

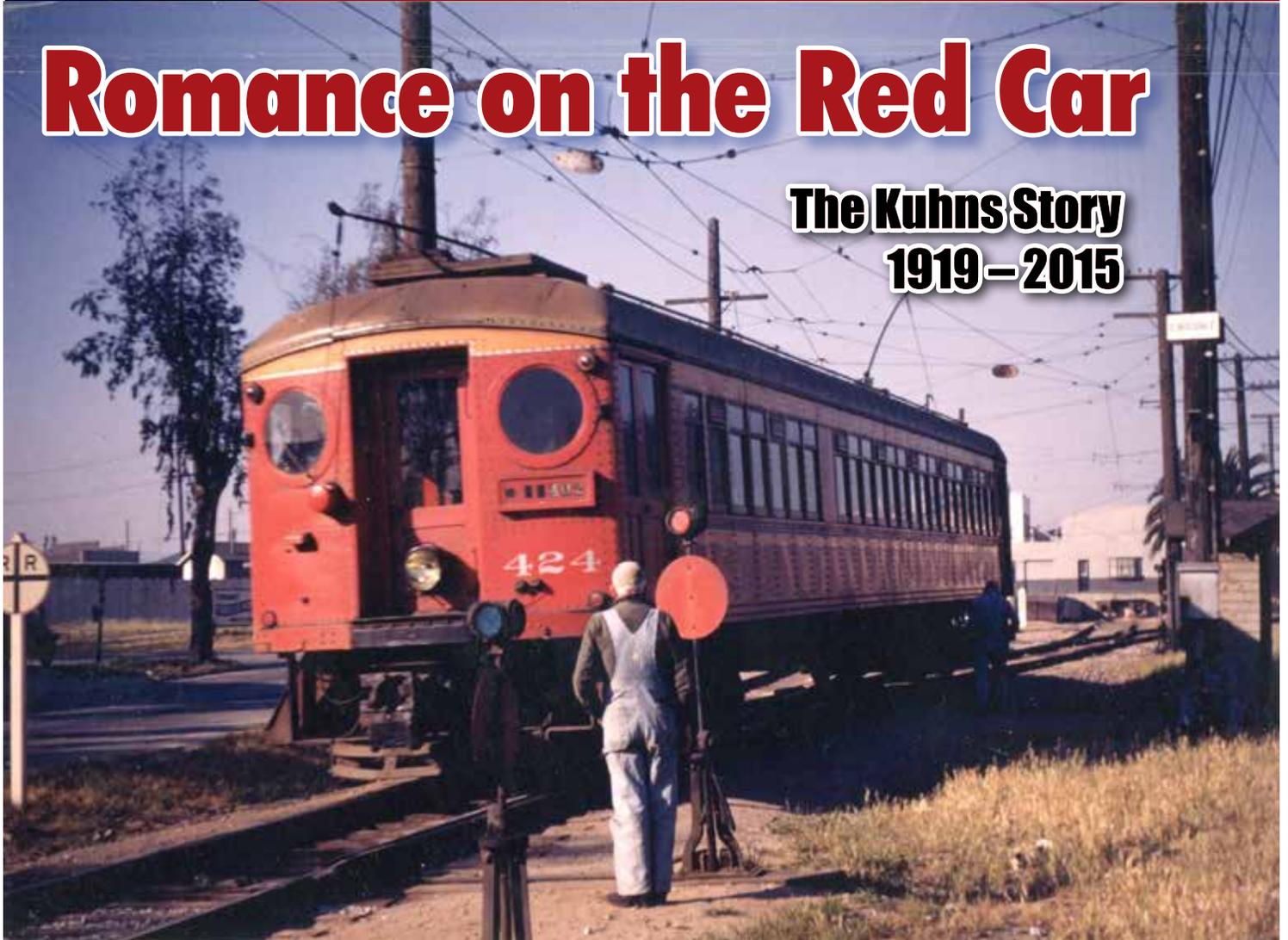
# Torrance Historian

Newsletter of the Torrance Historical Society

Editor – Ann Strong

## Romance on the Red Car

**The Kuhns Story  
1919 – 2015**



*From time-to-time, our members share their family connection to Torrance. The story of Richard (Pat/Dick/Eli) Kuhns began before he was born . . .*

It was the early 1900s, when Grandpa Kuhns left Allentown, PA, where his family had farmed since 1742, and headed west for San Francisco with his wife and two-year old son. He was

a carpenter, and doing quite well, until the great earthquake of 1906. The Army conscripted him to help clean-up the city, and sent his family back to Pennsylvania. Eventually, Grandpa Kuhns was released from his duties where upon he returned to PA, gathered his family, and headed for Denver

to start anew.

In Colorado, he stepped off the train to look around, didn't like what he saw, hopped back on the train and headed for the little city of Los Angeles. He settled in Watts, because the Red Car had a central station there and he could go in all directions to find work.

*Continued on next page*

Grandpa Kring (his mother's father), was born in Ohio after the Civil War. He got a job in construction on the Sante Fe Railroad. However, he tried to organize a union — a big no-no in those days — so they sent him to Gallup, NM, to be in charge of a water tank in Indian territory. Pat's mother was born in NM in 1902.

Naturally, the family wanted to move on, and settled in Long Beach where Grandpa Kring started building roads. From Long Beach, the Kring family also moved to Watts because of the Red Car terminal.

### **Watts & the Red Cars**

So now, the Kuhns family (my father, Eli) and the Kring clan (my mother, Katherine) all lived in Watts — where the kids attended school. In 1918, both Eli and Katherine were 16 when they graduated high school, however, not in the same class. They heard about factories being built in the new industrial city of Torrance, so my father got a job with Union Tool Company in 1919. My mother got a job with the Abalone Factory in 1919, as well. They both lived in Watts and road the Red Cars to Torrance. Needless to say, riding back and forth on the Red Cars, it wasn't long before they met, and in 1922, they married. Since they both worked in Torrance, they wanted to live in this area. My mother's boss, who had just moved to Flower St. in Lomita, informed her that the big lot next to him was for sale, cheap. Flower St. (now 241st St.), and the rear 25 feet, were a right-of-way to Torrance for street purposes. Being that my grandfather was a carpenter, a house was soon built. Shortly

afterwards, little me was born in my parent's home, as there were no hospitals available yet in 1923.

My father worked for the same oil well manufacturing company in Torrance for 45 years until he retired in 1964. This business did very well after oil was discovered at Signal Hill, and soon afterwards, in Torrance. Then, the oil petered out and the plant moved elsewhere. Because of me, my mother became a stay-at-home mom. At that time, Narbonne High School, where I attended, was in the same school district as Torrance High School.

*Since I was with our track team for four years, I often noticed Louis Zamperini just running around the track to keep in shape.*

Also, as I was an Eagle Scout with Lomita Troop 215, and we had several contests with the Torrance Troop at Torrance Park.

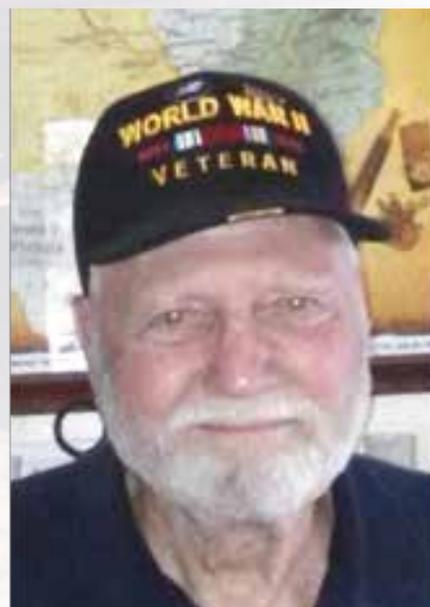
Then, December 7th, 1941, came along and everything changed! I was gone to the South Pacific in the Seabees, returning home in July 1946. Two weeks after I returned, the Los Angeles County Engineer searched me out. From 1947 to 1960, I lived in various sections of Los Angeles County, but then moved to Old Torrance with my family of 5 kids, so they could attend the Torrance schools.

In 1956, my father moved from Long Beach to Torrance, where he lived until his death in 1989. After his death, my mother moved to the 15th floor of the Senior Citizen's tower in Torrance. She later moved to Los Angeles, but because of

several strokes, I brought her back to Torrance to live in a nursing home where she passed away in 1991.

Since my retirement from the County Engineers in 1980, and my retirement from the Active Reserve of the Navy as Lieutenant commander in 1988, I have remained active in Torrance. I was appointed to the City's Environmental Quality & Energy Conservation Committee for eight years, Providence Little Company of Mary Hospital for 15 years, now a Life Member of the Torrance Historical Society, a member of Madrona Marsh from its start, forever a member of Old Torrance Neighborhood Association, forever a member of the Torrance Symphony Association., Scoutmaster of Torrance Troop 732, and several more I have forgotten. My brother, Martin was born in the original Jared Sidney Torrance Memorial Hospital in 1935. I am now the only Kuhns still living in Torrance.

— Richard Kuhns



*What started as a ride on Red Car, shaped the lives of an entire generation.*

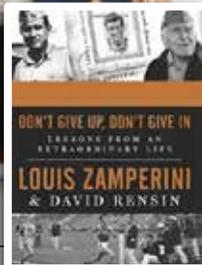
# AWESOME BRIDGE



## Light Up!

With citizens in awe and a light rain falling, the architectural beauty of this landmark is lit up for the first time, December 2, 2014. With a live feed from the bridge to the Torrance City Council meeting, Mayor Pat Furey led the count down to flick the switch to light up the bridge. It was quite magical to see the bridge illuminated. The Pacific Electric Railway - El Prado Bridge is on the National Register of Historic Places and was designed by architect Irving Gill in 1913. On May 7, the Bridge received the 2015 Los Angeles Conservancy Project Preservation Award to the *delight* of many.

## BOOK SIGNING



In January and March, we hosted a book signing with David Rensin, co-author of recently released **Don't Give Up, Don't Give In- Lessons from an Extraordinary Life** by Louis Zamperini & David Rensin. In this book, Louis Zamperini shares his wisdom, values, lessons, secrets and other insights gleaned from his remarkable experiences. To a standing room only, David, along with Louie's daughter, Cynthia, and son, Luke, answered questions from the audience and then signed books.





Progressive Dinner Winners Toast the Host  
 Front row- left to right: Rick Wirsing, Penny Wirsing, Tracy Underwood  
 Back row- left to right: Scott Nishimura, Terri Nishimura, Derrick Smith

Last October, opportunity tickets were sold for a Gourmet Progressive Dinner for Six to be hosted in January. The lucky winner, J. Henry, was not able to coordinate a date in January, so she asked us to draw a new winner. That winner was actually three people -- Terri Nishimura, Tracy Underwood and Penny Wirsing. They, and their spouses, enjoyed a Farm-to-Table Menu in three Historic Homes – all within a three block radius of the Museum.

## Free Little Library

On Monday, April 13th, Clay Zamperini, Executive Director, Victory Boys Camp / The Louis Zamperini Foundation and grandson of the late Torrance Hometown Hero, Louis Zamperini, installed a Little Free Library in the lobby of the Torrance Police Department (TPD).

Why the police station? Because . . . that is how Louis' track career "unofficially" got started – running from the police. The Louis Zamperini Foundation was invited to team with A Chance for Children (ACFC) and the Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) to promote and create literacy. ACFC & the LAPD have worked together to install a Little Free Library in every police station in Los Angeles County, and on Monday, during a Ribbon Cutting ceremony, the

LAPD passed the torch onto the Torrance Police Dept. – making it the first police station in California outside of the LAPD's to have one of these libraries. The concept of the Little Free Library is "take a book, return a book." Torrance Chief of Police, Mark Matsuda, noted, "Child custody exchanges take place in the police department lobby regularly and the Little Free Library will be a welcoming activity for all involved." The books target children ages six - 16, and are free. All children are invited to stop by and pick out a book (or two) to read or drop one off to share. The Little Free Library at the Torrance Police Dept. will be maintained by the Juvenile Diversion Dept. – book donations are welcome. From the stomping grounds of Louis Zamperini, the Old

**Sips & Nips** The evening started with "swanky" appetizers prepared with Torrance Farmers' Market ingredients served fireside in a 1927 Spanish Colonial Revival home where former Mayor Eisen once dined. Beer was provided by Red Car Brewery & Restaurant.

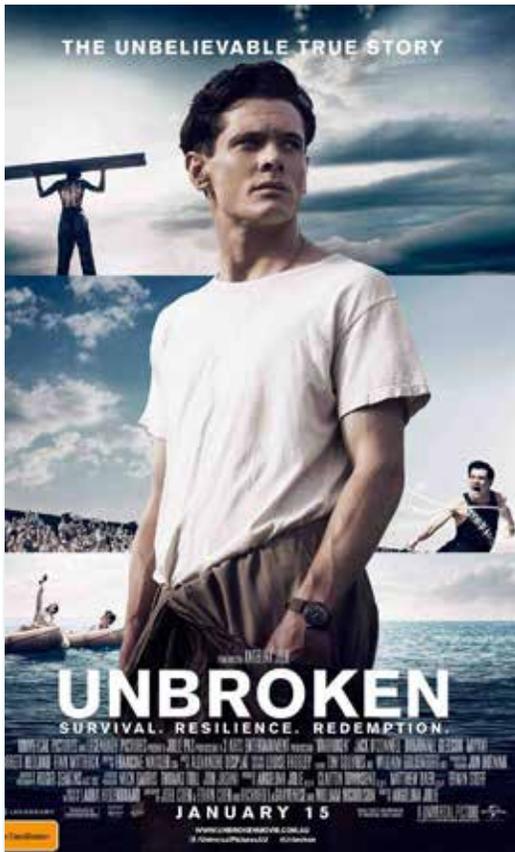
**Main Course** The six sat down to a Farm-to-Table dinner in 1936 Spanish Colonial Revival home built by the Massie family. In fact, they dined in the very room where Mrs. Massie used to entertain her card-playing lady friends. The Red Car Brewery & Restaurant donated their famous Red Car Salad, and wine was provided by Amore Vino.

**Dessert** After dinner, homemade dessert was enjoyed in a 1939 white Spanish Colonial Revival home where Torrance Rotary Anns once held meetings in the very rooms in which the winners sipped Kona coffee and after-dinner liquors. We gratefully applaud Judy Johnson & Steve Gray, Janet & Charles Payne and Jerry Ronan for opening their homes to the winners and for graciously sponsoring the meals. Tracy Underwood summed up the evening by saying, "What a great deposit to our 'sweet memories' bank."

Torrance Neighborhood Association is starting the donation campaign by giving 10 copies of the Young Reader's edition of Unbroken by Laura Hillenbrand to this library. For those interested in making donations, contact Shannon Flannery, M.A., MFT, Juvenile Diversion Coordinator, at 310.618.5555 or SFlannery@TorranceCA.Gov.



Left to right: Councilman Mike Griffiths, Councilwoman Heidi Ashcraft, Clay Zamperini, Tai Collins, Torrance Police Chief Mark Matsuda, Pamela Gibbons, LAPD Officer Heidi Stoecklein, Mayor Pat Furey and First Lutheran Pre-School children



# Unbroken Premiere

On Tuesday, December 16th, at the AMC Del Amo Theatres, the Torrance Historical Society had the privilege of hosting a fabulous fundraising event – an exclusive, private, pre-release screening of the movie *Unbroken*. All thanks to Universal and AMC! Those lucky enough to be in attendance, were one of the first in the nation to see this film about our Hometown Hero, Louis Zamperini. Both the Producer Matt Baer and the Zamperini family provided welcome introductions and post film Q&A. That night, Torrance also made headlines for the torrential downpour which caused flash flood warnings, stalled cars and businesses to be flooded in Louis’ ol’ stompin’ grounds of Old Torrance. While many thought the rain to be dreadful, it was a sign! When Louis was adrift on the raft,

with the sun above, circling sharks below, and dying of thirst and starvation . . . he whispered from his swollen lips – *If you save me, I will serve you forever.* Then, a light rain began to fall. Years later when he was reluctantly beneath the tent of Billy Graham, getting ready to dart out of there, that promise he made long ago, came to mind . . . followed by rain. He stayed. Forgiveness followed. *The rain stopped, as guests began to line-up for the movie!* We trust that Louis had a hand in this!

Proceeds from this fundraiser were dedicated to the *Louis Zamperini Trust Collection* at the Torrance Historical Society, and to other related events/projects.

It was quite an event for “Torrance” to watch the film of our Hometown Hero, *together.*

## Zamperini Invitational



There was a chill in the morning air on Saturday, February 28th, but that didn’t seem to bother the Torrance High School Track Team who were wearing throw back uniforms similar to the one Louis Zamperini wore when he ran track for Torrance High in the 1930s. The uniforms were graciously sponsored by the Torrance Historical Society & Museum and will be worn this year only in memory of Torrance hometown hero, Louis Zamperini.

The event was the 8th Annual Louis Zamperini Invitational Track Meet hosted at Zamperini Stadium. This meet was named after Zamperini to honor the WWII hero, Olympian, Humanitarian and track star of Torrance High School (Winter Class of 1935) who made headlines across the nation and put our city on the map with his record-setting running prowess. Torrance High Head Coach, Kyle Irvine, said, “This meet was a favorite of Mr. Zamperini’s. He’d always attend and bring along one of his Olympic Torches.”

After the flag salute led by Louis’ best friend, Jim Standifer, the first race of the day began with the Zamperini 5000 meter race. This is the distance Louis ran in the 1936 Summer Olympics in Berlin -- the same race, in which Hitler asked to meet “. . . the boy with the fast finish.”

Following that race, in memory of his grandfather, Clay Zamperini, ran in a symbolic four-man mile relay. Clay took the last leg of the relay carrying the very Olympic Torch his grandfather ran with in the Olympic Torch Relay during the Los Angeles 1984 Summer Olympics.

Grandson Clay Zamperini, 2015  
Louis Zamperini, 1935



## Message from Jamie Ruth Watson, President

A key component to the museum's success last year was our involvement in the movie UNBROKEN. From the first calls for research assistance, to the final screen credit which rolled at the end of the movie, we gave it our all in a grand way. Debbie Hays and her team soared! We now are the caretakers of the Louis Zamperini Trust Collection. How proud we all are for this honor.

The top public service activity, and the one which requires the most constant level of interaction, is the Third Grade Local History assignment requests for information. A station with guides, little treats and handouts is setup, but each child needs personal attention. They come in droves and spurts and are always assisted with great skill and patience by Janet Payne, the faithful Sunday volunteers, and the weekday specialists who spend most of their time with files and boxes in the Archives (AKA the backroom).

The Historic Resource Survey has moved out to the public in the form of three Public Hearings organized and presented by City staff at the Bartlett Senior Center. Work continues to fine tune all the documents so the public can utilize them in the near future.

April was National Volunteer Month and I want to give very special recognition to the fact that there would be no Historical Society if it hadn't been started by volunteers with a mission. Thanks to the Board and all those who have donated time, energy, ideas and so much knowledge and enthusiasm over so many years.

### THIS ANNUAL MEETING

Sunday, June 7, 2015  
11:30 AM

Lunch • Program • Election  
Meeting • Tours • Prizes

Stone & Myers Mortuary  
1230 Cravens Avenue  
(now the Volunteer Center)

**\$25.00** per person

Take a look at the past in a special  
adaptive reuse landmark - people  
have been dying to see inside.  
Look for your invitation in the mail.

### BOARD 2015-16 SLATE

President \*\*-----

1st VP - (Programs) **Janet Payne**

2nd VP - (Membership) **Michelle Polcari**

3rd VP - (Fundraising) **Debbie Hays**

4th VP - (Newsletter) **Leslie Cortez**

Secretary - **Ann Strong**

Treasurer - **Gene Higginbotham**

Financial Secretary - **Kurt Weideman**

Historian - **Joann Miyamoto**

Special Events - **Jill Maroney**

Museum Volunteer Chair - **Jerry Ronan**

Parliamentarian \*\*\*-----

\*\*THS By-laws provide for Board to appoint any vacancy not filled by election or resignation.

\*\*\*THS By-laws state the position of Parliamentarian is filled by appointment of President.



# Excitement at the Museum

On Sunday, February 8, was the third annual Tea at Two—a Valentine's Day Tea & Program at the Museum. An afternoon of tea, delicious delicacies and history were served, oh so dainty. Ladies arrived looking beautiful in their hats and tea attire. Once again, this was a sell-out event! The day included a program on Vintage Hats by collector, Janet Stancliff who asked ladies in attendance to model them. Each table featured a teapot from the private collection of Jamie Ruth Watson. There was a Vintage Boutique sale and opportunity to win Tea Party gift baskets. Mark your calendar for next year's tea—Sunday, February 7, 2016

## Tea at Two



## Girl Scouts Tour



## Mrs. Claus & Santa Visit



## The Peanut Man from Dodger Stadium

Known around the world as the Peanut Man from Dodger Stadium, Roger Owens has been entertaining baseball fans for over 57 years. Last November, Owens was at the Torrance Historical Society pitching peanuts over-hand, under-hand and around-the-back, telling tales, and signing his book - *The Perfect Pitch - Life Story of the Famous Peanut Man from Dodger Stadium*. Owens says, he doesn't mind "working for peanuts," and has tossed out well over two million bags of peanuts during his career at Dodger Stadium — and is still counting!



*Pictured left to right - Janet Payne, Jerry Ronan, Roger Owens and Debbie Hays*

**Torrance Historical Society & Museum**

1345 Post Avenue  
Torrance, CA 90501  
310-328-5392

[www.TorranceHistoricalSociety.org](http://www.TorranceHistoricalSociety.org)

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**Upcoming Events**

**Walking Tour of Old Torrance**

4th Sunday, May - October - 1:30 PM  
Starts at the Museum -Free-

*Note: Because of Memorial Day, May's Tour will be May 31st*

**Names on the Wall Remembrance**

Memorial Day - Monday, May 25 - 2:00 PM  
City of Torrance Veterans' Memorial Wall  
Torrance Blvd. at Maple -Free-

**Breathing Life into the Past**

**Annual Meeting & Installation of Officers Lunch**

Sunday, June 7  
Stone & Myers Mortuary (Volunteer Center) - \$25 pp

**Rock Around the Block 50s Celebration**

Thursday, July 16 - 5:00 PM - 8:00 PM  
Museum -Free-

**Late Night Thursdays**

Thursday, July 23 - Thursday, August 27  
Museum open until 8:00 PM -Free-

**4th Annual Summer Stroll**

Docent-led walking Tour of Historic buildings & a taste of what's inside

Thursday, August 6 - 6:00 PM  
Begins at Museum - \$30 pp

Spring 2015

