

**SARASOTA COUNTY WATER ATLAS  
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT  
NEW COLLEGE OF FLORIDA — FALL 2012**

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**Interviewee: John “Pete” Burgess**

**Date of Interview: October 2012**

**Interviewer: Matthew Cutler**

**Matthew Cutler:** Well, I think I have it all set up now. Would you mind just introducing yourself, saying your name, how long you've been in the area?

**Pete Burgess:** This is John Burgess, known as Pete. I've been in Sarasota most all my life. We moved down from Macon, Georgia when I was about 11 years old, and been here ever since. It was kind of a small town, Sarasota was almost still a fishing village when we got here. Had a hotel down at the end of Main St. and that's where we stayed for 3 weeks while we found a house to rent, and we were down with my mother and my three sisters, they came down, and, my father and mother were separated so, kinda, had to find a new home. So this was the place my mother brought us, and it was kinda, a really small town back then, we stayed in the Watchers(?) hotel on lower Main St. for about 3 weeks until we found a place we could rent, and every afternoon rain would come down lower Main St. and it would wash right into the building..[laughs]..and it was kinda fun..but..we would play out in the rain, but we really wanted to go to the beach and it kept us from going to the beach all that time because it was raining cats and dogs.

**Pete Burgess:** The whole time, whole 3 weeks and then finally, of course, we got nice weather, and we were able to participate in the beach at that time. But back then, there weren't any buses that ran to the beach so you either had to walk or ride your bicycle, and I think I was about 12 years old and it was uh, it was uh, all coconut palms. We had friends who knew how to climb the coconut trees along the median there going out to the beach, we'd get coconuts and we'd break em open and eat the coconut juice and the coconut. And, back then they had the Lido Beach Casino, and that was quite a place, and since then it's been torn down. And there was a Casino further south from there, most people don't even know about it, it was a big wooden casino, and it stayed there for years till it fell down.

**Pete Burgess:** We had some good times back then. You could drive your car on the beach in Siesta Key, if you had a car. The kids would go out there and we'd drive down the beach. It just uh, it was a good place to grow up, we had a good childhood. Went to Sarasota High School, that's where I graduated.

**Pete Burgess:** When I got out of school, I went to work with my brother-in-law. He had a, it was Bispham's Dairy back then. They had cows, that they milked everyday and we'd sell the milk to well both , we had two routes back then, we had a route on the north side of Sarasota, we'd deliver in the morning. And then we had a route on the other side of Sarasota we'd deliver to them in the afternoon and we delivered 7 days a week. Back then you didn't have as much

refrigeration so they'd pretty have to drink the milk before it went bad so that's the reason we delivered. Actually, the man that I worked for, Mr. Bispham, he started the dairy out on Longboat Key I understand, and he had a delivery schedule where he delivered a pint of milk to a person and then he'd come back in the afternoon and deliver another pint of milk because they didn't have refrigeration to keep it.

**Pete Burgess:** We had a lot of fun at that dairy, we'd get through work and we'd go back in the Bay there, and you could pick up these Bay scallops and we'd just, go through the woods there. We rented the property where the landings there are in Sarasota, and we'd go through the woods and we'd just wade in the water, take your shoes off and just wade in the water and you could get all the scallops you wanted back then. But scallops they tell me, need almost crystal clear water, and back then course it was really prime, so there were plenty of scallops. And fish too, we had all the fish you could eat all the time.

My Mother lived on Point of Rocks, that was out on Siesta Key, and she had a big house out there, that had about 75 windows in it. Upstairs and downstairs, it was a nice place. It overlooked the water. It was probably the highest place in Sarasota, according to elevation. And we'd go out in front of her house and you could spear fish out there, back then you could spear about any kinda fish you wanted to eat and you'd go out in the morning and you could spear those fish and bring em right in and cook them and there wasn't anything much better than that.

**Pete Burgess:** All the fisherman back then, we got to know a lot of them, and they'd give us mullet. You could, I remember one day I was on a milk route down south and on the beach down there and they needed a ride back, they only had their boats, so I rode 'em back to Vamo, that's a little village down south Sarasota. I rode em back there, and he said, come back this afternoon when I get home I'll give you some Mullet. I remember he gave us 3 or 4 buckets full of Mullet and we had Mullet all for, I know a long time we put them in our freezer...hah...but, it was just different then. I remember one lady I used to have on my milk route, and you could go there and she'd always have fish, and she'd fish for her husband, too. She'd go out in the morning early and when I knew her she must have been..70 years old, but she'd...he worked for a lumber company in Sarasota, and she would go out and catch fish in the morning and he'd take them to work and he'd sell them to the workers, and that helped their income, ya know?

**Pete Burgess:** But back then, you could pretty much live off the land. My wife's uncle, he had a place out in east Sarasota, it was a big ranch, about 3000 acres and it's now sub-division, it's called Myakka...uh oh it's uh, I think Berlin bought all the property and developed it. And I think it's called Myakka Ranch I believe it was. But anyway, you could, we used to go out there and you could hunt and fish out there, and it was real wild, it was all kinda game back then, turkey and deer and about anything you wanted. Actually we never had to buy much meat between fish and we'd shoot duck and turkey and you could pretty well just live off the land. So it was, we had 4 daughters we had to provide for so that helped a lot.

**Pete Burgess:** Had game wardens back then, and of course they still have game wardens but there was one game warden in particular that everybody said you had to watch out for if you had over the limit...hah...course we had over the limit I'm sure sometimes but, his name was Lefty Taylor. He was probably the best game warden that Sarasota ever had and he sure could sneak up on you...[laughs]...but he was a nice guy. I heard that he would let different ones get by with a lot that probably shoulda paid for it but they...in fact I was...so his son the other day, Ronald Taylor, he said that his dad did let a lot of people off that should have probably been really caught..hah. but yeah it was fun growin up back in those days. 70 years ago now, and we've been here, my wife and I have been married now I think 65 years. And it's been a good life. We built this house in 1974, and we'd been here ever since. We had a house in Sarasota for about 25 years. Sarasota just got too much traffic for us, so my wife says we have to find a place, she worked at the hospital, she said we gotta find a place away from all this traffic so we got, I'd been on a milk route at that time and I was in the management at that time, the dairy had been bought out 3 or 4 times.

**Pete Burgess:** So anyway, I was on a truck one day and I was out in this area and I saw a For Sale sign and she came home that afternoon and she said we gotta find us more property. I said I know exactly where we are going to find it. So we drove up here and she saw these trees and it was about 5 acres in. So we found the lady that owned it, there was a real estate sign out front, so we put down a down payment and there was several people looking at the property. One of them was a priest I think, he'd come out here and just sit under the trees and meditate and the property was owned by a lady that had a bar and the bar was in old Myakka, it was called the Silver Dollar. And so we put the down payment down and she said she already had somebody put a down payment down that we probably wouldn't be able to get it because she thought she already had it sold. Anyway she found out that they didn't have any money, so we took and put a backup offer on it. I didn't know such a thing existed, but the real estate lady said to, so we did. And we ended up with the property. It turned out to be real good for our whole family. We had a daughter that needed an acre so we deeded her an acre down on the property and we took the middle acre and a half and sold that and paid the mortgage off on the house we had built here.

**Pete Burgess:** We had a builder from Palmetto across the river and he'd never built a home over here so we had him build the house for us. We saw it in Better Homes & Gardens magazine, we probably, ya know you never build the perfect house but we've enjoyed it here. We raised our family here and we had grandchildren. They were back and forth through the woods when my daughter down at the other end she had the house down there they'd come back and forth through the woods, and it was just nice having your grandchildren all the time around.

**Matthew Cutler:** How did you meet Jane?

**Pete Burgess:** Jane and I went to school together, and I asked her out for a date one night and we went, I think I had to tow her on a bicycle, we didn't have a car, we didn't have anything, any transportation. So we'd go to the movies I'd tow her on the bicycle. One night we did get a car

from this fellow that worked at the dairy with me and that was kinda of a funny thing. There was a drive-in theatre north of Sarasota so we went to the drive-in in that old car and it just barely made it. And it was raining that night and I remember we had the battery, it fell through the floor. And we drove the car as far as it would go. And I think that fella that I got the car from, he only paid 50 dollars for it and that's about all it was worth...hah...so we started walking and we were all the way up there, close to New College, and we walked down Bay Shore Rd., and she had an ex-boyfriend down there that she knew. So we went and knocked on the door and her ex-boyfriend's father came out and we told him what happened to the car and asked him if he would take us home to Sarasota, so he said sure. He owned a hardware store in Sarasota. It was quite funny though, but he was a nice guy, he brought us back to Sarasota, I remember that night...[laughs]...but I don't know how we got the car home—I still don't remember.

**Pete Burgess:** But during the time I went to Sarasota, I always liked football, I played a lot of football there. We got beat a lot of times, we won a few, Manatee was our real big game, just like it is now. But I think they beat us my senior year 6-0, and that was a terrible thing...[laughs]...any time a team got beat by Manatee.

**Matthew Cutler:** So you played on your high school team?

**Pete Burgess:** Yeah I played 4 years there, and I really enjoyed it. After I got out of high school we had a team that a lot of people didn't know about, it was called the Semi-Pro I guess. Kids that got out of college that would come back home and they'd want to still play football, so we got up a team and we'd play other teams around the state and we called ourselves The Salts, I don't know how we got that name. But we had the man that owned the Sarasota Dog Tracks, he sponsored us and he bought all our equipment for us. We'd play every Friday night or Saturday night, we'd go all the way across the state. And we didn't have any insurance, if we'd of gotten hurt it woulda been too bad, ya know?..hah...but we had a lot of fun. Finally it ended up where we teamed up with some boys from Manatee and we all played together as a team and we did that for 4 or 5 years, then I think they discontinued it.

**Matthew Cutler:** So you were raised by pretty much just your Mom?

**Pete Burgess:** Yeah, my mother she raised us. She worked hard. Ya know back then it was pretty hard making ends meet, but we always seemed to have a meal, and she worked hard, in 3 or 4 different department stores in Sarasota, she sold children's clothing in that store for quite a while. My sisters and I... my sisters of course didn't make a lot of their own clothes back then and she would...I can still remember washing the clothes, we didn't have a washer and dryer, she had to wash them in the tub, and that just would break your heart to see her working that hard ya know washing those clothes like she did and taking care of all the kids, but we made it through.

**Matthew Cutler:** How long was she around...?

**Pete Burgess:** My mother, she was probably 65 or 70 when she died, she had Alzheimer's, but she had a real good life, loved by everybody. She lived out there on the beach, she loved the beach and the water. She got remarried to a retired army colonial, and he's the one who had that big house with all the windows. And her life was a little easier about that time because he had enough money from his pension and everything to support her and made her life much better for her.

**Pete Burgess:** And my dad, he was in the clay mining business. They mined this kaolin clay, it's a white clay like the chalk they use on chalkboards. That's pretty much what it is. It's used in paint pigments and fillers for paint pigments and mostly in fine grade paper. They put a finish on real good grade paper, they take the ink much better that way. That's actually what the white cliffs of Dover in England, they're all kaolin clay. There's a place in Georgia, a section that runs through that's all under burdened with this kaolin and they take the overburden off. All the dirt comes off and then they have this pure, the purest clay in the world I guess. But that's what he did most of his life, worked for a big company that mined this kaolin clay.

**Pete Burgess:** My one uncle actually wrote a book on kaolin and he was probably the most knowledgeable of all the brothers, there were 4 brothers that did this. And one of them liked mining so much he went to Georgia Tech in Atlanta, he became an engineer, and the older brother, he ended up in Lima, Peru, trying to find gold and he went in the gold mining business down there. They were all raised in Macon, Ga.

**Matthew Cutler:** Did your dad ever make it to Sarasota?

**Pete Burgess:** He'd come down occasionally, and we'd go out to lunch. There weren't too many restaurants back then. There was one restaurant, you probably heard about, it was a drive-in restaurant. You can't talk about Sarasota without talking about Smack's. It was a kind of drive-in where you had a speaker, like in a drive-in theatre, and they'd hang a speaker on the car and it'd play music. It was kinda way before it's time really, and it'd play music and if you'd wanna order french fries you pushed the button and they'd bring you an order of french fries. The girls would come out and put it on a tray, sit it on the side of your car. And they had that restaurant probably I guess 30, 40 years. It was owned by this fellow called Mack...McDonald I think was his last name. But the property was bought out by a bank, on that corner now. But he had the best hamburgers and best hot dogs in Sarasota. Everybody came there after the football games. They called it cruisin'. They'd cruise the parking lot and we would..there were guys there like the Boston Red Sox. This was their home back then, and fellas like Ted Williams, all the ball players would come there and you'd meet em...you just never knew who you were going to meet, Birdie Tibbits, Billy Goodman, he was another ball player.

**Pete Burgess:** Paul Waner he was another good ball-player. But if you didn't eat at Smacks, you just didn't know anybody because everybody came there...[laughs]...it was the place to be. The kids that had cars, they called it cruising Main St. That's about all you had to do because there

wasn't, well when you got past 10th St. in Sarasota you were in the woods and that was north and south boundaries were, well it was about where, I guess, Bee Ridge Road would be the south part, and that was about the size of the city then.

**Pete Burgess:** We had some hurricanes back then. I remember one hurricane we had, and we had to go to work milking the cows, that was when I just started working out of high school, I forget what year it was. '48 or '49 there was a bad hurricane that came through. We thought it was bad but it wasn't nearly as bad as Andrew or anything like that.

[Pause for ringing phone]

**Pete Burgess:** It wasn't near as bad as a lot of storms that we've seen, but this one storm it was called Donna and I can remember there were these tall trees along 41. That was highway 41 going south called the Tamiami Trail and it had all these Australian pines, they planted these pines as windbreaks and we got up that morning and we went to milk the cows and all the power lines were down on 41. Trees had blown down, a lot of those trees were every which way. So we had 3 or 4 dogs, and my brother in law he was a great big fella. He sent the dogs across those wires before we went to cross to make sure they wouldn't electrocute us, ya know? ::laughs:: That the only way to go to work. We had to walk to work it was about a mile to get there.

**Pete Burgess:** We used to have good times down there when we milked the cows. There were two brothers, my brother-in law and his brother, and there was the Bispham boys—and everybody knew the Bipsham boys. The fun we used to have, though. I can remember that the feed salesman would come and sell us feed and they would talk him into going and getting a bottle of whisky and he'd go and get a bottle of whisky and they'd have a good time with that. They'd bet him all kind of crazy things. I remember one thing they used to do was bet him that they couldn't pick up a 100 pound sack of feed with their teeth...[laughs]...and he says you can't do that. They say yeah, yeah we can pick it up with our teeth. Anyway they would take a sack of feed and they would lay it down on the floor and they'd get up on that sack of feed and take one of those full sacks and they'd put that croaker sac in their back teeth and they'd pick it about 2 inches off the ground. You wouldn't believe that you could do that but they were rugged guys...[laughs]...

**Pete Burgess:** And we'd walk in the barn, it'd be so hot coming in from milking the cows. We didn't have enough water pressure, so they had a big barrel there that they would fill the barrel and they would leave the water running in the barrel all the time, and they would dip these 5 gallon buckets in the barrel. That way they could rinse the barn down between each herd of cows coming in to milk them. They got to where they were so good throwing that water to rinse the barn that we'd all have shorts on, because it'd be so hot, we'd come in out of driving the cows and you never knew when to expect it but the one brother, he was so strong he could take two 5 gallon buckets and just pick them up, all the way up from the floor to your side, but he would take these buckets of water and hit you when you came in the barn, you wouldn't expect

it..hah...boy he'd pop you with that bucket of water and he'd just nail and knock you down...but that's the kind of fun we'd have. I remember one day we had a place where we washed milk bottles. We had this kid, scared to death of snakes. So the bottles, when you put them in the vat to wash them, they were upside down and they would float in there and you'd wash them with these brushes and you'd put them two at a time on the brushes and put them in a fresh water vat with chlorine in it. I remember we snuck in the back door there and put a snake on the vat of bottles and he turned back after rinsing the bottles. He saw that snake and he ran out through the door and there were two 10 gallon cans of milk there he ran right through those, spilled them all over the dairy floor and he didn't stop till he got all the way to 41. That's about a mile away. I don't think he ever came back to help us...hah... We scared that poor boy to death. I guess if you could call that fun, we had a lot of things we used to do like that. It was fun growing up back then

**Matthew Cutler:** So the beach, did that happen right when you moved here, was it more popular with you when you were younger hanging out with your siblings?

**Pete Burgess:** To go to the beach? That's really all you had to do...If you were a kid you had the drive-in and well, you could go fishing. We used to go fishing a lot. After school we'd, the only way you could get to the beach was either on a bicycle or if someone had a car and took you out there. Yeah we stayed on the beach a lot. My wife and I are suffering from that with skin cancer. Ya know a lot of people don't realize that the sun's that detrimental to your skin. We've had a lot of visits to the doctor because of that. It's a good thing to wear the sun screen of course.

**Pete Burgess:** Yeah you'd go out there on the beach and sometimes you'd stay out there 4 or 5 hours. But back then that was the greatest thing there was around here, and it still is. I guess people can live anywhere in the world, some of these people in Sarasota, and they choose Sarasota 'cause it's such an ideal place. You got the sun and all that goes with it

**Matthew Cutler:** Did you used to go anywhere on the beach or was there a spot..?

**Pete Burgess:** You could pretty well fish anywhere. We used to catch a lot of trout. We had an old boat that we'd take, and back then you'd push your own bait up. You'd get a little square net, and you could wade in the grass there, and shrimp would be in the grass and they'd jump on the net and you'd push it through the grass and you'd have all the bait you wanted. More than anything, you'd catch 100 or so trout in one afternoon back then. Lotta fish. I remember the old fisherman, they would be out there waiting for the mullet. They call them, wait for them to get right, I don't know what they meant by that. The mullet would run out of that pass so fast and they looked like the water was black with those mullet, millions of mullet back then. And they might run for 5 or 6 hours and get just right and those fishermen put those nets out and just about break those nets. They had got so many fish in it. And I remember people on the beach would go out there and help them pull the nets, and they would give them all the fish in the morning because they had more fish than they could ever sell. Yeah, fishing was good.

**Matthew Cutler:** When did I-75 start?

**Pete Burgess:** Yeah, we were here before 75 was put in. We used to ride our bicycles when they first started putting it in, we would ride up to the interstate and we'd ride all the way south to State Rd 70 and back home. Of course, when they opened it up we couldn't do that anymore. In fact, we rode on it before they even opened it up. We'd drive from Sarasota up here, and I remember one night we got caught. The highway patrolman said how'd you get on that highway? Said we just rode on it. He said didn't you see the sign? I said there wasn't any sign, sir. He says, well there was a sign there, so he took us all the way back to Sarasota and we showed him that they didn't have a sign out and so he let us go he didn't give us a ticket. That was around 70 something, in the 70's they got that finished

**Matthew Cutler:** How much around the county did your milk route take you?

**Pete Burgess:** Well, back then we had 2 milk routes when I started working for the dairy. The one day we'd go to Longboat Key, well that was the afternoon route because there wasn't much population out there. When you went to Longboat, it was only about I guess if it was 30 houses out there all the way up it'd be a lot, not motels or hotels. There was a place called the Cherry Oak Cottages, and that was owned by Mr. Thompson and his family. And he would go out on the golf course and he'd play golf all day, and that's where he got his tenants. He'd meet them on the golf course and invite them to come out and spend time at his place. He had about 8 cottages. He kept them pretty full. And on the South end of Longboat there was a plant nursery that sold trees and shrubbery, and that was all that was on the south end. There was really nothing till you got all the way up to the north end of Longboat Key, and there was a restaurant up there on the end of the key. The bridge of course wasn't there at that time. It'd been washed out in a hurricane, so that was about maybe 30 houses up there in that little village. Don't know if you've been up there on the north end, but my sister she had a house up there for years and her husband was raised up there. His family had coca-cola stock, some of the original shares, so he was well off for a long time, till they spent it all.

**Pete Burgess:** He bought 40 acres out here east of Sarasota and he had a wild animal farm out there, had Bengal tigers and wolves, about anything you can think of. I think he had to feed them a whole cow every day. He had the cages made but they, I don't know what happened to all those animals, but he was also a racecar driver at Daytona. He had his own car and he had a crew that drove his racecar and he was known as the rebel, and he had a rebel flag on the hood of his car, painted on the hood of his car. That was back when it was big time stuff I mean driving at Daytona. And he still goes up to Charlotte, NC, and meets his old buddies; they meet up there every year. His father had a home out there on Longboat Key, and that was about it, there wasn't many houses out there. It was another set of cottages called Cherry Oak Cottages, and they kept having to move those cottages. The beach kept eroding back during the storms and things, and they'd have to move those cottages every time a storm came. It would get closer and closer. But



some of those cottages have been redone and they are still over there in the village. People still living in some of them.

**Matthew Cutler:** None of the hurricanes...you talked a little about the hurricanes before but, did you do a lot of preparation, how much warning did you have for something like that?

**Pete Burgess:** Well back then of course there wasn't much communication about hurricanes. I really don't know how we found out whether a hurricane was coming or not. I guess maybe their radio, I guess that was the only way back then. But as far as preparation, all you did was you got everything out of the yard and anything that would fly and you'd board your windows up. We've been through some pretty bad storms. In fact, here we had a big tree come down and take our porch off, and it pulled the whole front of the house out. And we stood in the living room there and we watched a big pine tree, the storm came and it pushed the pine tree over a little bit and it'd come back up and it'd push it again and it'd come back up. I tell my wife this time it's going over. And it came down and hit the corner of the roof, and when the porch came off it pulled the whole front of the house out and the stairs were way out. And we had to have a carpenter come in and all this was all boarded up with 2x6's and that held the house up while they put the wall back in. And the porch, we had to take that down piece by piece because it was so messed up. That's when we got this new porch put on.

**Pete Burgess:** We had another tree out back fall on the garage. That was a big oak tree. Probably since we've been here we've had, during storms and just natural old age, we've had some of these trees fall, and we call our family and they come and help us cut it up and we split the wood. But we've had some pretty good storms since we've been here. But you sit here and watch these trees and you wonder whether you're safe or not but of course anywhere you can be during a hurricane you can never know what's going to happen. But it gets pretty hairy in here with all these trees.

**Matthew Cutler:** Did you ever think about leaving?

**Pete Burgess:** We were going to move out to Oregon one time, but I'm glad we didn't because, I don't know, we got all our family here. It seems like every Saturday once a month our families made it kind of a ritual since we've gotten older to come up and help us. They cut the grass and dig the weeds out and we kind of get together as a family and have a kind of family reunion once a month, which makes it real nice. But I'm glad we never did move because ya know, it's just enough room for our family when they come home to visit, we've got a couple of extra bedrooms.

**Matthew Cutler:** We can take a break for a bit if you want

**Pete Burgess:** Yeah let's go down to the barn.

[END OF FIRST INTERVIEW]

*Interview 2, October, 2012 at Pete's House*

**Matthew Cutler:** Maybe just to start...did you think of anything later you wanted to add...I was wondering if maybe we could pick back up on some of the milk route sort of things, re-hash how you got into it? What were the early days of that...?

**Pete Burgess:** It was when I got out of high school, actually I did it during high school. I'd go down and work for my brother-in-law and his brother. They owned the dairy, with their father. And it was south of Sarasota there where The Landings is now. They had about 20 acres in there and then they leased another 30 or 40 acres back in the place where Oyster Bay is now. And we used to have to go down and get the cows and bring them up and milk them, and it was alright. We had milking machines back then to milk the cows. But if you had a hurricane, you had to milk them by hand, maybe as long as 2 weeks, cause we didn't have a generator, nobody could afford a generator back then. So we'd have to milk them by hand, and your hands would get so sore from not being used to milking those cows. Yeah it was pretty intensive work. Had to mix the feed. The feed would come in on a railroad car about north of Sarasota and we'd have to go up and load it onto the truck and bring it back. We split a load of feed with another dairy there in North Sarasota, so you'd get 3 or 4 different kinds of grain and you'd put it in this room and you'd have to take a shovel. And after you open all the bags, you dump it all out and take a shovel and mix cotton-seed meal with maybe some oats and other kinda feed in there. And then you'd use citrus pulp for what they call roughage. That would kinda fill the cow up, and it was a cheaper feed because we could get it from Tropicana up in Bradenton, we'd go up and get a truck load. You'd feed that and then you'd give them a little bit of the good grains so they would produce better milk.

**Pete Burgess:** But it was quite an experience washing the milk bottles. You wash them by hand. And the man that worked there, his name was Mr. Wallace, Wallace Phillips. He had a little mustache like Hitler, so we nick named him Hitler Bill. [laughs] He didn't seem to mind it, he was alright with that. But he'd have to bottle every bottle by hand and had a big bottling machine that the bottles would go on there automatic. But he would have to crank the handle down every time he kept a bottle, and before the new caps came out we used to use paper caps and it was called a plug cap to cap the bottle. You did that all by hand if you couldn't afford a capping machine. When they came out with these new, Day Crow caps, made by a company called Day-Crow, and they were metal caps and they were much better and you could, they came in a tube, you'd put those tubs in and you'd put one cap on each bottle as it came around. But that was quite an operation because he'd have to stand there and maybe cap by hand, a couple thousand bottles in an afternoon, plus you'd have to wash all those milk bottles for him. But we had a lot of good times there, the brother-in-laws, they were kinda out to have a good time. A lot of the days we worked, it wasn't all work. We did a lot of playing around like everyone else. I remember we would get through work and his brother Siy, he and I would race to the house every day. It was about a mile and half. Sometimes he'd beat me some days I'd beat him. But he's still living, he lives out on Clark Rd. in Sarasota. He's a big fella. He's got long arms. He used to

be able to pick up two buckets of water, that amazed me, and hold them straight out, just 5 gallon buckets. I never knew how he could do that but he was a strong fellow.

**Pete Burgess:** We'd go down to the bay and get scallops and that was after we finished work. Back then, you'd get all the scallops you wanted just by wading in the water. But their father, he was more of a farmer than a dairy-man, he loved to grow tomatoes and have a garden and when they sold the dairy he went up to North Florida and he grew a lot of his vegetables. He made preserves like fig preserves, and he'd can his own stuff. He was quite an individual. When they sold the dairy, the one brother he went up to North Florida to Live Oak and he started another dairy up there, and his brother started a dairy out east of Sarasota out there. And he stayed in that 'till he developed the land, and he had a home development out there and he sold real estate, I can still see him walking up and down the street, selling real estate to people. He made more off of one house sale than he did in the dairy business all year probably because it was touch and go in the dairy business. Feed got so high and land got so expensive he just couldn't afford to stay in it. They did real well for themselves while they were in the business. They sold it out to a dairy in St. Pete when the Sunshine Skyway opened. That dairy in St Pete wanted to expand into this territory, so they bought out several smaller territories, and my brother was one they bought out. They'd bring the milk on a big transport every day, over the Bradenton. We had a bottling plant in Bradenton too where we kept our trucks, we had about 40 routes and delivered mostly home delivery back then. We had a few store routes that went and delivered to stores. But it got so expensive to deliver the milk when gas started going up that they had to get out of the home service business.

**Pete Burgess:** I guess I was in it for about 25 years, I went from delivering milk to kind of managing the routes and then into managing the dairies. I really enjoyed the route work most of all, I didn't really enjoy the management part of it.

**Matthew Cutler:** So you like driving around and delivering?

**Pete Burgess:** Yeah I liked that much better, meeting people and building your route and getting new customers. It was more of a sales job. Fellow that was in charge of the sales, he'd always tell the guys, there's going to be a sale made when I go to that door. I'd say, how come you say that? He said, well, they're going to sell me that they don't want my product, I'm going to sell them that they do, so there's going to be a sale made. But he was a cracker-jack salesman. And we used to have meetings where we'd get people that. Like one fella, he was another good salesman, he sold chocolate syrup to us. And he'd come and put on sales promotions, and he'd give away 5 dollar bills and 5 dollar bills were like 100 dollars to us back then. And he'd give you an easy question, and if you could answer the question fast enough you'd get the 5 dollar bill. He was a real promoter. He had an idea where he would take a quart of chocolate milk and a quart of golden Guernsey milk, that was a kind of elite milk, it was from the Guernsey cows so he'd put a chocolate milk and a bottle of Guernsey milk in there and you'd put in a cottage cheese and I forget what else but we had these buckets. And we'd put 4 or 5 products in these buckets and

we'd go to the house and we'd sell the bucket for real cheap price, like 2 dollars for everything in it, and everything was in the bucket.

**Pete Burgess:** And then you'd from there talk the customer into taking milk from you. That way we built, we built a lot of routes that way. We had 6 or 8 guys going door to door, you couldn't go door to door like that today because people would run you off. But back then you'd just go from door to door and you'd talk to the lady of the house or whoever came to the door and you'd talk them into taking milk from you. We put routes all over Florida, went to Avon Park in the middle of the state. Wauchula and I guess Sebring, Florida, put on quite a few routes and eventually we had to put in what you'd call a substation where they'd bring us the milk and we'd distribute it out of that substation.

**Pete Burgess:** Eventually it just got too expensive to keep delivering to the homes. Back then it was like 25 cents a quart, and bread was maybe 10 or 15 cents a loaf. Those were real cheap, but of course you didn't make much money either. I think the first paycheck I got for working 7 days a week, which I worked when I first started, I think I got 44 dollars a week is what they paid us. We kept having to go to the brothers for raises, and finally we got it where we'd made our work on a commission basis so the more we sold the more we'd make after they agreed to set it up that way. Before that you just got a flat salary. We had families we had to support, so we needed more money. But the first house I bought in Sarasota was a brand new 2 bedroom house, it wasn't big, but it was sufficient for starting a family. I think it only cost 9500 dollars. That was brand new on a corner lot and that same house today'd probably be worth maybe 115, 120,000 where it is, so that shows a difference in the economy then and now .

**Pete Burgess:** It's sure changed a lot, you'd think back then. I remember when I went to school I took a course in mechanical drawing. I used to draw home plans, and I drew up a plan and the instructor estimated the house to cost 18000 dollars, and you'd think well that's a house nobody will ever build cause they can't afford that. That was I think a 4 brim house we could build for that. Times changed quite rapidly, and I would never have thought that things would go up to 100, 150, 200,000 even the houses now, a million dollar house isn't that uncommon in Sarasota. That's about the standard price of some of em now, about 10 million isn't unheard of if you look in the real estate sales.

**Matthew Cutler:** Yeah...Everything is more expensive, but people get paid more, prices go up...

**Pete Burgess:** Yeah if you take the average guy probably makes, I don't know if anybody is really making, if they make 40, 50,000 a year they could probably live alright, but any less I think they'd have a hard time raising a family.

**Matthew Cutler:** When you were making the 48 dollars a week, was that comfortable for you? You didn't have to support anyone at that time..?

**Pete Burgess:** Yeah, we had a daughter. We had just had a daughter, and of course we got dairy products, they'd give us a couple quarts of milk a day. So we had mostly dairy products that we could eat. I usually ended up working another job, I'd mow lawns for somebody. I'd work out the beach, and I had 5 or 6 customers out there where I'd take of their yard and plant flowers for them and just do anything around the house, and we even got to where we would do remodeling for people. We put our ad in the shopping guide, it was a little paper, and we would, like they wanted the bathroom remodeled..we didn't know anything about remodeling a bathroom so what we did was go to home depot and ask the fella in there how you put a bathtub in, and we got by doing all that stuff. I remember one bathtub we put in my house in Sarasota. It needed a new bathtub so we had to cut a hole in the wall to put the tub in.

*{Jane walks in, "It's not me..."}*

**Pete Burgess:** *It's not?*

...

**Pete Burgess:** *Are you alright out there [to Jane]*

**Jane Burgess:** *Yes, if I fall and break my neck I'll call you*

**Pete Burgess:** *Alright*

**Matthew Cutler:** *[laughs]*

**Pete Burgess:** *Call me before you do}*

**Pete Burgess:** Yeah we, had a lot of different things we'd do, we'd roof houses for people. I remember one day we roofed our first shed-like. We started the wrong way laying the shingles and got just about through with the roof and the man said, I think you put them on wrong. So we had to go back and take them all off. Actually the way you roof a house, you start at the bottom and roof to the top, and we started at the top and roofed to the bottom, it just didn't work out that way. The reason we had a tub in that bathroom in Sarasota and if you have a 5 foot wide tub you can't lift it up to get it out of the bathroom if it's an iron tub, so I didn't know it was common practice to take them through the wall but I figured that was the only way to get it out of that bathroom. So we cut a hole in the wall the size of the bathtub and we slid it through the opening into the bedroom, and then we got a new tub and slid that back through the same hole. Then we plastered the hole up, put new studs in, plastered it up and right after that we sold the house and I don't think the people ever knew there had ever been a hole in that wall. That's when we moved

**Pete Burgess:** We had this house built by a fellah from Palmetto, it was the first house he'd built in the Bradenton area, and if I had to do it over again I'd a built a little different house. I'd a built a house with a bit of an overhang to protect the side from the rain, and I wouldn't build a two story house again because as you get older, like my wife, she can't go up the stairs. She can go up

but she has a problem with her knee, so I definitely don't recommend a two story house to a family because eventually if you stay in that house you going to have physical problems and I just feel that a one story house would be more practical for anybody.

**Matthew Cutler:** I guess you said that when your mom met the...captain..?

**Pete Burgess:** It was a colonel, yeah.

**Matthew Cutler:** He was the one with a two-story house right?

**Pete Burgess:** Yeah they did, they had a two-story house on the Point of Rocks. That's a place in Sarasota, one of the nice places as far a location. It's right on the water down there in Sarasota, and I think that house had about 80 windows in it. It must have been built probably in the 20's, 30's, maybe before that. It was a house that was built and then they put a porch all the way around the upstairs and all the way around the downstairs and had all those windows put in. But he bought that house for 5000 dollars when he got out of the service, and when he and my mother passed away we sold it for 400,000. Then it burnt down shortly after that and the property alone, the lady that bought it from us, she got over a million dollars for it. Now I think they probably got a 10 million dollar house sitting on there. Just shows you how much times have changed so much

**Matthew Cutler:** We're there a lot of...we're most of the houses small, one-story houses?

**Pete Burgess:** No, yeah a lot of them were in Sarasota mostly were little bungalow type houses. but there were bigger houses down on certain parts of Sarasota like Cherokee Park, and then there was other areas where they had large houses but the...

**Matthew Cutler:** Did you ever deliver milk to those people?

**Pete Burgess:** Yeah, that was my main route on Siesta Key where, where a lot of artists in Sarasota. I delivered to one fella, I remember he drew a comic strip called Alley Oop and his family became real wealthy because of that comic strip. But there were a lot of people out there. Like the one I delivered to was, they owned the Revere-Wear company where they made pots and pans, and that was a millions of dollar company I guess. They lived out there; it was that kind of people who lived on the Key back then, and the artists. Then there were a lot of writers out there too.

**Pete Burgess:** There were a couple of artists that illustrated the covers for magazines like Saturday Evening Post and those types of people. Then there was the Out Of Door school. A lot of wealthy kids went there, and I guess that's one of the older schools in Sarasota. They'd hold classes outside. It was kind of like New College, it didn't have any regimental grading system I don't think. They just taught and either you got it or you didn't get it. I think it went on to be a real credited school. They have a branch now in Lakewood Ranch. I think they still have a place out on Siesta Key. But that's mainly where it was back then, just the school out on Siesta Key.

But it was in a real nice area. You could sit in the classrooms and see the water from the classrooms. It was nice for the kids, and I think they participated in a lot of water sports like canoeing and things like that in the off season.

**Pete Burgess:** The roads in Sarasota back then were mostly dirt roads if you got outside the city limits.

**Matthew Cutler:** So your route was mostly on the dirt roads?

**Pete Burgess:** No, it was pretty much paved where I was out on the Keys, on all the Keys. We had to ice our milk down when we first started. We had a machine that made ice and eventually we got what we called refrigerated trucks. We got refrigerated plates in there that froze overnight, and then you wouldn't have to worry about putting ice on it anymore. But that ice was kind of a nuisance cuz your feet would stay wet all day from the water running into your cab of your truck, so it was nice to get away from that once we got those new trucks

**Matthew Cutler:** Did most of your customers have an open door policy?

**Pete Burgess:** Yeah, we would make arrangements with them where if they weren't home we'd go in, and we knew where the key was if they locked the house. Back then most people didn't even lock their houses. Because nobody ever broke into homes back then. It was unreal that you could go away and leave your house open. But you could go right in and tell your customer that she didn't have to worry about her dairy products that you'd take care of it. She'd tell you an order to keep in there all the time, so you might keep a couple pounds of butter and the eggs and the milk and the chocolate milk, whatever. You could sell her and then time to time we'd have different promotions, like Christmas time we'd have Egg-Nog. You'd sell extra egg nog. They'd give you a bonus for every quart of egg nog you sold. You got a 10 cent bonus, so it was to our advantage to sell a lot of egg nog. But you'd go right in and put it in the refrigerator.

**Pete Burgess:** I was on a route maybe 10 or 11 years, and in that time you'd see a lot of their children grow up and have families, and you'd start delivering to them, and you'd get customers that way, new customers. Just may have 3 or 4 different families of the same family living in different houses that you'd start delivering to. I had one lady that was in the real estate, and she'd get customers for me. Whenever they moved into town, I would go there and have to beat the other dairies to the house before they got the customer, so I'd go there and if they had a refrigerator I'd just put a complimentary few quarts of milk and some other items in the refrigerator. So I'd get my foot in the door, and once I got to talk to them usually I could get the customer that way. But I'd always see that the lady in the real estate that got the customers for me, always see that she had plenty of milk and whatever she needed. I'd just give it to her because she got me more business than anybody.

**Pete Burgess:** She did a lot of rental business too. Back then business was mostly done in the wintertime because everybody went home in the summertime. So your route would drop way

down in the summer, so that's when you'd have to do other odd jobs like whatever you could find to do like mowing grass for people or planting flowers for them. I had a ready-made thing for that cuz I would just ask as I went around on the route if they needed me to do any work for them. But back then you almost had to have a part time job or you almost couldn't make it. Especially in the summertime.

**Matthew Cutler:** So it's not a new phenomenon for snowbirds...

**Pete Burgess:** No, it's always been that way. My daughter is in real estate on Longboat Key and she does rentals for Wagner reality, and this next month will be her busy time of the year.

**Pete Burgess:** She'll I guess do most of the business within 3 or 4 months and then it'll go back to where she won't have a whole lot to do until the summer rentals come around. You get a better summer business now on the Keys than you used to. More and more people are finding Sarasota - they could live anywhere they wanted to but they choose Sarasota. They got enough money to live anywhere they want to. It's just that environment, the beauty of it that keeps drawing people. We're so fortunate to have all that right at our fingertips.

**Pete Burgess:** Do you know anything about that Crosley Estate, right next to...

**Matthew Cutler:** It sounds familiar...what is it?

**Pete Burgess:** The man that owned it originally he was an owner, an investor I think, and he actually built the Crosley refrigerators and also the Crosley car. A lot of people don't even know he built the Crosley car. It never really took off; it was a small dinky car but...kind of like a tin can and a Cadillac, that's about what it was. But I guess they sold quite a few of them, but I think he made his main money in refrigeration. But the estate now it's just north of New College there, I imagine you'd have access to it because they put on a lot of plays and things out of New College there, I think it's New College that puts on plays there...

**Matthew Cutler:** The Crosley estate, that sounds very familiar...

**Pete Burgess:** Here it is.

[Shows Crosley car on computer]

**Matthew Cutler:** There it is. The Crosley car. It looks pretty funny.

*[We go outside, to look for some photo albums. None come back into the house with us]*

*[Recorded casual conversation with both Jane and Pete, various clips in this conversation have been transcribed]*

**Pete Burgess:** There were milk routes, and diaper routes, and dry cleaning...you got to know those people like a personal friend



Jane Burgess: family, you were family. The milk man was part of the family.

**Pete Burgess:** I still remember Harry, what was Harry's name that did the dry cleaning?

Jane Burgess: Just Harry. Gibson?

**Pete Burgess:** I don't know...

Jane Burgess: Gilmer, Harry Gilmer.

**Pete Burgess:** Was it? But they were just like family members, you'd come in, given em a cup of coffee. Made you sit down and eat breakfast with you. The diaper man we went to school with him. What was his name? You remember? Me neither. It was just a small little town back then. Everybody knew everybody. You could walk down Main St. and you knew everybody, you knew the guy that sold you the shoes for the children, Sam Eidelson. He was a Jewish fella that had a shoe shop there on Main St. She [Jane] sat in his lap when she was a little girl and he fitted our children with shoes when they started coming along. It was just all family back then. And you could go to Morrison's Cafeteria, that was a big deal.

Jane Burgess: That's where the Apple Theatre is now.

**Pete Burgess:** Yeah you could get most any kind of meat there you wanted. Steak and Hamburger patties or whatever. Fish. And that was a nice place to eat and it was inexpensive compared to the other restaurants. But it was good food, they had good food. They had one in Sarasota and one in Bradenton too. Morrison's Cafeteria.

**Pete Burgess:** But we liked Smack's the best. [laughs] That was a fun place. They'll never be another place like that.

Jane Burgess: No

**Pete Burgess:** I was looking up on the internet this place we go to in Jackson, Georgia that serves BBQ, and I found them online here, and it shows the building and everything. It shows the picture of it.

**Matthew Cutler:** That was before you moved down here?

**Pete Burgess:** No, that was after we moved down we used to go back and forth to the mountains in North Carolina, and we'd always stop in Jackson, Georgia and have barbecue. Yeah, Brunswick stew, that was the best Brunswick stew that's ever made. They had a special sauce they put on it, it was a vinegar sauce, Jane didn't like it well as I did. She always got the Brunswick strew, she like it better than the BBQ.

Jane Burgess: How about a bear story with us camping?

**Pete Burgess:** Haha, a Bear Story.

Jane Burgess: The one where the bear came down the mountain and we had the camper there and the bear was coming around one side of the tent and you were coming around the other side of the tent and you almost met face to face...

**Pete Burgess:** ...and the girls were running around chasing the bear...

**Matthew Cutler:** Oh my god.

**Pete Burgess:** ...through the campgrounds. We had her brother with us one year, and he couldn't walk too well. He was on oxygen so he sat in a lawn chair next to picnic table

Jane Burgess: at Chimney Rock

**Pete Burgess:** Yeah, and we were up in the Smokey Mountains there, and we left an apple on the table for him to eat. And he was sittin there, and the bear came sliding down the mountain, and he went up and got that apple off the table. And the bear was eatin that apple, and after eatin that apple he went next, and all the time my brother in law was sittin there he went next door and got on their picnic table and tore there picnic cooler all up...

*[Continues with other camping stories from the Smokey Mountains]*

*[Pete talks about how he retired so he could go out to Oregon more, how it's beautiful.]*

[END OF SECOND INTERVIEW]

*Interview 3, November, 2012, Outside Pete's House*

**Matthew Cutler:** Just somewhere to start, I heard you talk a little bit about hunting. You talking about how you knew the game warden a little bit, I guess I was wondering if you could tell me how popular in Sarasota, or at the time, how popular hunting was as far as an activity. Was it sort of a leisure activity, did a lot of people do it to get dinner?

**Pete Burgess:** We could get most everything we needed right out of the woods. Of course we'd but some meat at the grocery store. We got a lot of wild game like ducks and frog legs, we had some of all that. We'd even eat squirrel and rabbit. It just supplemented our diet because we didn't have a lot of extra money to go to the grocery store back then. But you'd go out and most everybody liked to hunt back then, all my friends, and we'd go out early afternoon or in the morning and shoot duck. We always went out to my wife's uncles' ranch out in Myakka park. He had a big ranch out there when we were growing up and he'd let us hunt anytime we wanted to and they'd have once a year a big hunt and have all the different friends out from Sarasota. There would be the dentist and doctors and lawyers and good old friends around the area and every year they would butcher a couple of their cows. They'd have some wild pig, they'd roast it all night. They had some men that'd come out and roast it for them on their BBQ. We'd hunt ducks in the morning usually, then go back and have lunch, then go back out and find more duck on the ponds and just have a day of enjoyment with a lot of the different friends we had.

**Pete Burgess:** Back then you couldn't shoot deer in Sarasota County because they didn't have many, they didn't open them up until later on. Now they got them coming into yards out there, they are kind of a nuisance anymore, because not many people hunt then out there anymore. And the pigs, they had a lot of wild pigs. I never, I went hunting one night with my brother in law, we were invited to go with some fellas from Sarasota and they had these dogs that hunted the pigs and it was fascinating to watch these dogs. They'd run the pigs. They'd be barking, and when they caught the pig they were trained where one dog would catch the pigs ear and another would catch its hind leg and they would work together. That way the pig couldn't bite the other one and they'd hold him - they called them catch dogs. They were actually, some of them were pit bulls and some of them were these old Florida hounds. They would catch that pig and once they latched on to him, they wouldn't let go, they would hold on to that pig until you got there. The rest of them would run around and around and let you know where they were. But I remember, this one night I was with them and they had a jeep, some of them would run along with the jeep and a few of them, as many as they could, were brought in the jeep. I was lucky enough to have a place in the jeep. We'd been out there for about 3 hours running in through those woods, and I remember we all were just about starved to death. I remember they told us it was time to eat so they built fire and they took this length of sausage and they cut palmetto sticks. They took that palmetto stick and they'd string that sausage on the stick and they'd roast that over the fire and they made coffee by just dipping in the creek there and getting the water and just throwing coffee grounds in there and had boiled coffee. And I remember they had a loaf of white bread and everybody was so hungry, I think that was one of the best meals I ever had when, when they cut that sausage up and you make a sandwich out of that. I can still remember this day how good that was.

**Pete Burgess:** Another thing we did was, we hunted a lot of ducks on the pond, and I remember one time we shot ducks and they'd come in right next to the park here on the one side and we'd shoot them coming in. It was kind of a lake right in there next to the park fence and that was always good hunting in there. He had a lot of cows, Jane's uncle did. I was, I guess just out of high school and he had a, there was a time when a worm got in the calves, it was called a screw worm. He had a jeep, and it had this slew, it was actually a lake before but he kept it pumped out so that the cattle could graze in there, and the calves would get this screw worm and he'd have to catch them to doctor them. So I'd go down there with him, his son was too little then to do it. He'd take me down there and about every couple of weeks we'd doctor those calves. But the way we'd catch them, he'd take that jeep and run down through the slew and I'd stand on the edge of the jeep and when he got next to the calf I'd jump out and grab the calf and throw him down and then we'd doctor the calf and let him go. But if you didn't do that the calf would die because these worms would get in the calf. But then the University of Florida found a cure for these so it got to be that we didn't have to this anymore. There's been a lot of things in Florida where they've had to overcome the different things. They used to dip the cows in a, they'd have this concrete trough they'd dip them in that would get rid of the ticks and whatever else they needed to dip them for.

**Pete Burgess:** But those boys that we went hog hunting with, they had a land clearing business and they were all brothers, either brothers or cousins, and they used to take us out there and just, they were so used to going into the woods, it was just like us walking up Main St., they knew those woods so good. And Jane's uncle let us hunt those hogs in there, just to kind of keep the population down. But they'd come out of the park onto his land. The hogs if you caught them, like now there's a lot of acorns dropping off the trees, if you caught them when there were a lot of acorns, it'd make the meat real sweet, it'd have a real good flavor to it. That was always a lot of fun to do that

**Matthew Cutler:** When was the last time you went hunting?

**Pete Burgess:** Oh gosh, it's been 50 years now I guess, since I hunted. I remember that Sarasota had never had turkey season, and it was almost a celebration day when they opened turkey season up, after it had been closed for so many years. They were trying to reestablish the population. I remember we were all in the woods there, this was one time when we were having that BBQ and we were all staked out in there, we knew there were turkeys in there. We were all laying behind logs, some on the north side, some on the south side, and the turkeys we were waiting for them to feed into us and then we'd get a shot at it. But we were all, it must have been 20 of us laying behind these logs, and I can remember I was laying there and I asked a fella next to me, 'you think we can shoot em now?' because they were right out there on the edge. He says 'no not yet,' I says, 'well they're gonna get away' he says 'no it's not time yet.' So a couple minutes more I just up and shot. When I did, it scattered all the turkeys and nobody got a turkey, and I was so embarrassed, I thought we'd have a whole cubby of turkeys. But that was the only time we went turkey hunting in this county. I did go up north Florida, we had a friend that took me up there, he used to live in back of me here. He took me up to North Florida with him, they had a hunting camp up there on the St. Johns river. And he'd get up in the morning, about 5 o'clock in the morning when it was still dark, and they'd take you down through the woods and they had these stands all along the river and you'd climb up in these stands and they had these feeders out there where you'd feed them corn. Every once in a while that feeder would throw corn out and turkeys, hogs, deer, everything would come and feed on those. And you'd be in that blind, in that little, about 10 foot tower you climb up into, and you just sit there and wait on them and you could really pick whatever you wanted to shoot. Maybe a deer would come through there or there would be a turkey, just whatever you wanted. If you wanted to shoot a pig there'd be a pig come through. But to me that was not real hunting, it was just like shooting fish in a barrel. It just took all the sport out of it. That was the only time I ever went up there with 'em. They had a beautiful hunting camp though. One of the men who did most of the work on it, he remodeled the whole inside of his house and they needed a cook that time and nobody wanted to cook and I'd never cooked for a lot of people like that and they brought these steaks and they had these geese in this big freezer from Canada that they'd shot and brought down there. And I remember I took a big pot of chicken and rice. So the first night, we had that big pot of chicken and rice. I told them I'd do the cooking if they wanted me to. Got up the next morning and I cooked about 5 pounds of

bacon and about that much sausage and we had 4 or 5 dozen eggs we'd cook. Had some pancake batter that I took, and we made pancakes, and they seemed to be satisfied with all that, but you're cooking for that many, the food just went, I mean they really ate, because they were just coming back from hunting. Then that afternoon I think we had sandwiches, then that night we had steak, they brought those steaks so we cooked steaks. We ran out of meat after a while so I asked the man that had shot those geese from Canada, they were there and I asked if we could cook the geese, they said yeah we could cook them up so we got about 3 or 4 of those geese and I'd never cooked them before. This one fella said his mother cooked them, and what he said you do is you take them and put an onion in each one and pour in some red wine and he says you just put them in the oven and cook them that way. And we tried that and they got nice and brown, they were really delicious. There was one fella there, who even before we cooked the duck, said 'I don't like duck, I mean I don't like goose.' So after we cooked them and cut it all up, we set it on the table and it was a big platter sitting in front of him and he started eating that and I don't think he ever stopped eating it the whole time, he said 'I don't like duck but that was good.' He was one of the ones, he flew in from Alabama, he was a trial lawyer, had his own airplane and had two pilots that flew his plane for him, and they flew in from Alabama and stopped at Sarasota airport and rode up with us. He was a really nice fella, I can remember he gave me a box of shotgun shells, I've never seen anything like it. They were real powerful, In fact I shot a deer that day with one of them. You're supposed to shoot deer with buckshot but I was shooting turkey so I had these number 6 shells in there and that deer came in there, and I shot that deer with those number 6, and it just knocked him flat because they were so powerful. I don't know, I guess it was just a real powerful load that he had in there but they were some shells.

**Pete Burgess:** The game warden I knew, his name was Lefty Taylor, and he was the only warden in all of Sarasota at that time, I think. In fact I saw his son at the family reunion down at the Pine Air Picnic the other day, he said Lefty had almost arrested his own mother if she broke the law. He's that kind of fella, he just upheld the law all the time. But he said he had a lot of fellas that didn't like him because he figured he was too strict but he was just doing his job. But he was one of the cracker jack wardens in Florida, everybody remembered Lefty. If you ever shot over the limit you'd always look over the shoulder to see if he's there. Of course we never shot over the limit too much.

**Matthew Cutler:** Every once in a while

**Pete Burgess:** Yeah, just now and then, yeah.

**Matthew Cutler:** I guess I was wondering if you could tell me, back when you were at Sarasota High, were you an enthusiastic student? Were you happy to be at school, did people enjoy being at Sarasota High School?

**Pete Burgess:** Yeah I think we had a, it was a good school, we all got along well, you didn't have anything like you have now in these schools where guys brought guns or knives to school, you

didn't even think about that back then. Had a lot of good teachers. I went to what they call Technical Training school. You'd go half a day in that and half a day in regular classes like math and English, and different courses, but I enjoyed the technical side of because I've always liked to work with my hands. You could take drafting, which I took, architecture, and they had an agricultural department in that and they had machine shop where you could learn how to work on your cars or you could learn to be a mechanic. It was a real advanced technical school, even now. There was a man named Mr. Bellam who started it, and I guess Sarasota's got one of the best technical schools now from that, from his starting all that.

**Matthew Cutler:** What school is that?

**Pete Burgess:** It's a technical institute down in Sarasota, and now they've branched out where they have culinary and they have beautician and they have, like Toyota has a place there. Amanda's husband went to that school, that's how he got started as a mechanic. He has a good job with Toyota now. They have a lot of different courses you can take. You can take Nursing. They graduated a lot of nurses out of there and they've just recently built a new building. They keep expanding all the time in that school. Sarasota High School's a lot different, of course. They've turned that building into the arts building for Sarasota, and built a new school behind it. And they had, what I really liked about school more than anything else was playing football. I always enjoyed that.

**Matthew Cutler:** You were there when Paul Rudolph built that building right?

**Pete Burgess:** No, he built Riverview

**Matthew Cutler:** Oh was it a different one?

**Pete Burgess:** Yeah, I don't know what architect built Sarasota, I've never Googled that.

**Matthew Cutler:** I thought that that back area...

**Pete Burgess:** He may have done that new one, I don't know. He very possibly could have because I know he was the one that designed Sarasota, I mean Riverview High School, and he could have but I've never, I've never even been back to that new school, so I don't really know much about that.

**Matthew Cutler:** Were the technical programs or just the high school in general, racially diverse? Was Sarasota very diverse?

**Pete Burgess:** No, it was mostly all white back then. It wasn't integrated to my knowledge. They had Booker High School, that was the high school all the colored went to. When you think about it now, it just doesn't seem possible that that could have happened, but that's the way it was back then. They didn't even go to the beach, the blacks weren't even allowed out on our beaches. Later on of course, it integrated in there. To me it was always, I grew up, a lot of the time I spent on

my grandmothers farm growing up, I was just, played with them like they were white, it was just, I didn't know any different you know, because I was raised that way but then down here...

**Matthew Cutler:** That was in Georgia, right?

**Pete Burgess:** Yeah, in Macon, Georgia. But it was always, it was so different when I came down here. I came here when I was 16. No, I came down here when I was about 11. I lived with my sister. My mother went up to north Florida for a while, and I lived with my sister so I could play football at Sarasota, and go to Sarasota High. It was really to me, a sad time, because they couldn't even drink out of the same drinking fountain. They had a white drinking fountain and a black drinking fountain and it just wasn't right, you know. So, I was really glad when Martin Luther King came in and changed things. Of course there's still fighting, still a lot of it that people don't accept.

**Matthew Cutler:** Siesta Key's pretty...maybe other than South Beach in Miami...but like, Siesta Key is this beautiful beach and it's also, ya know you go and it's very diverse, and I really...I'll go to the beach on the east coast of Florida, like where I live in Jupiter and it's pretty much just white folks, so it's cool about Siesta Key, you really see a diverse population there.

**Pete Burgess:** It's definitely good,

**Matthew Cutler:** It probably would have been a hard thing to fight, did you know any activists people...it probably would have been something you'd get called out for, right?

**Pete Burgess:** No, we never really had much of that here that I got into. I'm sure maybe it was some of it out north of town. It was, Sarasota, I think accepted it after a while. It came down to where they had to. Of course there was a lot of them, they call them rednecks, and they were against all that.

**Matthew Cutler:** I guess I don't know the history, as far as Newtown, but as long as you've been here, has Newtown been the area where a lot of the black residents have lived?

**Pete Burgess:** Yeah, that was pretty much it. In fact, it's actually grown a lot since I was here. A lot of the houses on the north side of Sarasota, was taken over, was bought by the blacks, black population. And I had friends that lived up at 17th street, and up as high as that, and on up there that had homes that the black population has taken over that area, which is really nice for them because they got some real quality houses. But it was always, in fact I think it was there years before the segregation situation came up. I used to have a good friend that owned a gas station down in the center there, he owned a city service station. It was Carlton Baker, and he was the nicest guy you'd ever one meet. But he worked for my brother in law's father, he was his butler, and they lived out on Longboat Key. When his, when Mr. Worksham died, he left Carlton enough money where he was able I think to open up that gas station. He ran that till he passed away and then his wife ran it for a long time after he died.

**Pete Burgess:** Yeah there's been a lot of changes, sure has.

**Matthew Cutler:** Do you see Sarasota today as you expected it to look like?

**Pete Burgess:** Well, I never really gave it a lot of thought. I never thought it'd be a culture center like it is, but my wife's grandfather, he had this vision, he always said Sarasota was gonna be a real socialite-like city. Lotta culture and everything, but just growing up you never think much about those things. All you do is what you wanna do every day and what's fun and what's gonna be good for you. You don't think much anything past that. Sure been some changes, I'll tell you. Yeah he envisioned everything I think that it is now. He never went to school, as far as college, but he self-educated I guess you'd say. A lot of people would come to him to find out where certain markers were around the county because he knew the county so well. He knew where every piece of property was, just about by heart. Near the boundary lines.

**Pete Burgess:** But as far as thinkin in the future, I never thought that much about that.

**Matthew Cutler:** You were focusing on doing the milk route...

**Pete Burgess:** Yeah, I had my hands full just trying to make a living. Yep.

**Matthew Cutler:** I'm sure you ran into some odd things on the milk route. Are there any things you remember that stands out as maybe, I don't know, weird?

**Pete Burgess:** Yeah, I guess. Not ever too much really. There were situations where you'd run into everyday, ya know. We'd go put the milk in the refrigerator for the people cuz it's too hot outside, but they'd give us the keys to their house and you'd always see the houses, in the worst and best ways. You'd see a sink full of dishes, the beds not being made, or just by walking through. It was like the iceman, he'd bring a block of ice. He was just like one of the family. That was in my sister's house. We didn't have a refrigerator, and had an icebox, so every couple days they'd come in with a block of ice and sit in there. You wonder, they didn't have any way to keep ice cream, but we always survived with an ice box. But we had a sign you'd put out if you wanted 50 pounds or 25 pounds or 10 pounds. That sign you'd turn it either way you wanted it, whatever was on the top that's what he'd bring in, put it in the refrigerator. Yeah, we had a lot of good times back then.

**Pete Burgess:** Had families where they would go up and you'd get them as a customer if you were on the route long enough. I probably had two or three generations of different ones I'd be delivering to. They would always start taking milk from me because I was just part of the family like them, and just like the ice man or anybody else that came to deliver. But we used to have to put ice on the milk to keep it cold, you'd ice the milk down. Finally we got refrigerated trucks that didn't have to require that anymore, and that was sure nice to have that.

**Matthew Cutler:** Did you ever deliver to Jane's house?



**Pete Burgess:** Uh, I don't think I ever did. I think her grandmother bought her milk from the store. And that wasn't on my part of the route anyway, that was another fella's route. I used to deliver mostly on the beaches, that was where I delivered most of my milk. Had all of Siesta Key one day, then deliver Longboat Key the next day. Wasn't hardly anything on Longboat Key then. There was, I think you could probably count on your fingers how many houses were actually lived in long back then. Compared to now it's just night and day. There was very few cottages even. I think there were cottages called Cherry Oak Cottages and there was Whitney Beach Cottages which is still out there and Rolling Waves, that was another set of cottages. Then they started adding to it and as it would grow, the route would grow with it because you'd always get new customers all the time. And they had one little store up on the north end, we delivered to that little store, but of course the bridge wasn't up there then. If you wanted to get to Manatee you had to come around and go the other way to get on the Manatee side.

**Matthew Cutler:** So you didn't go there too often

**Pete Burgess:** No, I never went up there hardly. Then later on the bridge was rebuilt, but I guess it blew out in a storm. I don't remember what storm they lost that bridge in. They had a restaurant up there on the north end right by the bridge where the bridge used to be. There was, I forget, a Bee and Bills restaurant, they had the best hamburgers. He was a good chef. They had a good clientele, but you had to go all the way up there to the other end of the island to eat there. A lot of people went there to eat. It was one of the only restaurants out there then. Now there's a lot of them.

**Matthew Cutler:** Plenty of restaurants these days, I'd say.

**Matthew Cutler:** Cool, did you have anything in mind that you wanted to add, that you were thinking about?

**Pete Burgess:** I think we've covered a lot,

**Matthew Cutler:** Yeah, we have covered a lot

**Pete Burgess:** Everything pretty much.

**Matthew Cutler:** I'd say.

[END OF THIRD INTERVIEW]