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Ruth Deike oral history interview by Connie J. Brown, October 27, 2003

Ruth Sanders Deike (Interviewee)
Connie J. Brown (Interviewer)

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Connie Brown: —Sanders Deike, resident of Sulphur Springs, Florida, conducted in her home on 10-27-2003 [October 27, 2003] by C.J. Brown, graduate student in anthropology at the University of South Florida. Mrs. Deike lives in—

Ruth Deike: Plant City.

CB: Plant City. Now. Okay, first let me tell you how much I appreciate this and how excited I am that you’re going to share with us today. (inaudible) Oh, good! Let’s start out when you first moved to Sulphur Springs. Were you born in Sulphur Springs?

RD: No. I was born in—I was born in Tampa. My dad was working for the Atlantic Coastline Railroad and I was born in a little shack by the railroad track. Down there in Twenty-Second Street, somewhere near the Jackson Heights area.

CB: So you were born at home?

RD: Yes. Oh, yes.

CB: Okay. And when did you first move to Sulphur Springs?
RD: We moved there—we moved out to Lutz when I was still very small. Then from Lutz we moved to Keysville, and then to Sulphur Springs when I was in the fourth grade. I think that would have been—since I was born in 1921, I skipped the third grade, so I was in the fourth. I think it must have been around thirty-one [1931], something like that. We lived—we moved way down on the end of Twelfth Street. Busch Boulevard used to be Temple Terrace Highway, and it ended at Nebraska Avenue; after that it was a little dirt road, and that went out into Temple Terrace. We lived about—on Twelfth Street, about a block north of the highway there.

CB: Why did you guys move to Sulphur Springs?

RD: Well, it was during the [Great] Depression, and Papa was looking for work. We had traded our place at Lutz—site-unseen—for sixty acres out in Keysville. And anyone who’s been to Keysville knows there’s nothing there. We nearly starved to death. And then we moved into Tampa because the rest of our family was living there. We stayed with one of my brothers for a while, while Papa looked for some work. He was a carpenter—he did anything.

CB: Right, right.

RD: But he was a carpenter, basically.

CB: How many brothers and sisters do you have?

RD: In the first half of my family, there was six. There was four boys and two girls. And then my father’s wife died and my mom, who was seventeen, married him. And then there were four girls and two boys in our six. And my papa died in 1933: my mama had five of us and another one on the way.

CB: Oh, my. Did she have all of you at home?

RD: Oh, yes.

CB: My goodness. So, now had your mother always lived in Tampa, or in Florida, also?

RD: Mama came from Brooklyn, New York, when she was thirteen years old.
CB: Really?

RD: And they were caught in a hurricane or a storm off of Cape Hatteras and it just really frightened her about water, and she—it was all we could do to get her in the edge of the lake. Grandpa and them had a big orange grove out on Lake Stemper just south of Lutz. He had big orange groves out there.

CB: Oh, my goodness.

RD: And so, Mom was living there—by that time my dad was living in a section foreman house right there at (inaudible), which was a railroad crossing there at Stemper. From there we moved out to a place on the lake, on the nice deep lake there. Actually, just off Newberger Road, just north of Lutz. That’s the place we traded site-unseen for a place to farm out in Keysville.

CB: Oh, my goodness. Now which number are you of the—those children?

RD: I’m the second.

CB: Of the second set?

RD: Of the second set.

CB: Okay, so you have four younger ones?

RD: Yeah.

CB: Oh, wow.

RD: Oh, yeah, I know how to take care of kids. (laughs)

CB: So have you lived anywhere else besides Tampa, you yourself?
RD: Oh, yeah. I didn’t leave Tampa until I was—I think twenty-five. And then my son and I—when I got out of high school, I got married right away. I graduated from Hillsborough [High School] in 1940. Got married in August of that year, and my son was born in forty-one [1941]. And I had moved to Hudson as soon as I got married, because I married a boy from there. And everyone in Hudson was his relatives. There were twenty-one registered voters there at that time. And that’s the first place I ever voted when I turned twenty-one.

CB: Is that right? So how long were you gone before you came back to Sulphur Springs, or the Tampa area?

RD: When my son was about two and a half. I had my first divorce when I was twenty-one.

CB: I understand. And then you came back to Sulphur Springs?

RD: Yeah, I moved in with my mom. She was living on Klondyke Street then—just south of Waters Avenue. (inaudible)

CB: So, tell me about your first house in Sulphur Springs. First the one that you lived in as a child, and then the one—the first one you inhabited as an adult.

RD: Well, the first one we lived in—I can’t remember much about that, but we were living down at the bottom of Waters Avenue, in a little house. There’s a sinkhole there, and it was right behind this little house. And that’s where we were living when my papa died.

CB: Now, how did you come by that house? Did the railroad provide it?

RD: Oh, no, he—

CB: He had rented it?

RD: He had quit the railroad long before that.
CB: Okay.

RD: And he was doing mostly grove work and carpenter work when we lived in Lutz. At the time of his death, I was—I guess I was eleven. He was working on—during that time, he was working on the WPA [Works Progress Administration]. And—I guess [President Franklin D.] Roosevelt started that, I think.

CB: I think so, too.

RD: And he had to—people were starving to death. And they had sewing rooms where the women worked, and I know several of the dresses I wore to Hillsborough High School were clothes Mama made—and she and her friends made at the WP—at the—yeah, the WPA sewing place.

CB: Is that right?

RD: Yeah. My girlfriend and I, we’d buy little ties, bowties and things, and fix them up and starch them and iron them good.

CB: So, for those of us who don’t have enough background in it, were these clothes that were made for sale? I mean, give me some idea about this sewing room. I understand the CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps] and the WPA works, but I don’t quite understand how the women—

RD: The CCA came along—CCC came along a little bit later, when I was a little bit older.

CB: Okay.

RD: I believe they gave these clothes to the needy families.

CB: Okay. And was the fabric provided to the seamstresses?
RD: Which we were.

CB: Right. (laughs) Right.

RD: When we lived there on the bottom of Waters Avenue—at the time we moved in there, just across the street from us, still on the same side of Waters Avenue, there was a large American Legion building: a two-story building.

CB: Right.

RD: And they had dances there on the weekends, and one Saturday night after they closed up, a couple hours later the place was in complete flames. And that woke us up, the noise of the fire.

CB: Oh, my goodness.

RD: Woke us up because we were just across the corner from it. Our little house got scorched, but it didn’t get hurt in any way.

CB: Oh, my goodness.

RD: So they had never rebuilt on that when we—during the time I lived there in Sulphur Springs. After Papa died, we moved up to Eleventh Street.

CB: Okay.

RD: On the corner of Eleventh and Waters Avenue there was an Assembly of God church. And we moved in down the—north of that. Across the street from where we lived was a two-story apartment house, and that was the Foxworth Apartments. I believe that is owned by my friend Elise Foxworth; they lived on the corner. They were quite a large family, a very nice family. I think she had three brothers and two sisters. But I remember going over there, and they always—she made the best fudge, even when she was young.

CB: Oh, my.
RD: By this time, I was about twelve. And we were living up there when my sister, my youngest sister, was born. Mom was a tiny little woman, just five feet one [inch] and my baby sister was eleven and three-quarter pounds. And she was born at home, and I don’t know how Mom lived through that.

CB: I don’t either.

RD: But some of the ladies from the church were there; one of them was a midwife. And then Doctor Gale—he was a good doctor—he was in Tampa, somewhere in Tampa, and he was there taking care of her and finally he said, “Well, it’s all over but the shouting,” because I mean, everybody was praying. And of course for a twelve year old, I had to keep the water boiling and listen to all those groans and screams. It’s, uh—it’s really traumatizing.

CB: Yeah, I’ll bet.

RD: And it’s a wonder—I guess if I’d have known what caused babies, I’d never had any. But things were a little different then than they are now.

CB: That’s right. So, describe that house to me. If we were gonna go—is the house still there today?

RD: Uh, no.

CB: Okay, so describe it to me.

RD: We were—okay, this was—we were kind of on a hill, ’cause Waters Avenue is (inaudible) hill.

CB: Right.

RD: And people used to skate down that hill on that tar road. There were four houses built on this side of the hill, on the west side. The upstairs was level with the road, and then there was a walkway in between, almost like a drive that went down in between them and underneath was another apartment. And on August 17—a Saturday—1940,
four of those houses burned down. The one upstairs—at that time we were living in a
downstairs place. I don’t know why we weren’t upstairs, but we had moved downstairs
for some reason—probably more bedrooms or something. My husband-to-be and my
brother started to go upstairs, up the walkway to the street, and there was smoke coming
out the windows upstairs. So we had, oh, maybe ten minutes to get stuff out of our
house. The lady upstairs—I don’t know, I don’t think she—she was not home.
Something had been left cooking on the stove and—that’s what we understood. And I
won’t tell her name, but she moved in next door to Mama later, in a different place. We
were all so leery.

CB: (laughs) Make sure she wasn’t cooking again, right?

RD: (laughs) Right. But, I got married the next day. On the front page of the Tampa
Tribune for August 18, 1940—that was the front-page news—“Four Houses Burn in
Sulphur Springs.” My grandmother in New York—their name was Crouse—they were
the ones that had the big place out on Lake Stemper. Grandma had died, up in New York.
She was visiting up there with one of her sons, and she died up there. My mom had gone
up to Grandma’s funeral, and she was on her way back home on the train and she started
to buy the paper that day. She was trying to get back in time—I was supposed to get
married that afternoon. I don’t know why you can’t change these things when something
happened, (CB laughs) but you can’t. Anyway, Mom started to buy a paper in
Jacksonville when the porter came through with the papers, and she thought, “No, I’ll
wait till I get home,” because my half-brother was watching out for us, he and his wife.
She said, “He will have a paper there for me when I get home.” But can you imagine
what it would have been like for her? To see that paper, “Four Houses Burn in Sulphur
Springs,” and my name was on the front page because I had lost my shoes that I was
gonna get married in the next day.

CB: Oh, my goodness.

RD: But everything was piled up in the street from all of these houses, right up in the
middle of the street.

CB: Isn’t it amazing?

RD: Yes.

CB: Oh, gee.
RD: My half-brother, he was the youngest of that group; he was awfully good to us. They all were. They were so good to us. He went and he finally found a house and he got our stuff moved into it so that when Mama came home the next morning, when he picked her up he could bring her to the house. We had moved up on Klondyke Street.

CB: Oh, my goodness.

RD: He got the place there, and it was a nice neighborhood. There was a policeman and his family living right across the street from us. When we lived on Waters Avenue—backtrack a little. The Hensels lived the next street up Waters and just in the first block to the south of Waters Avenue. The Hensels lived there, and Mrs. Ranny had lived—they lived on the corner of Waters and—that would have been—maybe Tenth [Street]? Or Alaska [Street]?

CB: Ninth [Street]?

RD: It wasn’t Ninth. It must have been Tenth, because the next one—then up on that side was Eleventh. Because Alaska, or whatever that was, didn’t go through Waters Avenue. So anyway, Mrs. Ranny had chickens and we could buy eggs from them, and one of my best friends was her daughter Mary-Adie Shepherd. We became great friends later; we were all in school together. And I played softball with the Hensel girls, Gladys and Josephine. Boy, they were tough players, tough players. I think Josephine played shortstop, probably.

CB: Is that right?

RD: I played softball the summer—the last summer I was in high school. We had—just during the summer time, you know? And our coach was Orlando Marina, a wonderful fellow; all the kids loved him. He was a University of Tampa football player when I first met him, when he first started coaching us. And he was also a supervisor of the children’s home which was on Florida Avenue up near (inaudible) next to (inaudible) up near (inaudible) and he was sort of a supervisor at the children’s home and he—the kids just loved him.

And incidentally, when he came home from the service, many years later, I had—I was divorced, and I had a little boy four years old. He brought me the most beautiful engagement ring. He was a captain at that time. And I guess we just weren’t supposed to get married, because he got sick, and he thought he had picked up a jungle fever of some
kind, 'cause he was over in—he was in Korea. Because he brought a Korean boy home—he adopted a Korean boy, I think within the next year and brought him home. He got Congress to pass some kind of a bill to allow him to adopt this boy.¹ That is the boy that helped them so much. But anyway, we didn’t get married, and he went on to become a teacher—a priest—what is it, the Salesians [of Don Bosco]—what group is that? The Salesian Brothers. Anyway, Don Bosco—he went to the Don Bosco Seminary. He became a Salesian priest, teacher, and when he died—somewhere, many years back, probably twenty years back—he was still teaching over in the Bahamas, I think.

CB: Is that right?

RD: But he was a nice man. Let’s see now, where were we? Up on Eleventh Street—and that was just a block from the school. I could go out the back of our yard and walk across a lot, and I was in the school.

CB: Oh, my goodness.

RD: I loved it there. I was a good student most of the time. Yeah, I was a good student. Math I had a little trouble with, especially in the eighth grade. The sixth grade was my favorite. There was a—my teacher was a Mrs. Ruth Howard, and I just made straight A’s, because of the things that we had—I mean, the reading, the spelling, all of that came real easy to me. So everybody always said I was my teacher’s pet. But I just loved her. Seventh grade was harder ’cause we got into—I guess algebra. Math has never been one of my strong points, but I could memorize it. I memorized it and was able to pass all the tests, but I don’t know it.

CB: I understand that one. Earlier we were looking at a map and you were telling me your—something about your father helping build the racetrack—

RD: Yeah.

CB: —and one of the churches? You wanna back up and tell me something about that?

¹RD is referring to the complicated immigration acts of the 1940s and 1950s, beginning with the War Brides Act of 1945 and the subsequent Soldier Brides Acts of 1946 and 1947. These acts eventually lead to the passage of the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1952.
RD: Oh, yeah. Yeah, he worked on the racetrack; he was a carpenter. So, he was able to do that. And when we were still living in Lutz, we used to—we had a Model-T and we would driving to Sulphur Springs to the—they were trying to get a Church of God started. The one that has the—it was—the headquarters is up in (inaudible) Tennessee, I think—

And—so they bought property—they had—we went to a little mission right there on the corner of Bird Street and Thirteenth [Street]. There was—on the southwest corner there was a little string of buildings there, and Mr. (inaudible) had a store there. Next to it was a little open, empty building, and I can remember us going to little—a Brother Maguire had a little mission church in there. And we started going there, and then the group of the Church of God property across the street. And Papa—my brother, Willie Sanders, he was a preacher, and all of the family that was involved in anything helped to build that first Church of God that was there on that corner of Bird Street and Thirteenth.

CB: That’s wonderful. So what was the main area of Sulphur Springs like that you remember as a child? Describe, I guess, what we’d call maybe “downtown,” or—

RD: Yeah, it was the hotel, and it had the—it had stores. There was a ten-cent store right up on the top end of it on Nebraska Avenue, the last store on the end. One of the girls that I saw the first time I went to the Sulphur Spring reunion, Trudy Rudd, I remember for years she worked in that Mave’s department store, and soon after that first reunion, she passed away. I got to talk to her on the phone a couple of times. My mom had—she kept in touch with Mom a long time after the rest of us left, went different places. There was the big car barn—you’ve seen—have you seen pictures of the big streetcar barn?

CB: (murmurs in agreement)

RD: I think they had room for about four cars there, I’m not sure. They were streetcars, and that’s where they would end up at night. We could always go there and catch a streetcar out to downtown Tampa.

CB: Right.

RD: That’s what we did if we had a nickel.

CB: You had a nickel, huh?
RD: Yeah, that’s what we—

CB: How far did it take you?

RD: It went all the way down to—you could go all the way down to Lafayette Street and Franklin [Street]. In fact, if you could get a transfer—I think—I’m not sure what you had to pay extra for the transfer, maybe you did, but you could go all the way over to Plant Park and the University of Tampa. And, going up into there—and of course, at that time, the Fair, the Florida State Fair, was up there in that property near the university. Oh, that was really great, ’cause Momma would try to figure some way that each of us could have a quarter to spend at the fair.

CB: Oh, my goodness.

RD: Yeah, rides for a nickel.

CB: Isn’t that—

RD: And if we went on Children’s Day, the rides were free. So we could have that quarter to either waste on some of the betting, or eat some of the—we always took our lunch with us in a little brown paper bag, and that was a big thing. During those same years, our baseball—our softball team played in a tournament there at Plant Park—Plant Field. And we won.

CB: Oh, really?

RD: I remember playing—they came from [all] over the state, you know?

CB: Uh-huh.

RD: I’m not sure—that would have been in the late thirties [1930s] some time. I remember playing with both of my thumbs taped up because—back in those days—I played left field, or right, whichever way my coach thought the ball was gonna go, ’cause I just couldn’t hardly miss it. But we didn’t have gloves, ’cause you had to buy your own and everything.
CB: Right.

RD: But I can remember playing with my thumbs hurting so bad, but I’m pretty sure we won that series that time.

CB: That’s amazing. Well, take me back to the school, and tell me what it was like going to the school. Tell me what a typical day was like.

RD: Well I liked school. Back in those days, Mr. Bates was our principal. And he was a one-armed man—he could get out there and throw that ball and grab that bat from under his—part of his arm there and hit the ball. He could do so many things one-handed. He was such an inspiration. I liked him. A lot of the kids didn’t, but I liked him. When I was in the seventh grade, Mrs. Ruth Sansborough was my math teacher. Some of the girls and I used to walk over to her house and see her on Sligh Avenue from time to time, you know, on the weekends or something. She was great. And Mrs.—oh, I had her name right on the tip of my tongue. I lost it.

CB: (laughs) another teacher?

RD: Yeah. I was—I had all their names of my teachers right there, but I’m sorry. We passed right over them.

CB: (laughs) It’s all right.

RD: But I loved school. I started there in the fourth grade, and the fifth was good. I think I was in the year that—either the fifth or the seventh—I was in the south end of the school in one of the rooms there, the year that Amelia Earhart disappeared. We were all following her flight.

CB: Really?

RD: Yes. And I’ve often thought, you know—often wondered what happened to her. That was so exciting.
CB: Oh, I bet!

RD: And then of course the Lindbergh thing—these were all during my young days. We have lived through more exciting changes than any generation can now, I think. I don’t see how they can, because we came from the time when just barely radios—I can remember a friend of mine cooking up a crystal set with a straight pin and a little piece of crystal, and you could listen over earphones to—we could pick up Del Rio, Texas.

CB: Really?

RD: And back in those days that was when June Carter’s family, the Carter family, were singing gospel music on a station down there in Del Rio, Texas, and we could pick that up on that little crystal set. And I guess that was the beginning of my love for gospel and country music. Gospel music is still my favorite.

CB: That’s amazing.

RD: And the older country music. Now it gets too much into the—too much like the rock. I love to dance to some of the rock stuff.

CB: Right.

RD: But listening to, it’s not that good. But when I was nine I got to listen to the Grand Ole Opry on the radio. My sister—her name was Ethel, Ethel Sanders—we lost her around 1955. She was working for a Jewish family, and they lived in Seminole Heights, just a few blocks from Hillsborough High School. I used to go and stay with her. And they had a little girl, five years old, and I would play with her, keep her company, help with a few things around the house. I learned a lot of the nicer things of life in their home.

CB: Right.

RD: And Mrs. Lutz, her name was Frances. Nice lady. She always treated me nice. I used to take a lot of time doing dishes and I was—be looking out the window and my sister said—I remember her telling Mrs. Lutz, “But Ruthie’s so slow.” Mrs. Lutz said

2The kidnapping of the Lindbergh baby, which occurred on March 1, 1932.
“Ruthie is a dreamer. She’s not with us all the time she’s washing those dishes.” (both laugh) It was interesting, because I learned a lot of good things about the Jewish people. Her mother, Mrs. Neuwirth—they had a department store in Sulphur Springs, almost at Temple Terrace Highway on Nebraska Avenue. And I worked for her one year, the year I was seventeen, I think. I had to quit school to try to help Mom some. Mrs. Neuwirth gave me a job there in their department store. He had a grocery store right next to the department store and they sold clothes, and she taught me about how you took care of kosher things. And it was hard, washing greasy dishes with Old Dutch Cleanser, but you do it. I learned a lot of good things that—they were good to me. These were good people. And I have always had an affinity for the Jewish people for this reason, because all of the people that I knew like that were nice to me, Mrs. Neuwirth and her daughter Frances Lutz.

CB: Right.

RD: I’m glad I got the opportunity to get past so many prejudices that way. And Papa, when we first moved into Sulphur Springs we lived about two blocks from a little black Holiness church. And Papa, of course was in the—even though we didn’t have a church that we could go to—I take that back. There was the Tampa Church of God that was down in, I think, Jackson Heights. It was down not too far from where I was born, around Twenty-Second Street. Some—it was just dirt roads in there then. But Papa used to—we used to walk down to this little black church. And when Brother Sanders came in there with his little raunchy kids— (both laugh) Sorry.

Most of the time we didn’t—a lot of the times in the summertime we didn’t wear shoes; we didn’t really have shoes much, except for if we went to church or something. But we walked down this little dirt road to this church, and we always had to sit on the front row because Brother Sanders ran the testimony for them. When we would walk from where we lived to Neuwirth’s Department Store, we had to go down this little dirt road, past the church. And Papa always told us, “Now when you walk through here, if there’s anyone out on the porch, you say hello to them.” And this one black lady—we called her Aunt Martha; I don’t know what her name was. But she was very (inaudible) part of that church, and she had white hair, always looked so neat. She would be sitting on her porch, we’d say hello to Aunt Martha, and she would say hello back to us. I was—I feel very fortunate to have been raised in the family that I was. Because any prejudices I learned, I learned them later.

CB: Is that right?

RD: And yeah, I learned a lot of prejudices when I first moved to Michigan.
CB: When did you move to Michigan? As a—at roughly what age?

RD: I was twenty-five.

CB: Okay.

RD: First time I ever left the state.

CB: Oh, my.

RD: And I had re-married my first husband. And I helped him get out of Hudson, and he wanted to go up to Michigan where he thought he could work in the auto industry. So he answered an ad in the paper to help someone drive up there, someone who had been down for the winter.

And he went—he drove up there and he got himself a job and the man that he drove up there was—he was something in the union, in the auto workers’ union. So he got my husband a job first working as a caretaker in one of their buildings, and then from there he got in—he got onto the Chevy plant up there. And we moved up to—after he was up there a few months, my son and I—my son was six then, almost seven. And we got remarried because we thought maybe we could make a home for the boy.

CB: Right, right.

RD: And so, the boy and I took the train up. I had never been on a train, never seen mountains, and I was twenty-five. I nearly wore my neck out trying to see out both sides (CB laughs) going through the Smoky Mountains, you know?

CB: Oh, I bet.

RD: And it was beautiful—Michigan’s a beautiful state. We went to Flint and we stayed up there a couple years. And things didn’t work well, so I came back home. I was too homesick to stay.
CB: So you really—it wasn’t just you came home because of the marriage, you really wanted to be back in Sulphur Springs—

RD: I came home to see my mother.

CB: Okay.

RD: My mom was still there, and I missed her terribly. I thought I’d die if I couldn’t see my mama.

CB: Oh, my goodness. Oh, my goodness.

RD: And so we came home, and we stayed down here because things hadn’t been going too good up there. Actually, my husband wrote me a letter and said, “Since we’re not getting along very well anyway, you might as well just stay down there.” So, most of my belongings were up there, so—eventually I got some of them. (laughs)

CB: So, many people talk about the Arcade as being the heart of Sulphur Springs.

RD: It was. It was because that’s where the post office was. It was inside there.

CB: Okay.

RD: In the Arcade at the time. Then there was—Sanders’ Drugstore was on one side of the Arcade, part of it that went through—the hallway that went through east to west. And then Whitehead’s Drug was on the opposite side, right—in the same building, but right across the hall from each other. The Sanders boys, they were—’course, that was the rich Sanders family, didn’t have anything to do with us.

CB: (laughs) Okay.

RD: They were a little older than we were. They were always nice to people when they went in the store.
CB: Right, right.

RD: But, we used to always go over to Whitehead’s, ’cause Dr. Whitehead was in there and he always had someone at the counter that—my sister and I used to go in there and buy us sodas, when it was Sunday or something, you know?

When Papa died, she was thirteen, just about thirteen. And she went to work for people in their home—and I did, too, but they sent me home ’cause I got too homesick. I remember working for some people that had a little baby. They were people in the church, had a little baby and a little boy, four years old. I remember washing dirty diapers on a rub-board and taking care of a real spoiled little four-year-old boy. And I think Mama got fifty cents in money, and I got a new pair of rayon panties.

CB: Oh, my goodness.

RD: For a week.

CB: Oh, my goodness.

RD: And I was so homesick they let me go home.

CB: Do you have any particular memories of the Arcade itself? I mean, does it hold any special, fond significance to you, or anything? Something very special that happened there, or something exciting about it?

RD: Well, the first job I got after I was married, I got at there. There was a nice restaurant that would have been right next to Whitehead’s Drugstore, a big area in there that they made into a restaurant. And by this time—remember, I graduated in 1940 from Hillsborough High School.

CB: Right.

RD: During the time I was in high school, MacDill [Air Force Base] Field opened—they opened Henderson Field out there in Temple Terrace. That whole Temple Terrace area was Henderson Field.
CB: Oh, my goodness.

RD: Then there was—oh, what was the one over there near Hills—near where Dale—Dale Mabry was cut through to go from MacDill to—what was that big field that was out there, on the west side of Dale Mabry? It was an army field, anyway.

CB: Okay.

RD: A soldier type thing. MacDill was Air Force. Henderson Field was Air Force—Army Air Force. Infantry type training was in—how could I forget that? It was a huge field. Anyway, to be in high school, to be in that age group and be right in the middle of three Army bases, so to speak—oh, that was interesting.

CB: Well, yes. (both laugh)

RD: Everywhere you looked there were good-looking soldiers in uniform. Everywhere. I never was allowed to go out during those years. Elise didn’t, either.

CB: Right.

RD: My friend across the street—some of the girls I knew, though, really enjoyed life during those times.

CB: Oh, I’ll bet! (laughs)

RD: And the tourist club, of course, was really—I was not allowed to dance because in the Church of God it’s against the rules.

CB: Right, okay.

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3RD is referring to Drew Field or, as it was known during World War II, Drew Army Airfield, which is now Tampa International Airport.
RD: So I didn’t get to do any of those things till I was older. But the tourist club must have been a—I can remember going by there with somebody and we stood and watched it from the outside, watched them dance, and I thought, “Gee that looks like so much fun.” (CB laughs) And my friend, Mary Shepherd—Mary Adie, everybody called her Adie. Oh, she was a great dancer. I’m telling you, there wasn’t an inch on that girl’s body that didn’t move.

CB: Oh, my goodness.

RD: She got into jitterbug and she was—she and different partners, they won quite a few contests around town.

CB: Is that right?

RD: Yeah, she was great. We lost her about—oh, I don’t know, ten years maybe? Maybe more than that. She was living down in Miami, Miami Springs. She was great. I never think of her that I don’t chuckle, because she was such a fun person.

CB: Oh, how neat.

RD: And one of her sisters goes to the reunion. In fact two of her sisters have been to the reunions.

CB: Okay.

RD: Katie Bell Shepherd, her name’s Wannamaker now; and Suzie—I can’t remember Suzie’s last name. But she was the last one of the girls, of four girls.

CB: Oh, for goodness’ sakes. So what about the skating rink? Were you allowed to go to the skating rink?

RD: I couldn’t skate, but I watched ’em.

CB: Okay.
RD: Yeah, but I can remember when Papa was still alive—he died in March of thirty-three [1933]. And I think in July of that year, I turned twelve. They used to bring carnivals in, and on the south end of the Arcade building—there was a nice rose garden along there, by the way, between the sidewalk and where the Arcade came out.

CB: Right.

RD: Going down toward the pool. There was—and around this was an edge of Surinam cherries. Are you familiar with that cherry?

CB: No.

RD: It looks like a little pumpkin; it’s kind of an orangey-red. And they taste different. It’s like a mango or a papaya or some—completely different from anything else you’ve ever tasted.

CB: Oh, for goodness’ sakes.

RD: But they’re cherries, Surinam cherries, and we used to—they kept them trimmed back nicely, but we could pick the ripe ones from inside there, if the birds didn’t get to them first. (CB laughs) But they had carnivals that would come and would set up close to the rose garden. And I was down there one evening, one afternoon. Papa and Mama used to let us walk down there and you know; we knew we weren’t supposed to get into any trouble, and we knew not to because Papa was very strict. He was good.

CB: Right.

RD: He was good. But he was strict.

CB: Right.

RD: Somewhere I had gotten two pennies. God only knows where they came from. I don’t know; I might have found them. But anyway, they had this stand sort of thing where they had this wheel—you could put a penny on it and you could win something.
So anyway, I think maybe at heart, I’m probably a gambler. (CB laughs) Anyway, I put one of my pennies on there and I won a basket of groceries, a nice basket of groceries.

CB: Oh, my goodness.

RD: And it had a roll of toilet tissue in it. (CB laughs) Well, this was something—I mean, the house we lived in had outside—

CB: Right, facilities.

RD: House—yeah. So we didn’t—we weren’t really up on this toilet tissue bit. (both laugh). I was afraid—and it had five pounds of sugar and flour—things that use—

CB: Right.

RD: I was afraid to take it home because I was afraid I was gonna get a lickin’ for gambling! (both laugh)

CB: Oh, no! So what did you end up doing?

RD: I took it home.

CB: Did ya?

RD: I told Papa how I got it—I had to.

CB: (laughs) Otherwise he’d think you’d stolen it. (laughs)

RD: Yeah, but that was—I mean, that was funny. You know, you get caught. (laughs) But I don’t think he paddled me that time. He used to talk to us, and then he’d get a little switch and he’d switch your legs. But the talking had you crying before he ever got to the switching. He just did that ’cause he had said he was going to. But he was good—he was not a—he was never, never an abusive man. In fact I don’t think there were any of the menfolks in our family that were. I’ve never heard of them.
CB: That’s wonderful.

RD: It is. We were raised—we were poor—

CB: Right.

RD: But everyone was back then. But we—there was never any drinking in our family, with all of those grown men. I had one brother that eventually drank, but not around Papa, not around us. He smoked cigars; but the rest of them, they didn’t smoke, they didn’t drink, they didn’t cuss. So when I got out into the world, I tell you, I wasn’t really ready for it. (CB laughs) But we learned the value of the good things in life, and it didn’t take that much to keep us happy. And I can remember—I don’t remember—there was not too much about the big hotel, but it was a very basic part of our lives because the two drugstores were there. The post was also inside the Arcade. And there was a Dr. Brown that had an office down on the inside section. I don’t know about when I was younger, but later there was a sheriff’s depart—a sheriff’s office was inside [the] Arcade.

CB: Right.

RD: Right next to Dr. Brown.

CB: Right. Well, what about the pool? I’ve heard a lot of people talk about the pool.

RD: The pool, that’s where I really learned to swim.

CB: Oh-ho! Okay, okay. Tell me about the pool.

RD: And when we had the money we could go swimming in there—I think it was, oh, ten cents, maybe. Couldn’t have been much.

CB: Right.
RD: But that was wonderful, ’cause you could go down that slide and swim down to where there was a beach before the water went into the river—there was a nice beach there they had made, you know?

CB: Right, right.

RD: And this was—and there was a place with another little spring in it—a house—down from the pool.

Part 1 ends; part 2 begins

CB: Are we talking about the gazebo where the water came up, or is this a different little house?

RD: It was like a gazebo, okay. And we used to have to go (inaudible) and things and I can’t remember too much about it, right, because we were spending time on the beach and in the pool.

CB: Right, right.

RD: And the first time I ever (inaudible) was going off the ten-foot board and I went over too far when I dived off, and for about the next year in high school I couldn’t hardly straighten up when I got out of my chair. But back in those days we did have a chiropractor that was just across the river on Nebraska Avenue. One of the—somebody with that name, I can’t remember his name, Dr. something or other. But I have never—I think it’s his daughter or his granddaughter at one of the reunions.

CB: Really?

RD: Yes. I (inaudible). Dr. (inaudible), I think, or something like that. Anyway I have met some of his family at one of these reunions. And I just remember the name of the doctor, you know?

CB: Right, right.
RD: That would have been the first time I heard the word chiropractor. But back in those days (inaudible) and we just—we didn’t need doctors very much, and if we did, we had to go to the—after Papa died, we went to the county clinic, which was on Twenty-Second Street right near the TB [tuberculosis] hospital they had right there, right near Hill—no, just (inaudible) Hillsborough Avenue on, I think Twenty-Second Street.

CB: Okay. Okay. So you say you didn’t need doctors much. What kind of—

RD: We were not—we were healthy.

CB: Okay, okay. But what kind of health behavior did you do at home? Were there certain things they gave you for different ailments that—you said they didn’t go to the doctor?

RD: We didn’t need anything.

CB: Oh, okay.

RD: We ate a lot of beans and cornbread and grits and rice, and we just didn’t need—we weren’t sick. We weren’t sick. I don’t know about other families, but we were not. (inaudible) At that time, the water in Sulphur Springs was provided—it came from a well at Hamilton Beach.

CB: Okay.

RD: And I can remember some friends of mine—a friend of ours and my sister, Dottie—she was two years older than me—we used to start—we’d walk down to the springs at Hamilton Beach. There was a big sulfur spring there; people used to go and get that in the bottles. And we would start—and then we’d walk along the edge of the river all the way over to where the Twenty-Second Street bridge was. Now this was south side—on the Tampa side. And then we would come across the bridge at Twenty-Second Street, then we would come back home to where we lived, and it was (inaudible)

CB: Right, right.
RD: Once in a while we’d come across a parked car, but with people sitting in—didn’t mean much to me. I think the older girls might have known what they were there for.

CB: Right. Right.

RD: It was beautiful—you’d take that path along the river.

CB: I bet. So did you drink the sulfur water?

RD: We’d take a couple mouthfuls of it.

CB: So it wasn’t a—it wasn’t a ritual that you did to stay healthy.

RD: No.

CB: You know, drinking sulfur water—

RD: Older people were the ones getting bottles of water, usually Yankees.

CB: Yankees?

RD: Yeah, Yankees, because we had—during the winter months, it was very noticeable when the northerners came down.

CB: Right.

RD: And even though my mom was from Brooklyn, we never held that against her.

CB: (laughs) That’s wonderful. Two of the times—two of the most intense times during your growing up years would have been the Depression and the war.

RD: Mm-hm.
CB: I’d like you to tell me what it was like during each of those, and about your experience living in Sulphur Springs. How do you think that impacted you? Was it—was the Depression very different for you?

RD: Oh, yeah. When we moved to that house out in Keysville, when we sold—traded our place in Lutz, on the deep lake—

CB: Right.

RD: Moved to Keysville.

CB: Right.

RD: I can remember Mama standing there and crying. We moved into this little—there was a little house out there—it’s true, it was there—but you could see through the walls—the holes in the walls.

CB: Oh, my goodness.

RD: And I can remember my mama standing there and crying—she was only thirty-three when Papa died, so she was about thirty.

CB: Oh, my God.

RD: Because there was no food of any kind on those shelves in the kitchen for her children.

CB: Oh, dear.

RD: And Papa did anything he could to bring home a few groceries. At the time—I guess when he moved out there, the man that he bought the land from probably told him he’d get work at the mines, because we could walk through a little swamp and see the big
(inaudible). That was really something to see—and when you haven’t seen anything that big—

CB: Right, right.

RD: No, we were poor, and we were in need. But I can remember my brother and little sister and I taking—after Papa died, I can remember us taking—carrying like a syrup bucket or a lard pail, carrying and going over to a mission that this same Brother Maguire had opened over on Fourteenth Street—I think. He would go to the Farmer’s Market and get the stuff they were throwing away and bring it to his place, and we could go thought it and take the stuff. I can remember getting things and I’d take them home and cut the bad stuff out of them so we could eat. I was twelve then, I guess.

CB: Right. Right.

RD: But we were—we always seemed to have something. And my brother that had gotten the house for Mama—his name was George Rufus Sanders; he always wanted us to call him George, but we had never started that. But he and his wife—she was only about fourteen or fifteen when they got married—they always would show up and bring us a little bunch of groceries. On Christmas, the Salvation Army truck would always show up on Christmas Day. I always wondered how they knew that we needed things.

CB: Right.

RD: But they always brought food, and each of us kids had a toy.

CB: Right.

RD: When Papa was still alive—I remember he couldn’t find any work during the Christmas season. My brother Rufus was working and we three older children—well, four, I guess. We shared—he brought us a set of bingo and we shared that, the older ones of us, and he got something small for the two little ones. My youngest sister was not born yet, ’cause Mama—Papa was still alive. But we had—I had found a pine tree limb. I guess Papa got it for us. I probably asked for it. I’m a walker, and we had this pine tree limb stuck on the side of the metal cot that we were using for one of our beds. That was our Christmas tree. And somewhere we got some strips of crepe paper to put over this little pine-thing and then we got this bingo game to share for Christmas. It was great.
CB: So how do you think going through those kind of experiences shaped your later years? How did they shape who you are today?

RD: I have—there have been times in my life where I have had almost everything I wanted, but when you can’t have those things, you can get back to basics and survive very well.

CB: And you think that experience has—what? Made you that strong?

RD: Oh, yeah. I can—I still like to fix a pot of beans. I share them with my relatives out here. And it’s—yeah, I don’t need a lot. I thought I did, when I was younger. But there were times when I had just about everything I wanted. I never really until the last marriage had a happy marriage.

CB: Right.

RD: I finally found the man that loved me. I mean, he really loved me.

CB: How wonderful.

RD: And when you find that you know it—you’ll never make a mistake again of believing someone loves you when they don’t. Because you’ve been there, you recognize it. It’s just like—it’s just like knowing that God is.

CB: Right.

RD: And knowing that he can heal. He can guide us—if we just shut up long enough to listen. (CB laughs) And let him lead us—he will. And he does. And I’m so thankful I was born into a family like that. I think I’m one of the most fortunate people that probably ever lived in Sulphur Springs. And I had a lot of friends there, and it was a nice place to live. It was a modest neighborhood and we were probably around the poorest in the group, but nobody ever looked down their nose at us and the teachers treated all of us alike. There were a lot of kids, I mean, that had nice dresses and things like that. When I was about fourteen, I learned to sew. I learned to take in clothes that didn’t fit me.
CB: Right. Right.

RD: And things like that. And it’s something I wish I could teach my grandchildren, but I don’t think I’ll get a chance.

CB: So, talking about when you learned to sew—tell me about learning to cook.

RD: I think I always cooked, because it was something—being the second oldest in that group. Mama had—Mama worked in the—after Papa died—even before Papa died, Mama worked in the citrus industry—sectionizing—I think she worked at the Del Monte plant. And then there were several places in Tampa that sectionized in canned fruit. And Mama worked in various places like that.

CB: What’s sectionize?

RD: Oh, you take a grapefruit and you take the peel off of it and the pulp part there, and you take a real sharp knife and you reach in there between those sections and flip out those sections.

CB: Oh, okay. Okay.

RD: And you get the seeds out of them and it all goes into a can.

CB: Oh, wow.

RD: You get a few seeds, but not many. But some of those women were very fast, and I think Mama might have been one of them. Because when you’d watch her, Mama—it’s the way she’d work. I’ve got a little granddaughter—I was watching her when she was about two years old; she was playing at my coffee table. I told my daughter, I said “Oh, my God, that’s little Grandma all over again!” I was behind her and watching her work with her kitchen utensils there, and she—her movements were just like my mama’s.

CB: Isn’t that amazing? (laughs)
RD: It was! I said—’cause everybody that could worked in that type of thing. First job I ever had, I worked as a waitress when I was fifteen. I said I was eighteen. I got my first Social Security card and I worked in the Kress store in downtown Tampa. My sister bought me a pair of new shoes ’cause I didn’t have anything, and oh, my feet hurt so bad. But I worked with wonderful ladies up there, in Kress and you know, when the Kress and Grant’s and those stores—when they went out, we lost a real way of life, because it was such a pleasure to go in those places and be treated and waited on—be treated like they were glad you came in.

After I worked in there—that was the year, I think, that I went to work for Mrs. Neuwirth in her department store, or along that time. And then I—when summer came, Mrs. Neuwirth said, “You need to go back and finish that year.” That’s why I didn’t graduate with my friends in thirty-nine [1939]. I graduated in forty [1940]. So, they didn’t need me then. So when school started, I was able to start back to school.

CB: She encouraged you to do that?

RD: Yes, she did.

CB: Wow.

RD: And they were nice people. They were nice people.

CB: Well, knowing that businesses always try to figure out how to get ahead—do you think, going back to your comment about Kress, et cetera, do you think that it was the people or do you think it was the policy, or do you think it was just the times that those were—those kind of stores?

RD: Unfortunately, it was probably the times.

CB: Okay.

RD: Because now there are so many people. Tampa was—at that time—when I left Tampa and went to California in 1957, it was like 120,000 people. And now it feels like two million. (both laugh) I don’t know how many it is.
CB: Oh, wow. Okay, tell me about some of the—you have—I know you have long-term friends from Sulphur Springs, et cetera. Tell me about some of the really good friends from school and if you interact today or see them today, et cetera. Who were some of your best friends when you were at school? What was that like?

RD: Well, like I say, Mary Adie Shepherd and I became close friends from maybe the fourth grade on, and we remain friends. We went to different places, we were here there and yonder, but we could come back five years from a visit and pick up right where we left off. And Elise Foxworth is like that to me. She’s a very gracious lady. I just love that girl. And she’s the one—at our fifty-fifth reunion—no, our fiftieth reunion for Hillsborough High School—the master of ceremonies, I think it was Harry (inaudible), and he was coming around to each table. And we said who we were—we stood up, said who we were, you know. And when he came to Elise, he said, “And this young lady, whatever it is that she’s taking or doing, I wish she would bottle it up so we could all have some of it.” (CB laughs) Because Elise—even today, she doesn’t look like she belongs in our age group.

CB: Oh, my. (laughs) Oh, my.

RD: And I have been with her to the Coliseum there in Saint Pete. When I lived over there, I met her there a few times, and she’s a marvelous dancer. That’s her life, the dancing, ballroom dancing. Me, I like to go someplace with a good, peppy country music. And get up there and do your own thing, you know? (CB laughs) I just never learned to do much ballroom dancing.

CB: Right, right.

RD: I wish I had, but it’s okay. It’s not a big deal. There’s so many things I want to do.

CB: Right, right. Well, we talked about activities, and sometimes a town activity is centered around school, sometimes around the Arcade, the churches. Where was most of your youth activities centered?

RD: The church.

CB: Okay. What kind of activities did you participate with did—
RD: Well, we had a wonderful Sunday school teacher when I was in my teens, Brother Joe (inaudible). He worked in a big Barkley’s Dry Goods retailer—I mean wholesaler—downtown Tampa. I mean, he was probably there till he died. He and his wife—and he had a daughter named Judith (inaudible); she just died recently in the last year. Brother (inaudible) would take us in his sailboat—he would bring it up to the Ballast Point pier. He would see that we got there someway, and he would bring it up to the Ballast Point pier and he would take us out. Our church was against wearing slacks, too. But he told us, he said, “I feel that when a young lady is stepping from a pier into a boat, if she has on slacks, it’s much more practical.” So we could do that.

CB: That’s good.

RD: And his wife and daughter could, too, but it’s just one of those things the church is against. And a lot of times I thought the church was against smiling and laughing, but they had wonderful music. The singing—I mean, our singing would still be going on when the Baptist church down on the corner of Sitka [Street] and—not Sitka. Anyway, down a couple of blocks from us, there was a Baptist church. They would be finished and we would be still singing. They’d come stand outside our church and listen to the singing.

CB: Oh, wow.

RD: Yeah. And on Sunday afternoons, sometimes we’d have singing conventions; they’d come from all over the area, you know. Gospel singing, I guess, is the big thing that has been a constant in my life.

CB: Okay. So are you a stage performer gospel singer, too, or—?

RD: No. (laughs)

CB: You’re just from (inaudible)

RD: My brother was—my brother Henry, he was seven years younger than me, and we called him Hank as he got older. Hank had his own country music band for years out in California; he went out to California in fifty-four [1954]. He had—he sang on WHBO—

CB: Is that right?
RD: When they first came on the air. Him and Bob (inaudible). I think you might have talked to him out there one day.

CB: Right.

RD: And Bob Thompson, who he and his wife (inaudible) are there every time we have a reunion. And a fiddle player named Louis. They all were on WHBO: they had a Saturday program on there.

CB: Oh, my goodness.

RD: And when Hank started to go to California, one of the last songs—he was their soloist. And when he started to go to California, the last song he sang was for his wife. It was Eddy Arnold’s “I’ll Hold You in My Heart (Till I Can Hold You in My Arms).”

CB: Oh, romantic!

RD: Yeah, it was.

CB: How wonderful.

RD: It was—those were all good times. We were all very poor, but it didn’t make any—it didn’t matter. We survived, and we always had love, that was the thing. We didn’t have the things in our family that some of the other people were, um, fortunate enough to have. But most everybody I knew, like the Hensels and Mary-Adie and Norma (inaudible) and all of the kids I knew from the Springs there, they all—we all went to different churches, but they were all good people. Good people and happy families. And some of them had happy marriages.

CB: Okay, let’s go back to that other big thing that would have impacted your life, and that was the World War. Tell me about how going through that went. What was life like during that time?
RD: It was a very bad time, because I graduated in forty [1940] and the war started—our part of it started on December 7, 1941. My son was four months old. And his father was a fisherman out of Hudson there. I remember sitting there—it was a Sunday afternoon—in the middle of my bed, holding my little boy and hearing it on the radio and just being terrified, ’cause I knew my husband was gonna have to go. And also, the place I was living in had been a garage, and they put a floor in it and rented it out, ’cause places were at a premium, you know, with so many soldiers around. I was scared to death of the black spiders. They were on those spider webs. I was terrified of them. I would just—I remember sitting there on that bed holding my baby and just crying because I was so frightened and scared. It was very traumatic.

CB: And what were the war years like for you? You said so many soldiers and everything around.

RD: Well, I had wanted to be a nurse when I was younger, and Mom didn’t want me to because she said if we had a war I’d have to go. So, I spent my years, my war years, slinging hash. But I worked in a wonderful place. I worked in the Tribune Grill down in Tampa, and word got out that it was a good place to eat, so we got lots of soldiers in there—all those good looking men in those uniforms.

CB: So did your husband have to go to war?

RD: Yes, he did.

CB: Okay.

RD: And his mother never forgave me because I divorced him and he had to go to war.

CB: If you just have stayed married he’d would have had an exemption, right?

RD: Right.

CB: Okay.

RD: But we couldn’t stay together.
CB: Right, right.

RD: My son recently told me, he said, “Mom, you and Dad are just like oil and water. I can see that now.” So anyway—

CB: So give me an idea of—I know there was rationing during that time—

RD: Yeah.

CB: How did—how was life itself as far as your day to day experiences?

RD: Well, my son was growing at that time, and I saved my shoe coupons so he could have good leather shoes, so I could buy him good leather shoes. And since I worked in a restaurant and got one meal, it didn’t affect me that much. I still lived in Sulphur Springs during those years. At that time I lived up on Twelfth Street, not far south of Waters Avenue. One of the things I remember about Twelfth Street: there were three big mulberry trees right on the corner of Waters and Twelfth Street, right along. Grandpa and Grandma Ellis lived in that big house on the corner. They weren’t my grandparents, but everyone called them their Grandpa and Grandma Ellis. And they would let us pick the mulberries if we wanted to. And, well, later I became friends with part of Grandma Ellis’ family. I was able to go in the house and visit.

But during those days when we went to school—school was right cattycorner from that corner, ’cause it was right there between Twelfth and Thirteenth Street right on Waters Avenue. That was the (inaudible), and then the fifth grade started in the brick building—the red brick building that was down there. I don’t know where it is now, what happened. But I used to enjoy being in the plays in the ninth grade. When I was graduating the ninth grade there, my Grandma Krauss took me downtown, Tampa, and bought me a white—a long white organdy dress, and since I had really big feet, she had to get me women’s shoes. But I got my first perm then, ’cause I had straight hair then. Straight—looked like a little Indian, I tell you. It was black.

I was in the play, and I got my first kiss in that play. The guys got together on this—I was the Irish maid, and there was a—no, I was the French maid, with my black hair and bangs, straight hair. I loved to—I could speak out, so I had this part of the French maid. And (inaudible), one of the boys in our class, he was the Irish cop, and he liked me and he came in and I remember—so he said—let me see, how’d he say it? What do the Irish say? (inaudible)? No. (inaudible) Anyway, I said “Au revoir,” and he kissed me smack-
dab on my mouth. And boy, did I get disoriented. (both laugh) I couldn’t remember my
lines. I was just—I lost it. And I remember the teacher, whoever it was, on the side, you
know, cueing me in so I could carry on. But this was—I learned later that this was
something they had come up with, and so that was my first kiss. That was fun. There
were a bunch of nice kids there.

CB: Sounds like it.

RD: The Arcade building was very important to all of us, because everything we went to
—the grocery store was across the street, there was an A&P that Grandma used to come
in and go to; she came in from Lutz and went there. Everything was there: the
drugstores, the doctor, the post office. And when the dam broke in—I think it was thirty-
five [1935]—someone had asked me if that was the time they blew it up. I don’t know.
But I was looking at this map and this is us here—okay, here—so, the dam had to be right
up in this area, or up in this area. It had to be up in here. But we heard it. We heard that
water rushing down the road. It was at night.

CB: Really?

RD: Oh, yes.

CB: Oh, my.

RD: We were living up on Eleventh Street then. It was before the houses burned down.

CB: Oh, my goodness.

RD: And that was a terrifying time.

CB: I would think.

RD: They had—in the north end of the building is where they gave the typhoid shots.
Actually, right outside the building, because the water—the water flooded the whole
Sulphur Springs area.
CB: Oh, it did?

RD: Including the Hamilton Heath where the pumps were, and we had to all boil our drinking water, but apparently it didn’t—I don’t think it did any harm to the pump system. So once the water went down, we were able to get on with it. But I know we all got the typhoid shots, and I remember my little sister—she was just a baby then, and she had to get it and I remember her crying.

CB: So how long did it take the water to go down? I mean, is this like a one day—

RD: Oh, no.

CB: Several days—

RD: Oh, no. It was all the way up to the north end of the Arcade building, the hotel building, and I’m sure it must have taken a week or two.

CB: Wow. That long?

RD: Well, that was—that was way up off the river. I mean—I can’t say.

CB: But give us some idea, because most of us haven’t lived through one of those floods.

RD: Yeah, everything was really messed up on both—all the way up, ’cause it was across the street, too, you know, all those little stores and restaurants across the street. Mr. Hensel’s office was right down—it was across the street from what would have been the south end of the Arcade building—the hotel. It was across—you know where the old theatre building is down there?

CB: (murmurs in agreement)

RD: All right, he was just across the street from that theatre building. He was right there. I think that would have been River Cove [Street], right? River Cove and Nebraska?
CB: Right, I think you’re right.

RD: River Cove and Nebraska. Yeah. Everything in that area was just flooded. I don’t know, I have no idea ’cause I was—like I say, I was only—what? Twelve, thirteen, along then. But I know that it was really something, and it took a while to drain off.

CB: Do you remember anything about a train depot there in Sulphur Springs?

RD: The train was up on Temple Terrace Highway. But I don’t remember there being any depot up there. We had a big ice house right at the railroad tracks at—right at Temple Terrace Highway, and then there was a railroad tracks and then—that was on the south side. And then Nebraska Avenue—there was a big ice house up there and there was a big bead store up there. I remember on the corner of Waters Avenue and Nebraska, on the east side, there was a small store that had a little ice house part of it. ’Cause my brother and I, we used to go down there and buy—I don’t know, a square of ice?

CB: Yeah, the—

RD: Yeah, and they’d put—wrap a cord around it, and then the man would put folded newspaper under it so it wouldn’t cut our fingers carrying it back up Waters Avenue to the house. Right, we had an ice box. I think most everybody did. The few people that had refrigerators—back in those days there was a refrigerator—couldn’t have been a Whirlpool. There was one with a thing sitting on top of it.

CB: Oh, okay.

RD: The freezer thing, the—I guess that’s the—

CB: Like a coil or something

RD: Cons—

CB: Concentration coil?
RD: I don’t know, maybe. Anyway, it was sitting up on top, but I can’t remember who made that one. Right, there were very few people who had things like that. Only the stores and things like that. Yeah, things got better, financially, after that war in Europe started, ’cause it looked like we were going to get into it. That was part of the difference between then and now. They were training the people—the people they were—back in that time, I don’t think—they weren’t drafting them yet. Those were the volunteers. And they were getting good training, and they didn’t have to go over until they were trained. That’s the difference between then and now. Those poor people that are over there now—I’m going to say it—

CB: Do you want it on tape?

RD: I don’t mind.

CB: Okay.

RD: A lot of them have gone over there with just a little bit of training on the weekends, and they didn’t really get that much—they’re over there—those kids have been sent over there without any proper training. I know [Franklin D.] Roosevelt turned out kinda bad in some ways for some people, but he was a good—he was the best president we had. He was wonderful for the poor people. He did things to help us. If he hadn’t started the WPA and the sewing rooms for the women and the CCC camps a little later, there were a lot of people who just wouldn’t have had any way to earn a living. My papa, he was—they kept the ditches cleaned out, ’cause, you know, we always have rain in Florida. Always have, always will; if we don’t, we’ll be a desert. He got sick working in the ditches, working in the water. He got a strep infection, and that’s what killed him.

CB: Is that right?

RD: Yes. They didn’t have anything then, see; they didn’t come up with penicillin and sulfa until during the war. Those were things that came up as a result of the war. Just like plastics and things like that were a result of the NASA thing. I’m fortunate to have been able to have worked in the—for a subcontractor for NASA.

CB: Really?

RD: When I lived in California. Yes. And that first shop that went to the moon.
CB: Uh-huh?

RD: We—our company had over 500 instruments in that.

CB: Oh, wow.

RD: And they all worked perfectly.

CB: Right.

RD: Isn’t that—that’s the thing. I don’t understand the problems with NASA now, because everything we did had to be perfect because someone’s life depended on it. And somewhere along the way, they lost that attitude.

CB: Right. I think you’re right. I think you’re right. Amazing. Okay, well, how about—I’ve been told that there were boats that went from downtown to Sulphur Springs, or from Sulphur Springs to downtown. Did you ever ride the boats?

RD: I never knew about it.

CB: Okay. I didn’t, either, but it was one of the questions. You tell me that you guys had a car at one point. Okay, did you always have a car that you could—

RD: Oh, no.

CB: Okay.

RD: In fact, I think—I don’t remember us having a car after we moved into Sulphur Springs. Papa probably had to sell it. And we lived in Belmont Heights for a short time when we left—(laughs) what’s this poor place out here?

CB: Lu—not Lutz, but—
RD: No. Anyway, when we first moved into Tampa from out there—whatever this place. My nephew says I have that Sanders thing that CSR—you know, can’t remember—

CB: Got it!

RD: —can’t remember things.

CB: Oh, okay. (laughs) So he sold the car and—

RD: He must have, ’cause I don’t remember us having a car at any time when we moved into Sulphur Springs. So either it just got to the point where he couldn’t keep it running anymore or something. It was a Model T, so—I don’t remember us having a Model A or anything else after that.

CB: What was your favorite food when you were growing up?

RD: What?

CB: Tell me some of the things you remember eating. Different people have different things that—

RD: Anything we could get. (CB laughs) There was a vegetable—I mean, a fruit market—on Nebraska Avenue just south of Hillsborough Avenue, and Mr.—called (inaudible). Mr. Tom (inaudible) owned it, and he and his wife—they bought a piece of land from us out at Lutz and Papa built them a big house there, right on the lake. Mr. (inaudible), when we would come out to their place, they would always bring those Sanders children fruit. We probably got to taste our first plums and peaches and stuff like that from what they brought. They would bring us bananas—I mean, good stuff. They didn’t bring us the leftover dregs, they brought us good stuff. And that was always, I mean, something wonderful.

I remember stopping by—after we moved into Tampa, I remember stopping by their place. Mrs. (inaudible) used to work in there. They were nice people, really nice, and she would—when I would tell her who I was, she was always so sweet to me. And I had a sister that just had her ninety-third birthday last Saturday; she used to live in a house near right there, on New Orleans, right there just south of Hillsborough Avenue. So I
could walk down to visit (inaudible) place. She had a little boy and a little girl and they were nice little kids and—I’m not sure, but I think maybe when I was in my early teens, I might have babysat them for her a couple times. And we could ride the streetcar and go ride up Nebraska Avenue all the way into town. And one of them did come later. I guess it was a bus that came down Nebraska Avenue, because streetcar went up a ways and then cut over and went into Central Avenue and right there on Central Avenue.

CB: Okay. Okay.

RD: Through—what was it, Highland Park?—over there. It went through a park and went right into downtown Tampa and then taking my son on it when he was a baby.

CB: Were there any particular traditions in your family that went around food? You know how some people just have to have this pie, or Aunt so-and-so’s salad or something—do you remember anything? I guess what I’m looking for is how centered around food any of your traditions or your memories are?

RD: Well, when we were—when I was young, we just—whatever we had was what we were glad to get. And I remember my mama used to make the best guava jelly when we were living in the house that burned down. I can remember helping her make guava butter and guava jelly, and sometimes she would cook the half guavas and put, like, dumplings in there and—I mean, guavas were a real treat. And one of my neighbors just gave me a glass of guava jelly the other day—first I had in years.

CB: Oh, for goodness’ sakes.

RD: That was really interesting, and it’s good. I’m enjoying it.

CB: Oh, my goodness.

RD: That was—that or watermelon.

CB: Okay.

RD: Any fruit that we got—Grandpa—we used to get oranges and tangerines and tangelos and things like that from Grandpa, and then after they sold the grove and they
moved into Tampa after they got older and he lost one of his legs to diabetes. They moved into a nice little house, stucco house up on Brooks Street, up near River Cove, and it was a nice little place. That’s where they were living when Grandma went up to New York and then she died, had a heart attack up there. She was seventy-two when she died. And Grandpa—no, I guess just before that they moved into—he went into the Masonic—they went into the Masonic home there in Tampa, somewhere behind the boarding plant. I think it was around Twenty-First Avenue or something like that. It was a nice big—had been a home, I guess, in the state and the Masons turned it into a home. Grandpa was—as far as I know, he was living there, but I think he died when he was on a visit to New York.

CB: Oh, my goodness. How old was he when he died? Roughly.

RD: Well, he was a couple of years older than Grandma, and he lived until my son—I know my son—I took my son over to see him when he was about three, and I remember us finding Grandpa out there on the grounds sitting there enjoying the outdoors. And I rode the streetcar up to that farm and carried my son across. I don’t remember ever having a stroller or anything, I always had to carry him.(CB laughs) And when I was—I lived—the last time I lived in Sulphur Springs, I lived on Brooks Street; that’s the next street behind Klondyke. There was a—it was an older couple had a house there, and in the back they had this small house that they rented, and it was just perfect [for] my son and I. Their name was Davis, and she said we could call them Grandpa and Grandma Davis. They just loved my son, and they were so nice. We lived right behind my mom. I guess that’s where I was living when I re-married my husband and went down to Hudson again. And from there, we went to Michigan.

CB: Okay, what was the biggest change that you remember in your life or in—I guess what I’m looking for is more, like, in the area or politics in the country as a child or as a teenager? As you said earlier, you lived through a great deal—a great number of history events. What was one of the biggest changes that you remember in Sulphur Springs—while living in Sulphur Springs?

RD: I guess it had to be prior to the war when the economy picked up a bit, and I remember scattering around and listening to President Roosevelt during those times. And of course, with all of the air fields open, the economy—there was a lot of money came into the area, and it just wasn’t so depressed. But everybody who lived out at the Springs at that time—it was a modest neighborhood to live in, but everybody took care of their places. The only places that had any drinking problems or anything were right down on Nebraska Avenue, just north of where the Arcade building was. There was some bars and things along there. There was one bar right across from the Arcade—I don’t remember them ever having problems in there. But a little farther up—then, as the farther up we got, north of Waters and then on, north on Nebraska Avenue, north of Temple Terrace
Highway, which is now Busch Boulevard—that’s where most of it was. And then over on Florida Avenue, north of that, it had some good places that they went dancing. It had a lot of fights out there, but I was too young to be involved in any of that.

CB: What’s the biggest change you’ve seen in Sulphur Springs you’ve seen as an adult?

RD: Yeah, it was after I got out of high school and I moved back from Hudson and things changed a lot. I only lived in Hudson till my son was about a year and a half old.

CB: You’ve already told me that your family doctor was in Sulphur Springs, but you guys didn’t really go to a doctor, even though you had one.

RD: Yeah, we didn’t. We didn’t need one. We were fortunate.

CB: Okay.

*Part 2 ends; part 3 begins*

CB: Which adults made the biggest impact on you as a child?

RD: Well, looking back on it, since I’ve been talking to you, I’ve realized how much impact my being in contact with the Jewish people had, because they taught me a lot of things that I would not have learned because of our poor situation and all, and of course President Roosevelt who had a big impact on all of us. I didn’t learn about his inefficiencies, (both laugh) and I didn’t realize how angry he made a lot of people until later—’cause I didn’t know about, like, when they turned Israel over, when they turned that part of the world over to the Israelis. I mean that—I thought the Israelis were already there ’cause God gave them part of that land.

But anyway, my mom and dad, my brothers and sisters, they all had a—I mean, we were a very close family—we still are. As I said before, I’m thankful I was born into that particular family. Some of my teachers at Hillsborough High School. My grandparents. I was raised in the church to be very strict but I could never quite adapt to their strictness. I couldn’t be unhappy. (both laugh) I shouldn’t say it that way, but a lot of the people that were in there seemed to be unhappy, and I was in my fifties before I found out really that God loved me.
CB: Wow.

RD: I didn’t realize that he—I couldn’t think of any reason why he should, because I couldn’t obey the church rules, I didn’t want to wear long sleeves and let my hair grow long. I wanted to wear make-up. I was never on a dance floor till I was twenty-five because it was wrong. I didn’t learn to play cards. We didn’t do those things. In fact, we didn’t really do much of anything, but we had a good life.

CB: (laughs) That’s a good answer.

RD: It kept us out of trouble.

CB: That’s true.

RD: And I’m thankful for that.

CB: Okay, I know there were tourist rentals in Sulphur Springs, but did the townsfolk, like, own most of their homes or did they rent like you mentioned that you had at one time? I guess what I’m going for is, did people move a lot in Sulphur Springs?

RD: We did. But no, everyone else, just about—the Hensels, Mrs. Randy, Adie Shepherd’s mom, the Foxworths, all of those people owned their own places. Most of my friends they did because we had moved in there, you know, when I was in the fourth grade. And we rented—the little house we rented when Papa died—I think that was probably condemned right after we moved out of it, but it served its purpose.

CB: Right, right. What do you remember about the tourist camps?

RD: Oh, you mean the Tin Can Tourists?

CB: Uh-huh.

RD: Oh, well, I remember—we remember them. I remember them coming down and they were living in these little travel trailer type things, you know? Pulling them along,
and when that air stream came along that was really something to see, ’cause a lot of them looked like they were homemade—

CB: Really?

RD: Oh, yeah, oh, yeah—just boxes being pulled along behind their cars. I don’t—I guess I didn’t have too much contact with them. But they brought business in, ’cause they didn’t spend money—

CB: Oh?

RD: The tourists that used to come down—and I’m not sure about the ones today—they did not spend money. They bought what they needed, but they didn’t splurge. They came down to get away ’cause they couldn’t pay their heating bill up north.

CB: Really?

RD: Yes. Oh, yes. It was—and these little tourist camps—the places out on Nebraska Avenue out towards where Dorothy Richman lived, they had little cabins there, and the same people would rent those cabins every year and live here because they could afford to live, but they couldn’t pay their heating bills up north.

CB: Oh, my goodness.

RD: Mm-hm. Or at least that’s what I was told, and I’m sure that just about the way it was.

CB: So this was not rich people coming down to summer—I mean, to winter in Florida.

RD: They might have, but not where we were.

CB: Not where you were.
RD: I met some of them when I was quite young that went to the track, came to the track every year, and they would leave this track and follow it down to Sarasota and Miami; but those people didn’t spend much money anywhere else. They went to the tracks.

CB: Oh, for goodness’ sakes.

RD: And when they opened the horse track out in Oldsmar—I was older then, and I was fortunate enough to date a gentleman who had a horse who won one year.

CB: (both laugh) Wow. Did you know—you heard about the Jim Walters Homes?

RD: Oh, yeah.

CB: Okay. Did you know Jim Walters, or do you—how do you—

RD: Well, those came along much later.

CB: Okay, I understand that.

RD: When we first moved out here, we thought about something like that, when we came back from California. It was in seventy-two [1972]. I was out there for seventeen years.

CB: Oh, wow.

RD: And those big fires that are going on now?

CB: (murmurs in agreement)

RD: I lived in Simi Valley when it was completely surrounded by fire and it was just jumping from one block to the next. Miss one house and catch another on fire. But, fortunately there were enough people working on it that I had to leave my home. I didn’t know if I was—whether it was going to be there when I went back, because I lived in Santa Susana right down in the beginning of Simi Valley. But my nephews stayed there
and kept my house watered down, and a friend of his helped him with his house and my house.

CB: Well, Sulphur Springs seems to have been a magnet—here you were in California all those years, you came back and you came back to this area. You came back to the Sulphur Springs area—why?

RD: Because Mama was here. Mama was living in the J.L. Young homes.

CB: Oh.

RD: They’re not there now. J.L. Young was another realtor right there close to Mr. Hensel’s place. And in fact, he was someone that I remember hearing about all my life, and he built that home back there for those older people, or at least it was named for him. I don’t think he built it; the county built it or the city. But we came back ’cause Mama was here. I came back mainly because my brother and sister were coming and I needed to be near them. I didn’t want to be out there by myself, ’cause by that time my daughter was about nine.

CB: Okay, okay. So it’s—had the family moved off to Michigan, you would have gone back to Michigan, so it wasn’t—so Sulphur Springs—it was you were coming back to your mom.

RD: I was coming back to Mama, come back home. We didn’t want to settle in the Springs then, ’cause by that time most of us older ones—well, we were old enough that all of us had had bad experiences with marriage and things—

CB: Right.

RD: —connected with people where we had lived in the Springs. So we didn’t want to go back there. So my brother Hank, he and Tina took a map and they chose a central location, since he played country music and so we came back to Lakeland—

CB: Oh, okay.
RD: We went to Cocoa Beach first. I had a wonderful letter of recommendation and I was planning on going to work for Martin Marietta [Lockheed Martin] over there. And the week we got back, they had laid off 500 people. So that took care of that. And Hank, he got a job—we hadn’t been here long, but he got a job with Polk County. And he stayed—that was the best job he ever had for him, and he stayed—he was in charge of the mosquito control trucks and the chemicals that they used and he was there till the day he died in seventy-two [1972]. And I got a job selling electronics in Lakeland. Eventually I went to work in Tampa, and we bought this piece of land and pooled our money and put three mobile homes on a 1200 gallon septic tank on one pump.

CB: Wow.

RD: Works fine. We love our place.

CB: Why do you think your mother never left the area?

RD: She just—she knew the area. And I made her quit work when she was fifty-nine. I shouldn’t have done that. And I was trying—between her Social Security or sixty, I guess—between her pittance, what little she got, because she got very little. Back in those days they didn’t pay in much, you know? Between what she made—I worked two jobs out there for a while, tried to send her enough to keep her going till we could come back. I think she moved into the J.L. Young homes just before we came back from California, and then she got to where she was too unsteady. We brought her out here for a while, and she died in eighty-five [1985] at the age of eighty-five.

CB: Is that right? And of what, if I can ask?

RD: Huh?

CB: Heart problems?

RD: No, she had hardening of arteries to the brain.

CB: Okay.

RD: It’s the same as Alzheimer’s.
CB: Right.

RD: We tried to take care of her, but we ended up putting her in a nursing home in Thonotosassa; but they took good care of her out there. There was a lady out there, head nurse—the first time I went out to see my mama they had brought her out, they had her sitting in the dining room ’cause they had—somebody came and was putting on a church service, and my mother was one of the lucky people who had gotten the gift of tongues.

CB: Oh, my.

RD: You know, it’s a gift.

CB: (murmurs in agreement)

RD: And either people can accept it or they can’t. And my sister Dottie, she said, “Ruthie, you can’t—you’re never able to surrender enough to get it. There’s too much of you.” But Mom couldn’t hardly talk to us or anything, but when they were singing this one song she was sitting in her wheelchair there, and she was speaking to the Lord in her tongue. She never lost that.

CB: Is that right?

RD: Never lost it. And the head nurse, she came to me after that service and she said, “Tell me who your mother is. I think I know her.” And when we first moved up on Eleventh Street—this girl and her grandmother went to that Assembly of God church on the corner of Twelfth and Waters—Eleventh and Waters. I told her who we were, our name; she knew the name. I said where we lived and she said, “I know her. I know who she is now. I used to live with my grandmother, and we just lived on the next block on Eleventh. We would see her start out for church and all of you little kids trailing along behind her. I knew that I should know her, I felt it in my heart.” And she said, “Don’t you worry about her, we’ll take good care of her.” And they did.

CB: Isn’t that amazing?
RD: It’s amazing how the Lord works things out and put someone there to watch out for her when we couldn’t.

CB: Right, right.

RD: I worked in Tampa then, I drove from here to the other side of Dale Mabry. That was during—I went to work there in the—about 1980. Rest of the time I was working in Lakeland, but I had that—that’s a long drive, because the Crosstown [Expressway] was not opened yet and there was just I-4 and [State Road] 574 and Buffalo and that was about it, that was it. Or [State Road] 60, Adamo Drive, and that was going through—that was bad. But I’d stop by and see Mama there in Lake Thonotosassa on the way home. She got—she didn’t know—excuse me, I’ve got the hiccups. She knew I was one of hers, but she didn’t know which one.

CB: Right, right.

RD: But we had a family reunion at my sister’s house next door one time, and this car drove up and this man and woman were getting out. And Mama, she didn’t know names, but she pointed that little finger, she said, “That’s one of mine! That’s one of mine!” It was one of my older brothers.

CB: Is that right?

RD: Yes. She knew it was one of hers. That was my brother Claude.

CB: Even though she couldn’t return—recall the name.

RD: No, but she knew it was one of hers.

CB: That is wonderful.

RD: There was just so much love in the family. And that particular brother, he worked down at Monroe Electric. He and my brother Lucas, they worked for Monroe Electric and Quinby Electric, downtown, all of their lives.
CB: Now, how much older was your father than your mother, 'cause he had six kids when she married him.

RD: If I’m not mistaken, he was—I think he was forty-seven and she was seventeen. And the only thing I can figure is they wanted to send her back to New York to go to school and she wasn’t gonna go. And so, from what I’ve heard, she hid over there under the (inaudible) house so that Grandpa couldn’t find her. I guess they had a fit when she was gonna marry this man with six children, but he was good to her. He was good, a good husband. He didn’t ever make a lot of money or anything, but he was good to my mama. After he died, people said, “Well, you ought to, you know, date.” And she said, “I won’t bring anyone in here that might mistreat my children.” There were six of us at home, and she said, “I could never find a man that would be as good to me as Papa was.” And I looked for that kind of a marriage myself. And I did find it the last—my last marriage. I was married to four different men.

CB: Okay, so what would you want people to remember about the Sulphur Springs that you knew? We talked earlier about maybe your great-granddaughter will find these tapes one day; what do you want her to know about where you grew up?

RD: Sulphur Springs was a good, safe place for us to live at that time. It was a good place. The school was good. The churches were good—several of those churches were built in the time that I lived there. That Assembly of God, I remember them building that, the church that my papa helped build. And it was just a good place to live. Clean. I can remember Mama let me go to church on Wednesday and Friday nights. —I walked from our house on Eleventh Street by Waters Avenue over to Bird Street and Thirteenth, which it’s a pretty good walk for a young teenage girl. But I never—people never bothered me, and I never thought that they would. And Mama always was praying for the Lord to take care of me ’cause I liked to go to church—I loved it. All during my teens; then when I got a divorce when I was twenty-one, of course, that was a no-no. And people said, “Well, why?” You know? Just because. (both laugh) Like my son said recently, oil and water. Just couldn’t work out. But I have a wonderful son out of it—just great.

CB: Wonderful. Well, the last thing I’m gonna ask you—then I’m gonna give you an opportunity, because we’ve said these tapes were going to be archived. Anything else, any message you would like to leave for other people, your own posterity? Anything that you would—that we haven’t covered that you want to be sure and get out.

RD: I think that the children of today have too much. We had to work; we had to help. And if I could earn a quarter and take it home for Mama to buy a couple of loaves of bread and a piece of sausage with, that was wonderful. Children of today have not had to earn anything, and this is ruining their outlook. They don’t know how to appreciate the
things that we had. We had nothing and we appreciated every bit of it. And the church—the
curch was a very important part of my life, and it was for everyone that I knew. I
know the Hensels they were Catholic; they went down the street there to the Catholic
church. I remember when they built that. You know, you can remember a lot when
you’re over eighty. (both laugh)

We had nice little neighborhood markets where we could buy things. I hate these big
stores; they have too many things in the stores. There should be more specialized stores
for people to go to so they could find the things that they need and could get better
service. Because now, if you can’t pick out—if you can’t find what you want, you’re just
pretty much out of luck. You go into a store and ask—Radio Shack is still one of the few
that you can go get help. They have people in there that are knowledgeable.

And since I’ve gotten older and I can’t work, that’s one of the things that I miss, is being
—working with the public in a job where I can help someone solve some kind of a
problem. Because after I came back here and went to work in selling electronics—it was
great being in a job where I could help someone find something they wanted, maybe to
keep one of the big drag lines running out at the mines or somebody at home. I’ve
known several people who were in the T.V. repair business, you know. And they could
actually help people, and I could find the part the guy needed to fix it.

That’s how I met my last husband. I was selling electronics, industrial electronics, and he
was in charge of the biomedical department of All Children’s Hospital in St. Pete. I was
covering that area for Leader Electronics out of Tampa. I called on him for several years.
And I knew that his wife had—I knew she had been very sick and that she had died, and
about a year after she died he asked me if I would go to dinner. And I said no. I didn’t
want anything to mess up my life. I had been happily divorced at that time for about
eighteen years, and I didn’t want anything to mess it up. My daughter and I lived here. I
was taking care of her. We had a roof over our head, I had a job I liked, I was near my
family. And the second time he asked me, I thought, “If I say no, this man’s not going to
ask me again.” And so I thought, “Well,” I said, “I guess I could.” He said, “I’ll tell you
what: if you will come to my home and have dinner, I will invite some of my neighbors
that you will—so that we won’t be alone, and you will be comfortable and they can meet
you.” So I said, “Okay.”

So I left Tampa, went to St. Pete to his home for dinner and he had a young doctor at the
All Children’s Hospital—her husband worked in the biomedical department with him—
and one of his neighbors, a nice lady who lived on the corner who became one of my
very dearest friends. They were there, and he was a good cook. And since the doctor
didn’t eat much meat stuff—she was a Jewish doctor, good pediatrician—he fixed her
macaroni and cheese, and he could just cook the best macaroni and cheese. And my
daughter told me when we went over there—he was—my daughter’s boyfriend was
doing some painting, and the three of us went over there and spent the weekend; he had room in the house for us. And she said, “Mom, here’s a man that loves to cook, he’s got a dishwasher—you ought to marry him just for that, if nothing else.” And she said, “Don’t you turn him down just ’cause he smokes.” But a few months after we got married, he quit smoking.

Anyway—so what did you ask me? (both laugh)

CB: If there was anything special you wanted to put on this tape for your family or anybody else.

RD: Yeah, there were a lot of—there have been a lot of bad things in my life, but I don’t see any point in dawdling over those, especially when I know the Lord’s got something better planned for me. Every time one of those things comes up, he’s gonna get me out of it, show me something better, and he has. And today—I’m just thankful every time I can open my eyes in the morning. I can still see and I can put my feet over the edge of the bed and I can walk myself into the bathroom. I say, “Thank you, Lord.” And I’m not living in a mansion, but it’s safe, it’s comfortable. When I lay down on that nice bed at night I feel safe in here and I hear the acorns hitting the roof—I know they’re not gonna come through. They sound like walnuts. I’m just thankful. The Lord has taken such good care of me and my family. And even though we’re scattered all over—I have a nephew right now that’s in Simi Valley, and some of those fires came close to where he’s living. But he’s safe; he’s okay.

CB: Maybe he’ll move back to Sulphur Springs next. (laughs)

RD: Yeah, that’s a terrible thing, ’cause like I say, when I was out there we saw that. Those Santa Ana winds, they’re dry winds coming off the desert, and they can be anywhere from fifteen to sixty, seventy miles an hour. I mean, you can’t stop them. I used to put towels and things around my windows when I lived in Simi Valley, and that dust—that dirt would still blow in. It brings that sand from the desert with it. It just—it’s really something.

CB: Well, you have just been delightful. I can’t tell you how much I appreciate this, and if you think of more things you wanna talk about, I’ll be more than happy to come back and spend more time with you.

RD: I probably have a million—
CB: Thank you so much.

*End of interview*