He had a paper route, the Los Angeles Examiner paper route, in the late 30s and early 40s, and my brother and I helped him do it. He covered all of San Dieguito district out to Rancho Santa Fe and Del Dios and all of Escondido. We used to drive 110 miles every morning to do this paper route. We started about 2 in the morning and would get done before 7:30 or 8:00. There was a little building where we stuffed the papers, the Sunday papers (all the sections had to be stuffed by hand in those days). It was right on 101, just immediately north of where the Beach Grass Café is right now. It's a little apartment or something now. That was one of my fond early memories.

Richard: That's great.

Jim: That pretty much concludes the comments I have.

Richard: I really thank you for your participation in this. I will conclude the interview now with thanks to Mr. James King.