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Interview by Grace Gilbert

WHAT DID YOU THINK WHEN YOU FIRST CAME TO GULF TO BAY?

I first came here in 1958. We stayed up near where the office is for one year, then on the next street for a couple of years in a trailer. We stayed 3-4 months and then we'd go back north. That's about how long everybody stayed.

HOW DID YOU END UP IN ENGLEWOOD?

Joe and Rose Criss came down here and found the place. They lived in our town. When John was retiring, they said: "Come on down here and we'll save you a spot." So we wrote to them and they saved us a spot.

After his mother was gone, Joe Criss lived here for quite a while. Then they moved away and sold the place to Ruth and Charlie Hicks. She was from the same town as the Hicks up in Pennsylvania. They used to make jewelry and stuff and take it up north and sell it. They had all sorts of little houses painted different colors and they would rent them. They'd go mining and find diamonds and all that; she'd make jewelry out of the stones. She was very talented.

HOW ABOUT SHOPPING?

Tate's and Ainger's and the IGA store. There was no bank. We had to go to T or A to cash our checks. Mrs. Larson used to go every day to get our mail and deliver it. She'd come over and call us. Then we'd come to the door and pick up our mail.

GULF TO BAY ROADS: PAVED ROAD? ELECTRICITY?

Oh, no paved roads then. All gravel roads. The streets were all the same. We had electricity but we had to pay to the landlady. The power company wasn't in here. We had to pay 10½ per kwh. The last street (Estada) wasn't here on this side. Across the street was a snake haven - lots of grass and weeds and bushes. A lot of people parked their cars there. The Nighswanders - when they had their travel trailer - used to park there. When we bought the trailer, we were neighbors with the Nighswanders.

Our wells were only 12-feet deep. When we had a dry season, then the wells would go dry and the salt water would come in. So then we had to run next to Dube's. There was one good well up there and we'd all go there for our drinking water. The rest of the water for cooking - it was salty then.

HOW MANY PEOPLE?

When Red and Bea - bought the park, they had an old motor home and were going to Alaska and

stopped here on the way (they were from Marshall, Michigan and knew a lot of the people from there.) They went to Las Vegas - met some people there - the Polachiks - and then they came here and bought the park and then they left the Larsons to run it for them until they came back, when they took it over. After they sold it - he got drunk one day and threw the place for grabs - and she went and sold the park. She put it up for sale the next day and Shirley Ryan and Vining - they put up the money for Ruth Flieger and she bought the park. They backed her up. The place was sold the next day.

There were two other women who used to be in the park, Alita and Inez. They went to Alaska. When they went there, they had to tape up the trailers because the roads were all gravel - all the dust would get in.

They paved the road way later - Beach Road - when Ruth and Leo bought the place - maybe 10-15 years later. Most of them were gravel roads.

WHAT DID YOU DO ALL DAY?

F I S H ! Every day. We used to fish all the time.

They didn't have any auctions or anything like that, for park functions. Some made crafts. Others made afghans to sell. I used to make some jewelry, but I never put it up for sale. I made napkin holders and gave all my family one each - they were a lot of work to make. I gave a lot to my friends - a lot of the ladies in the park.

A lady who was a schoolteacher - taught us craft work. She was Mrs. Ona Dickey. Ona and Virge Dickey. She was right at the corner- Cielo St., a good teacher. She'd show me different things to make by the hour. She was here for at least 10-12 years. So every trailer had a lot of things she taught them to make. She was much older than us.

WHAT DID YOU DO AT NIGHT?

Nothing. Go to bed. Sure, there was nothing to do. Went to bed 9-10 o'clock, listened to the news on the radio. We had a little television in the trailer.

There were no park activities at that time. We'd come in, you'd sit at the table - remember the dark wood at the hall - the landlady lived back of it. People would come in and sit around the tables. She'd have cakes and coffee.

None of the men ever went hunting around here - they were just fishermen. We used to go to Placida and fish and shrimp off the railroad trestle. A whole bunch of us from here. The roads weren't good from here to there, although they did blacktop.

I remember we went to Sarasota with Red and Bea one day - they were working on the road and he was going about 85 mph in the gravel and big piles of dirt and chuck holes. Bea was hollering at him coming back: "Red, get Sophie the keys to drive!" So he gave them to me and I drove home.

WERE THERE A LOT OF PARTIES?

Everybody had their parties in their own trailers. The landlady didn't allow anybody to drink anywhere outside. You couldn't just sit outside your trailer with a drink. No. You had to be inside.

INTERESTING PEOPLE?

There were a lot of old-timers and they just fished, too, or shrimped. Mrs. Harrison used to go out shrimping with her little net and catch shrimp in the shallows. There were no homes around here. She'd catch shrimp and wade in the water way up by the bridge. It was all shallow - you could walk anywhere there.

WATER PIPES:

They just ran the pipes in the summertime so we didn't see any of it. When they put in the sewers, I took photos of it. But we'd go home and they'd do a lot of things around here.

They had all the old pipes - they were corroded from the salt water. So when they put the water in, we could hardly get any water. Not until George Hommel came here and he put new pipes in each row. He put new pipes - plastic - in place. The other pipes were big, but they had a little bitty opening, you know, no pressure.

GASOLINE PUMP

We used to have a gasoline pump here. It was down by the dock. We were allowed. A truck would come over and fill up the tank.

TRAILERS ON THE WEST SIDE OF BEACH ROAD

I don't know what year that happened. After the park was bought - they put in water and septic tanks and then rented those spots. Most of the folks that used to go there are gone now. There was a big changeover. There were no permanent buildings. Most of them just came for six months and then they'd pull out.

Some of them had trailers made out of masonite. There was one - Cheri Rose lived in that trailer - when they both died, they took the trailer apart and found it was masonite. So you can imagine. It was warm. Lots of other people stayed in tents.

DID ANYONE EVER GO SWIMMING MUCH?

Mostly we went fishing, but there were a lot who went in the water. A lot of them came from Chicopee where they used to swim a lot, so when they came here, they'd go swimming. There used to be a bunch of women sitting out on the beach, but that was much later. I never

went swimming - I only went fishing.

FAVORITE FISH TALES

My favorite fish to catch was grouper. We went out in the gulf with Dorothy and Vaughn. We got so many grouper one time - I have pictures - with Swickards. We're standing there, holding them and they got jaws on them!

We went with Swickards and Dorothy and Vaughn, he was backing up his boat because you have to keep going to troll. He had no prop. Vaughn had to tow him all the way back. We were way out of sight of land.

We had so many grouper - we gave them away. People would come up and they would pose with the picture. We would turn around and the grouper would be gone. Vaughn said to us to put some away for ourselves before they're all gone.

It was a lot better fishing then. We - Dorothy and I - were slipping and sliding on the fish in the boat. We were pretty good friends. They were nice neighbors and nice company. We were friends for how many years - and still are.

Nighswanders: They put in a lot of work there. When Joe Walker had it, he didn't put a penny into it. There were holes in there and everything and rats... he had them finches, birds and in the back he had a cage. All that seed and everything - he had rats and mice. They had a heck of a time cleaning it up. He had eggs hatching - birds laid eggs and little ones hatched. HE had half of that porch for a cage. He was the bird man. And Marcia's son in law helped Vaughn rebuild. The floors were terrible- he had to rebuild them. And fumigate it from the birds. He made a beautiful place from that.

OTHER PETS

They used to have dogs around. We used to have a dog when we first came here the landlady loved them. She used to go over and play with them. Jeanette Blanchard and her husband used to try to coax that dog out of the car - we had a station wagon. He would turn around and walk away from them! He'd ignore them! We had a Brittany Spaniel - liver and white, named Rex. We never let him go fishing with us in the boat. It's too hot in the boat and dangerous - he could get stuck with a hook or something. He did like to go in the water, though. He'd run in the water fine. We never took him in a boat. He was a bird dog. My husband used to go out and get pheasants and quail and ducks - that was his job. The dog loved that! When my husband picked up his gun - the dog was ready to go! They only went hunting up north. Fishing only was for here.

WHAT DID YOU DO WHEN NOT FISHING?

We'd go to Naples and Fort Myers. The trip to Ft. Myers of 45 miles took much longer when they didn't have good roads. They had single lanes then, there were four lanes. Finally they put

in the expressway. A visit took a long time to get there, then.

We sometimes went to Sarasota, but it was so crowded all the time. There were good eating places - we used to go to eat a lot up there. But that was really crowded. It would take you forever to get there!

COOKOUTS?

We only had one every once in a great while. We had dinners at the hall, but that was after people started buying in. There were no dinners before then. There wasn't any community spirit, either. People started buying in, lived here longer and then had dinners and all. Ethel Cross's husband used to be a great cook. He used to make roast beef dinners. We used to have 100 - 110 people in the hall. Emery Gravelin used to be the potato masher. He was a little man who had a great, big masher. He had to get up on a chair to mash'em. He used to boil the potatoes and then mash them by hand. No electric things. We used to have a lot of dinners. Christmas Dinners, we'd put out the stuff she had, and make a punch - they let us drink in the hall on that day when that gang came in.

Before that, with Larson and Ruth Flieger - she wouldn't let anyone drink in the hall because she said that if anyone got hurt, they'd sue.

GRASS/LAWNS

We always had grass alongside the trailers. Everybody cut their own. The way they cut it today, I don't know ...

AGE RESTRICTIONS/CHILDREN

We were the youngest ones in the park at one time. There were no age restrictions. I was in my 40's and we were here - there were a lot that age. The owner was my age. They didn't have any restrictions. No children, though. They'd come like now - vacations only for a week or two to visit their grandparents.

They wouldn't take anyone with children, though. the trailer. You see, you couldn't have the school bus come here just for one child. This was a trailer park with restrictions.

HOW THE PARK IS RUN

Before, nobody was boss. We had our main bosses who told us what you could do and what you couldn't do. Today you've got ten bosses - each one tells you something different.

HOW LONG HAVE YOU BEEN ON BAYO?

We bought this in 1968 and we had a trailer on this spot for a year or two. Then before that we pulled our own trailer back and forth. We stayed under the tree (Dowdell's) for five years. Then

we stayed where the pump station was - around the Grants. We lived across from that. Then we lived on back of the hall for five years. They had just a hose to hook up. When they couldn't find a place for us, they put in a sewer. They had to open it up and put in a septic tank. We stayed there for at least five years.

Oh, we stayed everywhere in this park! We had a lot of fun. That's why we stayed here. They were all good times. We got along with everybody. It was always worth it driving down in even the worst weather. I didn't mind driving back north in the spring. We'd go home and the roads were good. When I started driving, we'd leave in October - before November 1st. I drove fifteen years alone. My husband couldn't drive because he had a stroke. Then for about ten years after he passed away I drove down by myself. I wasn't going to stay up north. By October I was gone. Fifteen hundred miles each way. I still have my license with no accidents. Perfect score. I never got a ticket for anything. I'd start out in the morning and drive two and a half days and then I was here. Oh yes, I stopped for the night. I wouldn't do it today. Too many things happening on the road.