

MARIAN KIMREY
Matanzas Inlet Restaurant
St. Augustine, FL

Interviewer: Anna Hamilton

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Location: Kimrey residence

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[Begin interview]

Anna Hamilton: [00:00:00] This is Anna Hamilton. Today is Tuesday, August 16th, 2016 and I'm here with Marian Kimrey to talk about the river, growing up here, her parents building the Matanzas Inlet Restaurant, and working as the bridge tender for Matanzas Voices. We are at her beautiful home, right on the river. She has the best view in town. I'm going to ask you to tell me who you are and a little bit about yourself.

Marian Kimrey: [00:00:40] Okay, I am Marian Andrew Kimrey. My mother and father were Sterling and Shirley Andrew. They built the Matanzas Inlet restaurant. Our family has been connected on both sides. The Florida Cracker side—my mother, her family is all from Cartersville, which is directly west of here and no longer exists as community, but it was there for many years. My father's side were all Minorcans and they have always been up and down this river fishing and hunting and turtle egging and you name it. But we've always been part of this community here.

AH: Talk about a native Floridian.

MK: Yes, yes.

AH: Well, let's start with your parents. Would you mind telling me a little bit about your mom's side of the family?

MK: [00:01:45] Okay, my mother was Shirley Davis Andrew and her family was Lawrence Davis. That was L.O. Davis, the sheriff's grandfather. My mother was his sister. That side of the family, my grandmother's side, came from Cartersville. My Davis side came from Moultrie. My grandparents spent their honeymoon at Washington Oaks area. There was an old house the—a DuPont house that was used sometimes as wayside house. They spent their honeymoon there, so we're directly connected on that side. My father's side, Andrew, was old-timer Minorcans from St Augustine. He had the Blue Herring restaurant before he moved down here and built this.

AH: [00:02:56] Where was the Blue Herring?

MK: It was on Anastasia Island and a well-known restaurant there. The reason they came here to build their restaurant was L.O.'s wife's father bought the property. All of this property on the south side of Matanzas Inlet except for where Summer Haven was in 1950 to develop this into a housing, marina, restaurants and everything. Daddy and Mother bought the property from Mr. Sturche and he began the restaurant here. Mr. Sturche passed away and so the development never materialized. But Jeannie Fitzpatrick had a copy of the planned development. I don't know where

she got it. One day we were looking at and it was just amazing, what he'd planned. All the streets were laid out and the places. There are three houses on Gene Johnson Road; two of them still exist over there that he built. That was as far as he got.

AH: [00:04:10] That is so interesting, how Jeannie seems to have a lot of artifacts.

MK: Yes, she does, I seem to think I had a copy of it but I don't know where it is. I looked but haven't found it.

AH: How big was the size of the lot that your parents bought?

MK: I'm not exactly sure, I think that what we have remaining is like two and a half acres, something like that.

AH: Is this home front or the whole?

MK: It is this, this mobile-home park and the restaurant part. It wasn't a huge thing. At that time, [inaudible] was strictly a wild nothing. It was sand dunes and marshland. It was where we used to get our fiddler crabs and where we'd roam through and pretend we were wild Indians and things. Mother and Daddy found a home here and never left. They stayed here until they passed away.

AH: How did they meet?

MK: They knew each other forever in St. Augustine. At that time St. Augustine was so small and Mother and her family lived there, and Daddy and his family, and I guess just kind of—we grew up, we knew everybody. Daddy went to St. Joe's; Mother went to Ketterlinus. They just knew each other and had mutual friends and ran away to get married in Bunnell.

AH: [00:05:42] Exotic location.

MK: [Laughs] Yes. I guess the thing that intrigues me the most is the fact that this whole area has had such close family connections with us. My dad, when he was a young man, and L.O., they were friends, very good friends, would actually row from St. Augustine down here. They would use the tides to get down. They would camp out. They would fish, hunt things and then take things back to St. Augustine. Especially during the depression, they never went hungry they said. There was just always food available. They knew where to get it.

AH: [00:06:35] So what did that mean to them?

MK: It meant a secure life, basically, with their families. I don't think St. Augustine was hit by the depression like other parts of the country. I do know that my dad and uncle both were hoarders after that; they kept every nail, piece of lumber that could get their hands on. Anything like that was stored and kept in case you needed it. But, as far as this being a real depressed area, I don't think it was. I mean all the houses had gardens, they fished, they hunted and I think it was just that the land provided for the people from around here.

AH: [00:07:33] Why do you think your parents chose to move down here out of everywhere in the county or this area of Florida?

MK: Well, first of all, the opportunity to build the restaurant, their own place and work. They worked hard. My husband, when we first got married, Mother and Daddy were getting ready to sell and Jim kept saying, 'Let's buy it from them, we'll do that.' I said 'Jim, I've watched it kill my parents.' They worked seven days a week, twenty-four hours a day practically and even though they loved it and the people loved them and they were very successful, I just did not want that kind of life. I was caught between living down here with them on weekends and living in town with my grandmother during the week when I had to go to school. Summers I was here, but it was just not the kind of life I wanted for my children. They loved this. My dad, he would sit on his porch and look out here and that's all he wanted to do, to look at this inlet. He loved to fish. He taught me everything I know about fishing and how to get stone crabs.

AH: [00:09:04] Now, you mentioned that you had helped your dad when you were young to get stone crabs, how did you do that?

MK: Well, my job was basically was, thanks goodness, to sit on the bank. There was a large mud bank along here and dad and L.O. and different ones would all go and get in the water. They would feel around and find the stone crab holes, sometimes they even had to go under. They would take an oyster shell and put it between their two top fingers and run it in there so that if he's bit, he'd have the shell protecting them. They would run their hands over the top of him and grasp him and bring him out. We were on the top of the mud bank and they would put him up there and we would take the one claw, we were always taught just one claw and then release him. So we were sort of the bag carriers and the catchalls. Also, down at what they call Rock Beach now, you would find them under the rocks and we would get them and bring them and Daddy and Mommy sold them in the restaurant. We ate a lot of them ourselves. Still do if we can get a hold of them.

AH: What a luxury to have fresh seafood from this area nowadays. We don't see that often anymore.

MK: [00:10:32] Daddy, that was one of the things he was adamant about, if it wasn't fresh, then it was never served. He had a fellow from over where Washington Oaks is now, he was a caretaker over there, and he would bring Daddy flounder. Daddy told him, 'I'd pay you more if you would clean them' and he said, 'I don't know how to clean them that well.' Daddy bought him knives and would stand out here behind the restaurant and teach him how to clean the flounder and then after that he would bring Daddy just fresh filets when he would get them. But Daddy would not serve anything that was not fresh and we were never allowed to eat seafood at other places, other restaurants unless Daddy knew it because he said that's why most people hated to eat fish or hated seafood was because they didn't get fresh seafood.

AH: Was he afraid that it came from somewhere else or that you might get sick because it wasn't fresh?

MK: I don't think it was fear of getting sick, he just said that if it's not fresh it doesn't have a good flavor. He was a master at it, he was. His restaurant was very popular; you can ask your dad. [Laughs] It was a small place. It was not as large as it is now over here and they just catered mainly to local people. That's what kept them going because you can imagine that back in those days down here in the wintertime there were not tourists. Actually, I don't think Daddy and Mother ever had any kind of tourist business. It was just local.

AH: So did they just work in the summertime?

MK: No, they worked year round. Now, Daddy would take a month during hunting season off. Then sometimes a week or two here or there, but he had friends that would help out. When I was in college, that was another hindrance because Mother and Daddy had to work all the time and couldn't come up. I was in Tallahassee and they couldn't come up that often. But every once in a while they would say, 'We're going up for a weekend' and people around here who knew them well would just come in and take over the restaurant for them, and they'd go. It was that kind of relationship. We had it with all the people around here; at Summer Haven, everywhere. As we were younger, we'd go fishing, mullet fishing, on the beach and we'd come back and have a load of mullet and let everybody know and as soon as Mother and Daddy closed the restaurant, we'd be out there cleaning fish and breeding fish. Daddy would cook them in the cookers in the restaurant and everybody would bring covered dishes and we'd all get together and eat together. That was mullet on the beach.

AH: So you'd have like a picnic in the restaurant?

MK: Yes. Just local people, people who lived at Summer Haven and around here.

AH: [00:13:46] You talked about the stone crab and the flounder, what are the other kinds of things that your parents would have served at the restaurant?

MK: Back then they would serve steak. They got that from the little meat market over in Hastings. Lovett's, I believe it was. But fish, shrimp. I said if I had a nickel for every shrimp I ever cleaned or breaded or whatever, I'd be the most wealthy person. But seafood was their specialty. That was what they were most known for. I do remember times when he had lobster on the menu, but that was something that I don't think was a standard thing. And his clam chowder.

AH: Minorcan clam chowder?

MH: Yes, the Minorcan clam chowder was at the top of their sales. Mother made a French dressing. She never would share the recipe and I do have it, but she never would share it [laughs] and everybody would buy it and take it home with them for their own. I found that years later. I asked her, 'Why didn't you ever market it?' She said 'Because the base of it was Duke's French Dressing.' She says, 'I couldn't do it because it was somebody else's base and that she'd take it from there and create her own.' So she missed out again on that. [Laughs]

AH: Did you have a favorite thing to eat at the restaurant?

MK: Probably hamburgers and French fries [laughs] and shrimp. I still love shrimp, that's my favorite. But I would say yes, that would have been it. But I was such a picky eater. In town where we lived, we had a huge family around us. I had an aunt across the street, L.O. and Nina lived next door and then I had cousin next door to that and then one down the street. I lived with a blind grandmother and so every day I'd kind of just go around to see who was having what for dinner. Whoever had something I liked, that's where I ate. [Laughs] Down here though, it was mainly just the restaurant. Then I worked at Marineland for all my college years.

AH: Oh, and what did you do at Marineland?

MK: I was a hostess in the restaurant and I loved it. Loved it. Everything down there, a lot of the old timers were people we knew forever and they worked down there. They would take their lunch breaks and then come down here. We used to laugh about that, that they had a nice restaurant down there, but they'd come down here and eat with Mother and Daddy. I did that because Mother would have always let me off when she probably needed me to work if I had worked for her. The kids were all going to the beach and I'd want to go, she'd have said, 'Go'. If I worked down there, I'd have to work and I wasn't taking away from her, so she had my cousin Peg and some of them that worked for her. It worked out much better.

AH: [00:17:43] It did. So there wasn't any tension that you worked at someone else's restaurant?

MK: No, not at all. Mother and Daddy loved everything to do with Marineland, too. There were always people down there coming here to eat and they knew everybody that worked down there. When Mother and Daddy sold the restaurant, Daddy worked at Marineland for about four years as a bartender in the Moby Dick lounge.

AH: And that had the ship? Can you tell me a little bit about that restaurant? Because I was very small when it finally closed.

MK: I can, it was just a wonderful experience. I was there the day they started the ship and it was so funny, they had brought in all these engineers from New York and they had planned the ship and all. They get it all set up and they turn it on and it doesn't work. It just sat there.

AH: What was it supposed to do?

MK: It was supposed to rock. It was supposed to go down just like a ship would in the water and come back up and it did. Not a huge rock, but it was just a gentle rock. Everybody's standing around trying to figure out what they are going to do. These engineers are looking, they're searching and somebody said, 'Go over to the shops in Marineland and get Wally.' I'm trying to think what his last name was. He was fantastic though, just an old country mechanic. And so they brought Wally. Wally worked a few minutes and he adjusted something and did something else and the next thing you know, it's rocking. They were so amazed that they finally got the rock back in the boat. The Dolphin Restaurant had fantastic food. Joe Kevowski [note: unsure about spelling] was the manager and he was something else. He knew exactly what he was doing down there and after he left, the place just—I didn't work after that. I had already graduated then. Just kind of went down. It just was never the same.

MK: [00:19:59] I've heard that the rocking bar is in storage somewhere in Orlando I think. I'd give anything—My husband and I went down to Ormond Beach not long ago. We were talking about, how we wished that it was still there. We'd love to sit there and have a drink and look out on the ocean. It's missed.

AH: I agree. I think it was for sale, or it is for sale.

MK: The bar?

AH: Yeah, my dad sent me something. I'd have to ask him. It's been several years at this point.

MK: Oh I'd love to know what happens to it. There is a thing on Facebook, 'Friends and Family of Marineland,' and it comes up very often. The one thing I have noticed about that site is that everybody that's on it. I don't care whether they worked there in the forties or in the nineties, said that it was the greatest job they ever had. No matter what they did over there, that was the greatest job.

AH: Why do you think that is?

MK: It was just like a family. It was the most fantastic thing. You knew everybody, everybody cared. They cared about the animals, they cared about the facility. It was always kept in pristine condition and I think it just showed the pride that the people and the community there had. I didn't even know who the owners were. I had no idea. I know who managers were because that's who we dealt with. So they evidently knew how to pick managers. It's missed. I wish those days—that my children and grandson could see it.

AH: [00:22:08] What years did you work there?

MK: I worked there in '63 to '67, '68. My college years.

AH: And that was kind of the heyday?

MK: Yes it was.

AH: Do you remember any particular customers that would come in?

MK: Yes, one of my favorites was—Sterling Marsh was a racecar driver and his parents would come every summer and they would stay a couple of weeks and they were just as nice as they could be. That's all they did, they just stayed around there and venture through everything. I remember—I think it was the last year I was there or the year before, they came and before they left, they left a tip for every single person that worked at Marineland. I don't care if it was somebody over in the offices or somebody over in the shops, whatever. Divers, all of us.

AH: Oh my gosh. How many people worked at Marineland?

MK: They had the restaurant, they had the motel, they had the facility itself, but then they had the office, the shops that did all the maintenance and everything like that. Groundskeepers—it was a large group and most of them were, they all were, local people who had worked there for

years. Some of them, that's all they had ever done was work at Marineland from the time it opened in the forties right on up until the end.

AH: [00:24:06] You mentioned that your dad worked there.

MK: He was just a bartender, and he loved it just as much as we all did, at the Moby Dick Lounge. He would take me down there from the time I was a small child. I remember seeing when they set up the tanks in the back and they would be training the porpoises. They also one time brought in a—a hippopotamus and they were going have it as part of the facility where you could come. His name was Bruno and he was still a baby. We would go down there and in the afternoons they would be feeding him and we could tap on the side of the place where he was. He would come over and he wanted attention all the time. Then he got to a point where he would come over and he'd lay his head back and open his mouth real wide. What he wanted you to do was rub his gums. He was cutting teeth. [Laughs] He was the cutest thing. He had a problem in his intestinal track and he ate sand with his food and eventually it caused a blockage and they couldn't do anything. They had to put him down. I mean you always knew what was happening down there. I would be in the middle of lunch at the restaurant and somebody would come over and say 'You've got to come quick, we're having a baby over in the tank.' Everybody would want to quit doing what they were doing and rush to the tanks to see the baby. It was just wonderful.

AH: So Marineland was a really important part of everyday life, it wasn't just an attraction you went to a few times.

MK: Right, when my children were little, they'd come down and stay with Pop here on the weekends to visit. Daddy would just take them down there and give them his driver's license. At that time, St. Augustine and Flagler county people could go in for free. Drew and Jessica would go in and spend the day going around by themselves. They were just little tots, and then they would call Pop when it was time to come home and he'd go get them. He had no fear down there because everybody knew everybody. It was great. It went through two generations of us little ones.

AH: [00:27:18] Did you have a favorite person that you looked forward to seeing at Marineland?

MK: Yes, there were twins, and they were older men. Joe was so friendly and he was just the nicest person. Always into something and always had a tale to tell. I can't think of their last name, but it was Lloyd and Joe who were the twins. They had worked there since I think the beginning of time—I hope they got to finish their careers there before it closed down. During the summer, it was fun because it was college kids that were the divers. I was a college kid, so we'd all meet up after work and go to Daytona or whatever. That was a fun part too.

AH: Yeah, you got to work with your friends. So, when your parents had the restaurant, did they live here or did they live in town? Where did they live?

MK: They lived here, in the back of the restaurant. When they built the restaurant, they built a bedroom and bathroom in the corner of the restaurant on the back side. Years later Daddy added a little bedroom on for me, so that my friends and I could come down and stay. When they built the first concrete bridge, the people wanted to use part of their land for some of the equipment and stuff like that. So in return, they were going to tear down the bridge-tender's house. Daddy said that instead of doing that, just move it over on to our property and so he had it. It was sitting out there before [note: Hurricane] Dora came along. Dora moved it back a long ways. [Laughs] Then Daddy moved it further back. He used that as a rental. That was when he started renting property around here. Different ones who became friends of theirs that would come down and fish on the bridge mainly said, 'We would like to put a unit in so that we can just come down on the weekends or whenever we want to.' So Daddy started a little park and then when he sold the restaurant, he just kept this and then he and Mother lived here. They put a place in for themselves and lived here.

AH: So they were literally at the restaurant all the time? They lived there and you lived with your grandmother in town? Was that always the case or did you live here part of the time?

MH: Well, I would come here on the weekends. I would always come down on the weekends. He had work crews coming in as waitresses and he had to provide transportation to all his workers. So they were coming down and I would just come down with them. So I always came down on the weekends and stayed. Then on Monday I could catch the bus and go as far as R. B. Hunt and then a cousin of mine would pick me up and take me on to school on Orange Street or wherever I was going to school or Ketterlinus. The summertime I stayed down here the whole time and Christmas. Well not Christmas. They would take the week off at Christmas and come in. I will tell you one little Christmas story about being down here that I loved. When I was really little, Daddy had a waitress that lived down in the Hammock. He would have to take her home after work and I would ride with him. It would be right before Christmas, maybe after Thanksgiving, somewhere in there. That was the darkest road. I mean it was pitch-black. There were no houses or anything down there, nothing. I remember you could see the eyes of animals along there. I do know that there were panthers and things like that. Bud Daddy would always tell me that it was the reindeer getting ready for Christmas, so not to worry about it. It was reindeer down here and that's what you are seeing in the woods. I'm sure a lot of them were deer in the woods probably. [Laughs] It was a great existence. The people I got to know I guess is the most treasured thing. People from Gainesville, Palatka, Hastings, Jacksonville and Daytona. The restaurant was sort of the stopping-off point. On the weekends, the front porch of the restaurant,

there was a large front porch that ran along the whole thing with big chairs, and it would just be full of people. They would take turns. They'd walk up on the bridge, they'd fish for a while, then they'd come back down and they'd visit. Sort of a congregation place.

AH: What did it look like when it was first built?

MK: I have picture. But it was just a large—I thought it was large. Now that I look at it and go back into the restaurant and I look around and I think, 'This wasn't very big at all.' It was not. There was a front porch that ran the whole existence of it. On the south end, was what we called the bar side. It was a small area that went in the restrooms at the end of it, still there. He had a bar there and he served drinks, beer—you could get sandwiches over there too. He had fish and tackle and stuff in there. Then the rest of the restaurant was down at the northern part and again, like I said, I look at it today and I think that it wasn't that big at all, but it seemed tremendous. We would all be down on beach—I don't know how my parents did it. We'd be on the beach, in the water, sandy, wet, and we'd come traipsing through the restaurant to go back to where the bedrooms were, to where their bedroom was, to take a shower and change clothes. We had to have dragged the sand and stuff through, but they never complained, they never fussed. The part of the crew that worked for him would take us down the beach and babysit us while we were swimming so that we could go in the water. I think back now, that they had to have been saints.

AH: They let you have the run of the beach?

MK: Yeah, they did. When we got older, we all had some kind of transportation. Ellis Zahra that lived down in Summer Haven had what we called a 'beach buggy' and I had an old Jeep that Daddy had brought back from WWI. We would ride the beach all day long. I mean literally, before we had licenses. We'd drive from here to St. Augustine. Daddy would drive across the bridge because we weren't supposed to be on the highway. He'd drive us in the Jeep across the bridge and then we'd get on the beach and we'd be gone all day.

AH: How old were you when you started driving?

MK: Fourteen, but before that just around here, just in the backyard. But on the beach, I'd say fourteen. That was the love of our lives. Our rule was that you could pull someone out if they were stuck in the sand, but you could never charge them money. So we would have this cigar box in the Jeep and they'd ask us about that and we'd say, 'Oh, whatever you'd like to donate.' They would give us three dollars, five dollars maybe, and we'd put that in the box and that paid for gas. We had several friends that lived along the beach where we could stop and get something to drink and use the restroom or whatever. We were really just beach bums.

AH: So your days on the beach, you were just swimming and driving?

MK: We had mullet nets in the Jeep ready to catch fish if we saw fish. Actually, one time—and I have a picture of it. Your dad asked me if I had a picture. I was going to try to get a copy and I couldn't find it. I found it, I think, today. We found an old anchor across over here, but I wasn't part of that. I was working at Marineland when they found it. But they found it and they went over to tell the fort [note: Fort Matanzas] people and because they came up in a beach buggy and were all wet and sandy, and they were so excited, that they ran them off. They came over here and they were telling Daddy, and about that time the guys from the fort came over and they wanted to know what was going on. Daddy says, 'You've missed your luck. The kids have decided they are going to handle it themselves.' So they went over, and they and they had heard that possession was nine tenths of the law, so they tied a rope to it and had the rope come right up on the beach. They spent the night on the beach with the rope so that nobody could come steal the anchor. They knew they had a treasure ship. They went over here—Starvin' Marvin was just working on building some fish ponds where [inaudible] is today. He came over with this big thing that had a hook on it and they pulled it out. They had to cut the chain because it was probably attached to some kind wooden thing. But anyway, they got it and they brought it up here. Thought they had a real find. I think it ended up to be an anchor off a Confederate blockade runner or something. It wasn't as valuable as they thought. They sold it and I think they got like ten dollars each out of it. There was always something going on. You'd find something on the beach or something was happening.

AH: Who was it who found the anchor?

MK: Ellis Zahra from Jacksonville and Barry Norris from Hastings were out mullet fishing and they saw the prong of it. Peggy Davis was with them and Ellis's little brother. They were the ones that worked on getting it out. What a treasure.

AH: Was it just after a storm?

MK: I think so. It probably just washed out. The inlet is always changing. It changes daily. Two weeks ago, the sandbar over there was almost over here on the side. Now there is no sandbar in the middle at all. It's just gone. Change is constant and it just happened to be they who were out there catching mullet.

AH: Do you remember who bought the anchor from them? I wonder where it is.

MK: I think it disintegrated. See it was brought up here and it wasn't treated. They did contact some people from I think over in Gainesville and they came and looked at it and I don't think they deemed it being that important enough to do anything with.

AH: How big was it?

MK: It's huge. I'll show you a picture in a minute. I'll figure out a way to get that to your father. I don't know why he wants it, but he's asked me several times if I had that picture. I said, 'Yes I do.'

AH: He just loves telling that story.

MK: Well he'd probably come to eat when all these hooligans were out in the backyard running around with this thing. [Laughs]

AH: [00:40:41]What other kinds of treasures have you discovered in the river?

MK: None. The treasure is the river itself. That's the treasure. I guess you could call clams a treasure. I loved going clamming. I loved fishing, just getting back in the marsh and roaming through there and just looking at this inlet. You can't imagine that this still exists today. We can look out and there's nothing but trees and water, sand and sandbars. I'm so glad it's still open.

AH: That's uncommon to have this environment. We are lucky. Are the rooms that were your parent's bedrooms still active?

MK: No, they opened that up and it's part of the dining room now. That's why it just amazes me [laughs]. No they are not there at all. They built, I guess where the porch was, more on the front. I would say actually the whole space is twice as big as what it was. When you go in the side door, where you walk right into the bar, that all, that center part, was what the restaurant was. Then the rest was kitchen and restrooms and things like that.

AH: What was the daily workday for your parents like?

MK: I'm not sure what time Daddy got up, but it was way early. [laughter] I had to be at work at Marineland at seven in the morning and he was already up and I think he had already mopped and done all of that by that time. Then he was starting to prepare. They didn't have breakfast. Not in the first years. Later, they closed it off some and narrowed it down to where just he and Mother could run it. They would serve breakfast and lunch. Then it basically was just lunch and

dinner. Of course, they didn't close until nine and then they had the cleanup and things to do before that. Their days were all about it.

AH: How many staff people did they have? How many worked there?

MK: [00:43:35] During the summer, they probably had three waitresses. During the winter, they had sisters and they were basically only the only waitresses in the wintertime. In the kitchen, it would be like three. One person that helped Daddy with the cooking and then Pete. She was sort of ran the rest of the part. She would be breading or washing dishes or whatever. Then they had a black fellow who would help with cleanup and would help with putting stuff out that needed replacing, like beer things on the beer side. He was constantly doing thing like that. That was all. I still am amazed that it was as small as it was. That's what happens when you grow up. You realize things aren't as big.

AH: I understand that your mother's fried fish was famous.

MK: My dad's.

AH: Your dad's? I heard a few people say your mom's too. I'm not sure why that is.

MK: I don't know either. Mother was never a cook. [Laughs] Mother ran the front. She was sort of the social director, I guess you'd say. I don't ever, ever, know of Mother doing any of the seafood cooking. When she would come to town, St. Augustine, or later on when they had kind of retired, she did most of the cooking. But if fish were fried or shrimp were fried, it was Daddy that did it.

AH: [00:45:47] Why was it so famous? Why did people love it so much?

MK: I think it was just the fact that it was fresh. Daddy, what he was going to serve that day, he took care of that day. He breaded and had it ready that day. It was not something he'd hold over until the next day. He just knew exactly how to do it. Now, my husband is a pretty good fish cooker. He learned it from Daddy. It's all in the timing and making sure that you haven't overcooked it. Daddy was great at that. I don't know where he learned to cook seafood because even though he was a Minorcan and from St Augustine—I guess it was from when they had the Blue Herring is all I can guess—I was just little then. I remember flashes. A bit but not much. I know his mom and dad always had restaurants in St Augustine, but it was more Minorcan food: pilaus and I'm sure chowder was part of it. I don't think the fried fish and things came to play that much then. But he did know.

AH: Did he have a special ingredient, like a cracker meal or something?

MK: Well he used, and you can still get it—we get it at St. John's Frozen Foods, a cracker meal that is almost like a fine powder. Then he would double bread it. Most people don't do that today, they have a breading that you can just put the fish in and shake it up and it's ready to go. But the double breading, I think that it was such a soft breading. It was not heavy and overdone.

AH: [00:47:52] Does that mean that he dredged it and then did an egg and milk, and then did it again?

MK: Yep, not much egg, a lot of milk so that it was still not a strong, heavy coating. You always had to pat between times to make sure that it stayed on there. Otherwise he'd said that it would just slide off when he cooked it. He would put a little salt and pepper in there, but that was it. He didn't add anything else.

AH: Did your dad, you mentioned chowder—did his Minorcan heritage or your mom's Cracker heritage influence much of what they cooked?

MK: I'm sure his Minorcan did on the chowder, because Datil pepper was on every table in that restaurant.

AH: As a vinegar or a sauce?

MK: As a vinegar. He never put it in. Mother made the sauces, and she never put it in the sauces at all. But it was always on the table and of course it was always in the chowder. He had used sort of an Italian flair with it I guess you'd say because he always used thyme and marjoram in his chowder. I don't whether that was Minorcan influence. I think it probably was. It was a very simple recipe. It was just the tomatoes, the potatoes—a lot of people put bell pepper in it, but he never did that. But he knew what he was doing and the old timers used to tease him that he was forever saving clams. That he would just take clams on a string and run them around in it so that made it clam chowder. Now, he was heavy handed on the clams. He made sure you knew it was clam chowder.

AH: [00:49:58] You lived mostly, during the week, with your grandmother. Was that your dad's mother?

MK: No my mother's.

AH: What was her name?

MK: Jessie Davis. She was a Carter, Jessie Carter Davis. She was raised in the little community of Matanzas, which is just south of Pellicer Creek. That's why I say that the whole family had a—I found in her family bible that she was born in Matanzas. I was so excited that she was born at Matanzas Inlet. How wonderful was that? Then later I found out that there was a community of Matanzas and that was where her dad had settled. She had a story. When she was real little and they lived there at Matanzas she said that there was a real bad, I guess it was a nor'easter, and someone came to the house and said that there had been a shipwreck on the beach and that they needed help. They needed people to come over and help. She said that they left and they went, and this was the first time I ever heard the term 'haulover.' She said they went by the haulover and came over to the beach. She said that they got there after dark and she was real small and she was walking on the beach and sliding. All she could think of was that she was sliding on dead bodies or something. She said it scared her to death. The next morning came, and it was bacon and meats from the ship that had washed up on the beach and that was what it was. Anyway, there had been deaths involved in it. But they had gone over there and helped do what they could. She always thought that they buried the ones who had passed away in a group grave. She always thought that when they built Marineland and they found these skeletons there that it was probably that. Well, since then we have learned that that was an Indian thing. But she always thought it might have been from that. She said that they spent two days over on the beach trying to salvage as much as they could, to try to get help as much as they could. If you think of the distance, it would have been south of Marineland and the only place close would have been St Augustine to try to get some kind of help. All the people from communities over in there were on the beach helping. It was the Vera Cruz and I do have copies of the stories about the sinking of the Vera Cruz.

AH: That is so neat, such a vivid memory.

MK: Yes. She used to fascinate us. We'd sit around and she'd tell that story and it was so fascinating to us. But that's what she said, that she was so scared as little one. But again that ties everything in around her.

AH: I know, it's just like a quilt. Did she come down with you on the weekends?

MK: No, she was blind and by that time she was very elderly. Years before that, when I was a little girl, before Mother and Daddy built the restaurant, we'd go and stay at Summer Haven every summer. She would come down then and stay down at Summer Haven with us but by that time, she never wanted to leave home when she got that old. She would come to Summer Haven. She and her husband spent their honeymoon there. Of course, if you think of where Cartersville and Matanzas are compared to where Washington Oaks is and that area was where they spent

their honeymoon. They just crossed the haulover and come over onto the beach and stay. So she was connected with this and she loved Summer Haven. My whole family did.

AH: That 'haulover' being the dredge?

MK: It's where they had the dredge. It's where there was marsh probably. You had the Matanzas River which went so far, and the Timucua River, and then in between I'm sure there was heavy marshland. There may have been an area that was higher and they could come across with wagons.

AH: That's a new term for me too.

MK: I found a very old map that was showing the different homeowners along the Matanzas River or along this area. On it, it has the 'haulover' and I said, 'Well there it is, that's what she was talking about.'

AH: Was that an agreeable life for you to be able to live in town for the week and then come down or was that hard?

MK: No, I had the best of both worlds. [Laughs] I really did. I had this wonderful beach to come to any time I wanted to and in town I had a huge family. A large family. I never missed out on anything. Like I said, my uncle was the sheriff. They lived right next door to where my grandmother and I lived. I had cousins, all those—and then Doug Harley who was the school superintendent and he was my cousin. He lived right across the street. I got to go to every sporting event that was ever in the world because of him. It was a great existence. The only thing I missed was never having a brother or a sister. I always wanted a brother or a sister. But I had great cousins. I had one cousin, Peggy Saz that lives right down here now. She lived right next door. So we were like sisters. Another friend Judy Harvey, she lived right down the beach and she was sort of in between. At that time, there was nothing along here, especially in the winter time, and so Judy and I were real close friends and that gave her the opportunity to have someone close by. This was a lonesome place in the wintertime.

AH: But your parents were here.

MK: Yes, but what I'm saying is that as far as activities and the kids and stuff—because in the summer, every house down in Summer Haven was rented. So the place was just full of people. Crescent Beach was rented. Everything down there was rented. So it was full of people. As kids, we just all kind of intermingled, but during the wintertime, everybody was in school and very few people down here. Except for the people who'd come to eat at the restaurant or fish.

AH: Who taught you how to throw a cast net?

MK: My dad.

AH: Did he knit cast nets also?

MK: Yes, he did. I've given my grandson all his knitting tools and everything hoping that one day he'll have the opportunity to use them or just enjoy them. He made a net, and Sterling has it. Sterling was born on November 1st and Daddy knitted a net for him that he gave to him for his first Christmas. It was about this big [Note: makes a gesture indicating a kid-sized net]. [Laughter] Sterling has it now up in his room at home, at his home. But yes, he'd sit right on that porch and knit nets.

AH: [00:58:46] Where did you go to school in St. Augustine?

MK: St. Augustine High School. I went through elementary school at Evelyn Hamblin which is on the west side of town, then Orange Street, and then Ketterlinus for one semester. We moved to the new high school in January and then I went on.

AH: Then you moved to Tallahassee to FSU? What did you study?

MK: Elementary Education.

AH: Is that something that you knew you wanted to do from an early age?

MK: Actually, no. I wanted to be an architect and I went to Gainesville to kind of find out about it and I was basically told that women don't need to be architects because women start having families and so therefore they drop out of the pool so, 'We wouldn't recommend you do it.' I thought 'What can I do?' I knew I wanted to come back to St. Augustine. I never wanted to live anywhere else. So I thought 'What can I do? Get an education and then come back.' Teaching was kind of ingrained in us anyway, because I had Doug, partly. He was quite an influence in my life. So I said 'Ok I'll do that' and I never regretted it.' I came back and taught at R.B. Hunt for a couple of years and then went and got my master's and came back and taught a Murray for twenty, maybe twenty-five years. Then I taught at Gamble Rogers for the last ten or so years. I enjoyed it.

AH: When did you retire?

MK: I can't tell you exactly [laughs]. My husband said, 'You will forget.' I said, 'Yes, I will. I will forget.' I don't know. I would say ten years ago. It's funny that you forget things like that, but it was not important. I was ready to just retire. He retired five years before I did. He kept saying, 'Yes sir.' I said 'Oh, I'll go back and help them. I'll do this or that. I'll help them out.' He said, 'Oh no you won't. I promise you, you won't.' And I haven't. I loved the years I spent and I loved the people I spent it with but it was time to get out.

AH: How did you meet your husband?

MK: He was dating a very good friend of mine and they broke up. I didn't see him for a while. Then I'm standing on the beach one day with a group and he came up. We got to talking and we started dating then. It's all history after that. He loved it here too and didn't want to go anywhere else. So, he became a teacher and a coach and we just spent our time here at this beach as much as possible.

AH: When did you all move here into this spot?

MK: Eight years ago, permanently. We'd already had done it, but eight years ago we just decided that the house in town was big. We had lost our son, and our daughter had moved to Savannah. So we said, 'We don't need this big house. Let's just go to the beach and stay down there.' It's worked out much better. We sold the place in town and came down here.

AH: [01:02:48] You were telling me before we started recording that this is the old bridge tender's house.

MK: Yes it is. We are real happy with it. It's small. It's precise. It used to have a bathroom there where that pantry is now. It has one little closet in this room here and there was no closet in the room over here. We put in a little half bath in there and a little closet. Then we built a bigger bedroom off the back for us.

AH: This is the original foundation?

MK: This part's not. That part all is. This part was added when we made this into a porch. We took the old porch and made it into a living room, but we sure enjoy it. In the wintertime, we get that fireplace cranked up and we don't have to do anything else, but stay around.

AH: You all own this part, that you live in, and do you own the restaurant site also?

MK: No. Mother and Daddy sold that, I want to say back in '75, maybe '72.

AH: Let me find it, I think you had said 1972.

MK: OK, then I think it must have been.

AH: Why had they decided to sell?

MK: It had beat them up. They were so tired. Mother was not in good health and Daddy—I think he was just ready. That's when he went to work at Marineland, just to have something to do. He loved to be around people. He loved serving people, so that gave him the opportunity to do that. He had worn himself out and so had Mother and I think they were just ready to give it up.

AH: Who did they sell it to?

MK: The first person was White. His last name was White. His wife's name was Ika, I remember that very well. She loved to fish for sheepshead on the bridge, and I think he was a retired Marine or something. They bought it. I'm not sure what happened, but I want to say that he—that was when Jim and I were going to school—I think he may have had a heart attack or something and passed away and then she sold it. She tried to keep it a couple of years and I think she sold it then. Sold it to a group from Palatka. Eventually I think to get out from under it, they had an arsonist come in [laughter] and try to burn it down. I'm sorry to say but the guy who tried was not very clever and he ended up catching himself on fire and I think he died as a result of that. But anyway, it kind of just sat still. Then, the couple that ran the marina and everything at Marineland bought it. He passed away. She ran it for quite a few years, two, three, four years, then Jerry and Jenny bought it. Jerry and Jenny have done a great job with it. It's been very successful with them.

AH: [01:07:04] Nice. So did the arsonist succeed or is that a different structure?

MK: No, it's the same structure. He really didn't do a very good job [laughter]. I think he burned himself more than he did the restaurant. There was some damage, but not much. It wasn't really that heavily damaged.

AH: I didn't remember that or I hadn't heard about it.

MK: But that did happen. That is true. There were two of them, and I think one of them ended up leaving him somewhere so maybe he could get help, but it was too late I think. They caught both of them and [unc? L.O.?] caught the other one and he did time. I think the people who owned it, one of them who owned it also did time.

AH: We've been talking for about an hour and I hope that's okay. I just have a few more questions. This is my favorite way to spend the morning. Do you still go over to the restaurant often?

MK: Not often, we go every once in a while. We go over and have a drink and an appetizer and visit with friends, but we don't go out that much. I mean why would you want to go? They have music, and what is so nice is that I can sit on my own deck and hear the music. [Laughs] That doesn't sound nice.

AH: That sounds pretty nice.

MK: I'm simply saying with no reasoning. My husband's not one that likes to go out that much, so we don't. They've done a great job and I have to commend them. They have a heck of a business.

AH: [01:09:16] It's true, it's a great place to have a beer and watch the sunset. When you go over there, what's good? What do you recommend?

MK: I always get the calamari. I like that and that's the one time I get to have it is when we go over there. We sometimes go over there for lunch. They have a great southwestern salad and they have a great hamburger. My husband will usually get the crab cake sandwich. Lunch, if we go, we go for lunch.

AH: That sounds good. This is backtracking a little bit, but one of the things I'm curious about is that there is a history in several different times in history, of smuggling, and rum-running and stuff. Did your parents see any of that?

MK: Well, they didn't see it because by the time they were down here all of that, prohibition, was over. My father was involved with prohibition because his father had bars and restaurants in St Augustine. Daddy actually would run—would meet rum-runners down at the Crescent Beach area, and pick it up and then drive back. I always wondered why my dad always had fast, expensive cars when he was young. One night, he broke down and told us that it was his job for his dad. That he would run, try to outrun—well he did luckily, otherwise he'd have been in jail. He would run stuff back into St Augustine for his dad. That was the first time I ever heard the term 'Plum Nelly'.

AH: [01:11:19] I don't know what that means.

MK: It was a little community, used to be another community down there called Plum Nelly. I said, 'Why was it called Plum Nelly, Dad?' He says it was because it was plum out of town and nelly to hell. He said he'd have to run through there on his treks. So that was our connection with it. Of course we always knew Gene had been the master.

AH: Gene Johnson?

MK: Gene Johnson, the master at rum-running. I've often wondered—I wished I could have asked Dad if he was who he would get his stuff from when he went. Daddy was, at that time too, going to school in New Orleans at Spring Hill. I think it was Spring Hill College. Anyway, it was a Jesuit school. He said that it was always his job going back to school—each time he went, he always took pairs of shoes in boxes which were actually things that he was smuggling into the Jesuit priest. [Laughs] He said that was part of his duty at school was to bring them back something from St. Augustine. A pair of shoes [laughs], that's the only thing I knew about that.

AH: [01:12:42] People like Gene were making it here?

MK: No I think that they would get it offshore and bring it in. They said that Gene was probably the Master because he could run this river at night in pitch black dark and never miss a lick. And if they were after him, he could drop it and he knew exactly where to come back to, even though it was pitch black and there were no markers. He would know exactly how to get back to it. That was the story I always heard about him was the master rum-runner.

AH: Did you know Gene Johnson?

MK: Yes.

AH: Would you speak a little about him? He is such an iconic figure for this area.

MK: What I knew about Gene was basically that I would go for Daddy down to Gene's and get oysters for the restaurant, and clams, things like that. So, it wasn't that I had real contact other than running errands from him. I did have contact though because when I was little, before Mother and Daddy built the restaurant, we would all come down and go to Gene's to eat. And so you would get to know him basically that way while he was cooking and stuff. He'd be telling stories, but I was really too young to pay attention to it. Years later, when Gene was very elderly, L.O. and Nina Davis built a little cabin area down at the end of Gene Johnson Road and we would go down there and stay when we would come home from college, just as a place to hang out and all.

[Portion redacted]

MK: That would have been the perfect time I think to get stories from him and history from him. I wonder if any of his family ever did. You know, sit him down and say, 'How did you get to this place?' 'How did you manage your first years down here?' Things like that. But that is really the only contact we ever had with him. L.O. and Nina knew him very well, and Daddy knew him well. It was never, I don't know how to say it. I don't know.

AH: [01:15:32] You've mentioned before that he was kind of a mentor for a lot of people who were down here.

MK: Who?

AH: Gene was.

MK: Like I say, he would help people get started if they wanted to learn to raise oysters, things like that. I'm sure—I know he took many people fishing. I've seen pictures of him with tarpon and things like that which makes me think that he was probably doing some guiding. Fish guiding. My cousin Peggy lives where his old place used to be, before they built on the remnants of his shack and the place where he used to cook the oysters. We would go down there and camp when our kids were little. He did a great job of setting things up for an outside restaurant. The floors were all coquina. I mean covered in coquina. He had built wonderful oyster cleaning tables. He was a master at that. They had wonderful food. I do know that. Of course, you read about it everywhere, the food that they prepared. I was still too young really to understand that. I know we went down and ate a lot, but I can't tell you about it.

AH: Well I don't think I have any more questions. Let me take that back. Let me just finish by asking about the next generations who are living here. You talk a lot about your grandson and how you want him to know what this place is and what it was like. What would you say to that next generation?

MK: To try to enjoy it as much as possible. It breaks my heart that we've limited so much, in St. Johns County, people enjoying our beaches. I have a list of all—at one time, the beaches accesses that St Johns County had and how many they've given away. I just hope that—well Sterling has a place right here, but I want other people to be able to enjoy the beach and to enjoy these waterways. It's fun for Jim and I to sit out here, and on the weekends watch the people over here, the dogs running, the children running and hollering and the boats all lined up along out here just everybody swimming having a good time. I think that my dream would be that Sterling would be able to come back here and be able to sit on that deck and catch fish and kayak

and surf and do all the things like that that he loves doing now when he's a grown man. Just keeping my fingers crossed. I've bestowed it on my daughter and son-in-law [laughs]. They'll have to do something with it. But I want him to go up in the marsh and dig clams. I want him to catch shrimp in a net up in there, bring home a bass and cook it. So that's my dream for him.

AH: Well thank you, do you have anything else you want to add?

MK: No, I don't think so. I've talked too much.

AH: No, this was great. Thank you so much.

[End interview]