

Title : Memories of Ocean Beach, San Diego, California

Author : Liz (Long) Cotton

HOT! HOT! HOT! Burning sand scorched the bottoms of my feet after we kicked off our shoes and had thrown them down by our towels in our "special place" on the sand. Running as fast as we could, we finally reached the edge of the cool Pacific Ocean as it came toward the shore in Ocean Beach, California. We continued on into the surf and dove into the waves which cooled our hot, very tanned bodies. Tans were important and the word "sunscreen" was not in our vocabulary then. We just used baby oil and iodine mixed, to get really tan, and zinc oxide on our noses for extra protection. Whatever we slathered on our bodies did not take away from the delicious feeling of the chilly water covering us as we dove into the ocean.

That was the way many summers began for a group of us who had grown up together in Ocean Beach and Point Loma in the 1920's, 30's and 40's. We were really good friends, having attended Ocean Beach Grammar School and Point Loma Junior/Senior High School. We went to the movies at the Ocean Beach Strand Theater for Saturday matinees, where for a nickle we could see the news, coming attractions, a cartoon, a main feature, and the current episode of the current Serial. Sometimes we met at the Ocean Beach library to "study", or hiked around the sunset cliffs. We even walked across the bridge to Mission Beach and Mission Bay to swim, and all just for fun. Circa 1939, in the little "beachy town" of Ocean Beach was filled with good times.

The surf and sandy beach itself looked somewhat different than it does today in 2007. The sand was deep and thick, all the way up to the small shops along the street, until one huge storm tore most of the shops and walkway down, letting the deep sand fill in. Also there was no pier to divert the waves... they just pounded their way to shore. The Life Guards had a simple tower and a beet up shack to use as their "place".

Surf boards, the huge, long boards, were the only way to go, until someone discovered the "boogie board" and that became another kind of sport where you could skim along the edge of the surf, balancing yourself and have a ball. Some surfers did take the smaller boards out into the surf, but the big boards were the best, because you could ride the really huge wave, big enough to carry you, and a rider, all the way to shore. Sometimes you did have to be patient until the really big one developed but boy was it worth it!

Surfing was a sport that was dominated by the boys, but once in a while, there would be a girl who could master this wonderful ability and come riding in on one out in the ocean, On the crest of a wonderful wave, using the power of the ocean to propel the ride. What a blast!

Body Surfing was another way to ride the wave. It was different from the board surfing, as you needed the strength and agility of your body to propel yourself toward the shore. This was my favorite way to surf, although I can't say I was super good at it. I did survive....

Soaking up the sun as we rested and dried off was a high point of every day. Sometimes sharing a "PB&J" or just enjoying each others friendship. Summer was never long enough, even back in the 1930's.

1941 brought big changes to our activities. A lot of us had just graduated from Point Loma High and gone away to college, or out to San Diego State. A lot of the boys in the group joined the Armed Services and left for the war zones. Some returned....others became fond memories.

Ocean Beach is a special place and will always be the "little home town" I remember from my youth.

I am glad it is still there, even though it has changed somewhat over the years. Just driving down Newport Avenue and by the beach, is still a joy, and brings back wonderful, warm, exciting memories to me.