

The city of Imperial Beach in 2006 is much different than the unincorporated countryside of Palm City where I came to live with my husband Al and our two little boys in 1947. Palm City became Imperial Beach when the city incorporated in 1956. My mother, grandfather, and sister arrived in Palm City before us in 1946. The new Sav-On drug store on 8th Street occupies our old homestead; the pharmacy stands where my kitchen once was, and a car lot on Palm and Delaware stands in place of my mom's home. Jack-in-the-Box and Wally's IGA occupy the old Fisher place to the east. Seacoast Drive, once a rural sandy road called First Street now bustles with expensive homes. The 'Mouth' where the Tijuana River flows into the Pacific is no longer accessible to our cars, or host to the wonderful fishing trips we experienced there. My favorite 'pick your own' tomato fields and the smell of country celery fields are gone, too. Imperial Beach has changed and so have I. I arrived when I was 26; this year I will be 86, but the early days of Imperial Beach are treasures my family will remember long after I am gone as they continue their lives in IB, our little jewel by the sea.

My mom, my sister and I spent the 1920s and '30s on Lake St. Mary's in Ohio where my grandfather, William "Windy Bill" Cochran ran a fishing resort called Windy Point. We loved the water and we loved to fish. We moved away to different locations around the country and ultimately reunited here in Palm City to raise our kids and to live out our lives together. My mom and step-dad, Elma and John Smoot came in 1946. They bought and converted a duplex at the corner of Palm and Delaware, and later purchased the house and lot next door where Mom lived out her life until she passed in 1979. She ran a pottery lot on the Delaware corner for many years in the '50s and later opened a real estate office with her partner Jacquetta Dunning. In 1963 at age 62, Mom received her high school diploma and graduated from Mar Vista adult school along with my son Bob and niece Teri Lee Hiles Steijer who graduated from MV day school. Although she has been gone for many years, Mom's duplex still stands today and is the office for a car lot at Delaware and Palm. Her home next door is gone now but the little palm tree she planted grows straight and tall in her memory.

In 1947, we followed Mom to Palm City to find steady employment. My husband Al and my brother-in-law acquired jobs at the Overhaul and Repair Facility at North Island. My sister Gladys and her husband Harold Hiles arrived in 1946 and raised four children on 10th Street. Al and Harold's steady employment with Uncle Sam was our motivation, but we chose Palm City over other San Diego home sites for several reasons. The two lane Silver Strand commute to North Island was easier than the 'nickel-snatcher' water ferry across San Diego Bay. Living near the bay and the ocean was appealing to all of us because we enjoy the cool weather and we liked to fish. Al and I relocated from his hometown of Denver, Colorado. I was delighted there would be no more snow or riding to work on a chilly streetcar, and no more of my husband's lost paycheck days because of the snow and ice storms, when he couldn't work. I was grateful for my husband's new found steady income from North Island. Palm City was a great place to raise a family in the country and a good place to get a fresh start. Everyone was welcome in this friendly down-to-earth country atmosphere. World War II was over and the economy was not at its best performance. There were many struggling veterans all over the country. In 1947, my husband was a recently discharged vet trying to make a start. . A severance pay would have been a blessing but there was no such thing back then. Money was very, very tight. Our first need in Palm City was affordable housing. My Mom let us live in one end of her duplex. (Later she leased it to an attorney for whom I worked part time. It was ironic because the office where I worked was located in what used to be my old front room.) We chose to live with my mom but other people saved their money for a home while they lived in the subsidized Coronado Government Housing Project on

Mullenix Drive which now is the park beneath the Coronado Bay Bridge. We chose the 'sweat equity way;' working from a week-to-week paycheck of \$38.00. I was naïve and probably would not take that route again. We were poor but we were proud and wanted to make it on our own with a little help from our family.

Al and I found a little 'fixer-upper' at 656 8th Street behind my mom's place. The two bedroom one bath had just been moved onto the lot. The house was taken from its original site to make way for the new Coca-Cola plant in San Diego. The total price for the lot and the house was \$1,700.00. That was a considerable amount of money in those days and we knew it would be a real challenge but something we felt we could handle. We wanted to buy the adjacent lot for \$100.00 but money was too tight. What little money we had was borrowed from a family member and was spent for a new roof, a foundation, a bathroom and plumbing for the entire house, a cesspool and a septic tank. We knew remodeling would be quite a project but we bought the place. We sold a favorite 1938 La Salle car to pay for the plumbing. Our tears ran, but so did the water in the house's plumbing system.

We lived through the depression so we knew how to cope with tough situations. But at times, it was not easy to be patient. Life was a struggle. We were poor but happy together. My blue and white kitchen was the heart of our home where I prepared good meals for happy family times together. Al and I loved our little boys and added another little boy and a baby girl who were born at Coronado hospital. Although there were challenges, life was good and we enjoyed our friends and all the amenities of rural living in our little town. Today, my daughter Ginny asks me, "Mom, why didn't you buy beach property?" I tell her we just didn't have the money, even though the property seemed so cheap at the time compared to property costs now.

In 1947, my first trip to the beach was a thrill. Here was this vast ocean just waiting for me to enjoy. Hurrah! I couldn't believe I was there at the water's edge. When I waded into the ocean the first time I was almost scared of the waves and there seemed to be no end to them. Yes, to me the water was a wee bit cold. I wondered if anything would bite me. I could tell the water was salty. Oops, someone splashed me and I didn't really like that. I told myself to relax, "You've always wanted to see a big ocean, so enjoy everything connected with the experience.

One of my very favorite of all activities was spending time at the mouth of the Tijuana River and at the surrounding sloughs, now known as the Tijuana Estuary. There were not any barriers as of today, as the entire area was open to the public. What a treat for those who were interested in exploring the sandy fields and tidal pools next to the ocean. I would load my kids in my car and drive as far as we could go to get to "the Mouth." The worse part of the trip was getting up enough nerve to drive through a certain part of the trail without getting stuck in the sand. I had to drive an accelerated speed or we'd get stuck. We usually made it with a big sigh of relief. We then continued on to enjoy digging bait and fishing, or just wading through the clear peaceful waters looking for sand dollars.

My husband was a trout fisherman from Colorado and didn't care much about surf fishing and kelp snagging that we took up later. Our boys settled for having Mom escort them instead of dad. When the kids weren't fishing with Mom, they were learning auto mechanics in Dad's four car garage he built behind the house. Eventually, the garage was moved and is still standing on 18th Street.

Al did enjoy taking us to the beach during the grunion runs. It took awhile but we finally learned how to catch those slick little fish. With practice, we eventually learned that the secret to catching them was searching for them in less brightly lit areas of the sand. We caught a lot and I learned to pressure cook them for cat food. One

could easily be led to believe these little grunion that came in on the tide to wiggle and to lay their eggs in the sand, were only a myth.

The beach was great for all kinds of activities including swimming, catching sand crabs, or warily observing jelly fish. Sometimes in the middle of the night we would get the kids out of the bed to see the glow of a red tide, or to watch surfers ride the waves with brightly lit torches. We also spent time at the Silver Strand on both the surf side and the bay side. The kids liked the bay side. The older boys would dive in the bay for octopi that were holed up in pop cans. I remember Italian ladies at the beach wanting to buy them for 50 cents to eat.

We enjoyed the fishing boat that launched from the end of the pier and took us out by the Coronado Islands where we fished for yellow tail and rock cod. Other times we enjoyed the pier at all times of the day and night. One night a little old man took the spot next to me and proceeded to tell my daughter how he liked to use turkey for bait. We talked for hours as we caught fish all night. I can't remember his name, but it turned out the man was the mayor of Imperial Beach at the time!

We liked to fish with the Kelly brothers from IB who added so much to our fishing adventures. They knew all the best fishing holes. My son Bob and I often fished with them. Bob lost several pairs of glasses to the surf. Still, it was worth it to see him enjoy fishing so much. Contact lenses weren't invented yet but would have made surf-fishing much less costly!

One day as usual, we went to the surf to fish. We met up with the Kelly kids and their dad happened to be along that day. Nothing planned, it just happened that way. Then his wife Elsie showed up and was surprised to see a strange woman there fishing with her boys. Of course it was innocent, and Elsie became my best friend. We had fun telling the story how she once caught me fishing with her husband! She later worked with me for many years at my Need Soul's Mission building in National City, where I headed a youth and international mail ministry.

We experienced other Palm City water activities in front of our little house. There was a drainage ditch down in front of our lot. The ditch overflowed and flooded the yard and the street when it rained. We would have instant waterfront property on 8th Street that now runs along side of Wally's IGA Store. We'd paddle our little wooden boat down the street; the deeper the water, the better. The drainage ditch made a great pond on dryer days and the boys would play alongside catching pollywogs. One sunny day, I had quite a surprise at the boys' bath time. Lo and behold, shampooing flushed out a partially dried pollywog. It didn't bother me too much, as I had grown up on a lake and was not at all squeamish

There were more water activities to enjoy at the bay at the end of 7th Street. We crossed the railroad tracks to where there were locks that opened and closed. The boys spent a lot of time fishing for gar there. Sometimes, I would go to the area just to sit and relax, especially during a period of illness after the birth of my daughter. Today, every July 4th the kids sit next to the railroad tracks on the same shore to enjoy Coronado and Chula Vista fireworks

For city celebrations during the fifties, a train bound for Coronado would pass on these tracks. While the train was moving along, a fake train robbery would occur. The passengers were quite surprised to experience a real old Wild West train robbery. It was all well taken in fun.

The beach and the bay were great fun while my kids were growing, but in the earlier days, we also enjoyed the tomato and strawberry fields down off Monument Road near Mexico. You could pick your own strawberries, have them weighed and pay for them on the spot. The tomato fields were open and there was no charge for the public to go pick in after the caretaker was finished with the seasonal crop. My dear friend, Marilyn who still lives on

Calla Street by the beach, picked and then canned our own tomatoes. One year we accidentally got into a field not yet open to the public. It was an embarrassing incident to get run out of a private field! The caretaker declined our offer to pay for our illegal gain. Later, one of our favorite tomato fields was replaced by a much welcomed Safeway grocery store on 13th near Palm Avenue.

One day I was busy canning tomatoes, when we heard a whale had washed up on the beach. I turned the fire off the tomatoes and took the kids up to see the huge mammal. I lost most of the tomatoes. The fact they were free somewhat eased the pain. I couldn't disappoint my children who had never encountered a whale. I probably already had my bathing suit on under my clothes. We were soon off to see the whale. My dear friend Ruth and I wore our bathing suits most of the time, either with or without our clothing over them. We were always ready to go to the beach. I was in my late twenties then. (Now, at eighty-six, I never put one on, not even for a Jacuzzi.)

Other produce besides tomatoes and strawberries were abundant around town. There were so many groves of orange and lemon trees. Most of the lemon trees from this area are now gone, as are the celery fields one could smell while driving along the roads. There was a traveling produce lady who sold vegetables to those who did not have their own little gardens. I regularly purchased her vegetables. Other traveling vendors sold milk, bread, Raleigh products, Fuller Brush and Jewel Tea products. We all had rabbit hutches and raised rabbits to eat, but some people did sell their rabbits. For a long time in the early days, the nearest grocery stores were in Coronado and Chula Vista.

Although we never heard of them bothering the rabbit hutches, in the early days of Palm City, packs of dogs roamed the dirt streets. For the kids' safety, we kept an eye on the dogs as well as an abundance of scorpions in our alley. The landscape, stores, services, people and technology were definitely different then than now. There was a family whose transportation was a big old wooden wagon drawn by horses. Our best friends, Frank and Ruth, were lucky to have a car. They drove around in an old Buick with one fender missing. If you rode in the back seat, you had to keep a good distance from the wheel. They decided they needed a safer ride, so they traded Dr. Hayes office cleaning for a car he wanted to sell.

In those days, money was tight for technological luxuries such as cars and appliances, and local doctors were very scarce, as well. We saved for a long time to get a new refrigerator, but ended up spending the money on delivery of a new baby boy. We were happy to welcome him to our life, though, but nearly lost him to a coma one night. The benevolent Dr. Rhea favored us with a middle of the night house call and saved our little Larry's life. There were no 911 calls or quick trips to the emergency room in those days.

Our favorite 'department' store in town was a second hand store, "Jessie's Opportunity Shop" at the corner of first and Coronado Avenue. If you needed anything, Jessie would find it at a price one could afford. We usually were lucky to bring home a piece of clothing, or kitchen item we called "Jessie's Special." Many of us were stay-at-home-moms. There weren't many money making opportunities around the area. You couldn't always get what you wanted or needed. Jessie's was a great place to look for bargains. One year, my entire Easter outfit came from Jessie's. It looked pretty good but I could hardly walk in those high heels. Still, I wished I would have saved the fourteen pair I had given away when I got married.

The beauty shop in town was also called "Jessie's," but we couldn't always afford such a luxury. In those days, many of us women gave each other home perms. It was easy. Just cut the hair three inches in length all over

and find the best brand home permanent to use for your type hair. It worked pretty well. But one carefully selected the right friend for this task.

Then there was the phone service. Phones were few and far between. We just shared until service became affordable to all of us. Cell phone? I don't think so! Count your blessings, cell phone users!

Eventually, developers brought grocery stores to the area. There was Pennysaver, Piggly Wiggly, Safeway and Big Bear Market. From our little home, we watched as the farmland on 8th street developed into a grocery store and shopping mall. The grocery store, once Big Bear, now houses Wally's IGA. A grocery store was a great luxury in those days and the Lyons and the 'Big Bear' were happy neighbors for many years..

Adjacent to Big Bear came Jack-in-the-Box, previously the old Fisher farm. The Fishers had a cow I was very afraid of. One day I looked out of my window and there was that cow in my yard! They sent a little boy about seven years old over to take the animal home. Today I am still not too sure being around those big animals. We always wondered what happened to that cow or if she wound up as Jack-in-the-Box hamburgers.

We didn't own a cow at 656, but my youngest son, Larry was a member of the 4H Club at the Old Red Barn in Bonita and had a little lamb named "Lamberta." Larry and our neighbor Frances Fern showed their lambs at the Del Mar County Fair. It was great fun helping with the lambs. I would 'lamb-sit' them by staking them along the highway (Palm Avenue) at the south end of 8th Street. We were frantic one evening when one of the lambs got loose and headed for the highway. We scrambled and caught her. I drove the kids and their lambs all over for different activities and then up to the fair grounds when our Lamberta won a blue ribbon. I was so sad to think she would be eaten. The old-timers tried to comfort me and to convince me she would be used as a breeding lamb. To this day I have never been able to eat lamb.

The kids had a lot of fun growing up, but had to go to school, too. We were lucky to have elementary schools in town. The district kept building more schools to accommodate the growing population, and often changed the attendance requirement boundaries so my kids attended most of the new schools including West View, Imperial Beach, Bayside and Central.

I worked at Imperial Beach Elementary school in the cafeteria for awhile. School Halloween carnivals were fun. One year at West View Elementary, I introduced the cake walk and a version of the cherry tree game. My first son, David was eleven and in the sixth grade when he was chosen as king of the West View school at the carnival there in 1954.

In later times, the kids enjoyed leisure time away from school not only at the beach but watching movies at the Palm Theatre, skating Saturday matinees at the Rocket Roller Rink on Palm Ave. and going to Saturday night movies with Al and I at the Big Sky Drive-In in Otay.

The kids are grown now and some have moved away with their own families. They still enjoy a walk down the pier on sunny afternoons. I have difficulty walking these days but did make it to the end of the pier a couple of years ago – probably my last time, I suppose. Ginny took me for a walk on the beach in Coronado several years ago. There on the shore I found a huge but quite dead crab that was perfectly intact.. I put my treasure in a plastic bag to take home and keep for the shell. We walked from the beach over to a restaurant for lunch, crab and all. People eyed us in apparent shock. We finally realized the crab in the bag stunk to high heaven. We were having fun and hadn't noticed. We didn't care what people thought, we had a great time.

June's Story – 50 Plus 10 Years Classic IB
By June Mack Lyon
Edited By Virginia Lyon Lovell

I don't fish or can or pick tomatoes any more. Recently, Ginny drove me down 19th Street toward Monument Road to see if there were still agriculture fields. The road was different but the country flavor remained.

In 1997, my husband Al died peacefully in the living room of our home. In our respective home towns, Al once enjoyed the beautiful Colorado mountain trout streams, and I enjoyed the beautiful lake at Windy Point in Ohio, now a state park. Together, we came to Imperial Beach and gave our children their own outdoor memories of fishing and good times in California.

Now, 60 years after we moved here, I still love the area and intend to spend the rest of my days in this beautiful climate. I am not surprised that so many people have moved here, or that the traffic is so busy. The weather and the water are great attractions and we always forecasted that San Diego would become another "L.A."

In 2006, the produce fields are gone along with my little house on 8th Street. The location of my little blue and white kitchen is now the Sav-On pharmacy and, hopefully, good things still come from that little spot. Traffic fills multiple paved lanes where dirt roads once rambled with occasional old cars and an old country horse and wagon. The destinations are no longer the tomato fields, a fishing trip at the sloughs, gar fishing at the end of 7th Street, or a trip to the beach to see a dead whale. Perhaps, such activities are no longer a favored focus of today's youth. Life in the city of Imperial Beach is faster paced than in 1947, but in my heart, IB will always be the countryside I once knew; my little ocean-side paradise where my husband and I once thrived and our children grew.

When I was a youngster in Ohio at the lake, I used to sit in a porch swing under a big old mulberry tree and watch the beautiful sunsets. Now, in my golden years, I just look out my west windows to see the glorious Imperial Beach sunsets; and, I suppose one day soon I will leave my beloved little city and just walk off into one of those IB sunsets - past the tomato fields, the Mouth, the pier and the ocean to the only place better than IB by the sea...my little mansion in the sky – in Heaven, together again - my handsome husband, my mom, and little old me.

Thank you Imperial Beach, for 60 wonderful years. Congratulations on your 50th Anniversary!

June Lyon