

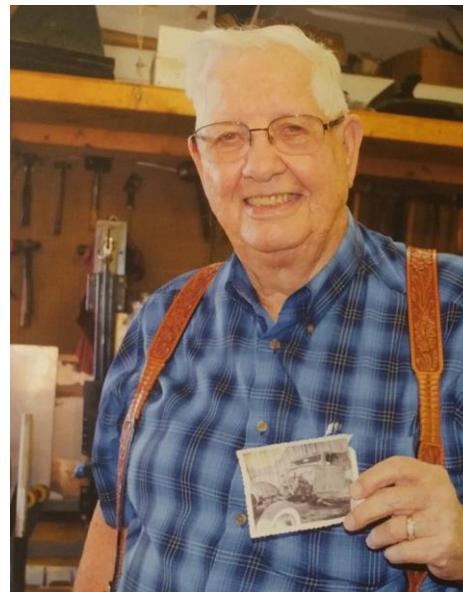
Sarasota Oral History Project
New College of Florida, Fall 2016

Interview with: David Pattison

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Interviewer: Allie Stachura

Born in 1935, Dave Pattison grew up in Venice and has both observed and participated in the town's development over the years. In high school, he was a founding member of the Venice Vagabonds, a drag-racing club in the 1950s that brought huge crowds to small-town Venice. He has worked in the funeral business since high school, owning a funeral home in Clewiston, FL and running an ambulance service for much of South Florida. Now retired, Dave likes to work in his woodshop and spend time with his family.



Interview#1:

DP: I've prepared some notes to start, is that alright?

AS: Absolutely, go ahead whenever you're ready!

DP: I'm David Pattison, and I am proud to say that I was fortunate enough to have the opportunity to grow up in the Venice-Nokomis area. I'm 81 years old, and I have certainly seen a lot of changes over the years in the Venice-Nokomis area... and I think we're here today mainly to talk about the history of Venice as I know it, not so much the history but how it was back in '48, '49, and the early '50s.

And probably the best way to start... um... I would think as you come into Venice, you come across the little bridge there, and the first thing your eyes would hit would be the Venice Shift, the drive-in restaurant on the corner, where today the water fountain and whatever the, uh, design corner next to the Venice Little Theater. And then across the street, there's a vacant lot, and then on the corner of Venice Avenue and 41, the Tamiami Trail, was a Sinclair gas station. And this Sinclair gas station was owned by Elmer Wolfe. And as you turn up Venice Avenue... Now let's talk about the Sinclair gas station. The Sinclair gas station in Venice was the only service station that had both white and colored restrooms, and white and colored water fountains. As you can tell that's back in the days, it was different.

As you turn from the Sinclair station and head west up Venice Avenue, the next little building on the right behind the service station was, Otis Bronson had a restaurant. And there was very few

restaurants in the area at that time. And next to the restaurant was Mitchell's barber shop, George Mitchell had a barber shop in there, and then on beyond that was Dr. Thompson's office. Dr. Thompson was one of the first physicians in the Venice area, and uh, 'course back then, this was before we had a hospital, and the doctors made house calls, which today I guess is unheard of.

And after you left Dr.... uh, that would be at Nokomis Avenue, then you'd cross over, the next city block was a vacant lot, and it was mainly used as the KMI parade ground. Now the KMI was the Kentucky Military Institute that was in London, Connecticut... or um, Kentucky, I'm sorry. And the boys that go to school were there until Christmastime, and then they'd ride the train into Venice, and they'd be here until around Easter. Well, when you bring a couple hundred boys into a town that's only population is around 600 people, that's quite an influx of boys when there was only so few girls. 'Course my graduating class in Nokomis—we didn't have a school in Venice—was only 30 kids in the class, and of the 30 eleven of us were boys.

But the KMI building, I contend or, I've always was taught, that this was Dr. Albee's hospital. Now, a lot say that, no, that Dr. Albee's hospital was the Gulf Breeze Hotel, but I think the records will show that it was along Tampa Avenue there, and when Dr. Albee bought Venice from the, uh, locomotive engineers out of Cleveland, Ohio, that Mr. Noland designed the city of Venice, that this was his hospital. Now, 'course, I don't remember Dr. Albee... but from there, Robert S. Baynard. Now the next building was on the corner of Nassau Street and Venice Avenue, was the Venice-Nokomis bank, and Dr. Robert S. Baynard from St. Petersburg, an attorney, owned the bank, and he had bought... he was one of Dr. Albee's attorneys, and he bought the city of Venice that Dr. Albee owned the properties from the widow. And he paid her a percentage as he sold property. How much he paid for it I have no idea.

Now, we'll get into some of that later. Behind the bank was a little store building that was part of the bank building, and it was Ben Dunn, who's a local fisherman and a good friend of Mr. Baynard's, had a pool hall... and a man by the name of Eddie Keys Sr. operated the pool hall. And another thing I might bring up is, going back to the bank, Mr. Jim Tom Blalock was the president of the bank. And, he was a very recognized man in the vicinity, very well-thought of, a very religious person. He and his wife, uh, Ethel Blalock, and she was very good at, they did most of the work and handling of the Methodist church, which was located in Nokomis.

When we leave the, well the pool hall eventually became the post office, and we'll get into that a little bit later too. Beyond the post office, going north, on the corner was a gas station owned by Mr. Segell. And this gas station was just a filling station, where you could get air in your tires or fill your car up with gas. He did not have a lift or be able to change oil, and he didn't do mechanical things, it was just a filling station. And the neat thing I want to bring up about him was, he'd go to Anderson Ford in Sarasota every year and buy a brand new Ford. And he would bring it down, and he owned this building that I'm speaking of, along Tampa Avenue, which today is the drive-in teller for the Bank of America. And he would park the cars in this garage, and he'd keep anywhere from 5-6 year old Ford automobiles, and he wouldn't drive 'em but he'd keep 'em clean and shiny,

and as I remember he drove a 1946 Ford coupe. 'Course that was right after the war. But upstairs over this garage building there was apartments, and Mr. Segell rented the apartments.

Now let's jump back over to the Venice-Nokomis bank, and go north from there. Um, next to the bank was the Venice Land Office, which was a real-estate office, and it was on the west side of the bank. It was owned by Mr. Baynard, but it was run and operated by the Roebuck family... uh, Frank and I don't remember his wife's name... Roebucks, that operated in the land sales and property for Mr. Baynard. Then next to that we had a 2-story building, that is primarily where the Bank of America is today. And this building consisted of-- was owned by a man by the name of Vick Retty. Now Vick Retty, in his first part of the building, he had a movie theater. And that was the only movie theater around. Other than, we had a drive-in movie theater up at Laurel Road in Laurel, but other than that we had It was open, it was only open, as I recall, on Wednesday night, Friday night, and they showed two showings on Saturday. And it didn't matter if it was in the summer time or the winter time, this theater was open. And they only showed the picture one time, so if you weren't there on time, you missed part of it.

And in that building, next there... Mr. Cox. Now Mr. Cox retired from the engineers in the United States Army. And he became the engineer of the city of St. Petersburg, Florida. Now Mr. Cox was, uh, crippled... he was in a wheelchair... and he ran a paint store. Mr. Baynard brought him down there, and he lived in the back of the paint store. And, I, as a child, would go over there as Mr. Baynard had asked me... Mr. Baynard and I were very good friends. I was privileged to be able to drive Mr. Baynard a lot, we can get into that later I guess... but, I'd go over and open the boxes up and put the paint on the shelves, and try to help Mr. Cox what I could. And of course, there was no money involved, this was just the way it was in Venice...

And then next to the paint store, was people by the name of Gardner. And they had the Gulf Breeze restaurant. Now upstairs over that restaurant, in 1950, my dad, C. A. Pattison, founded and started the Venice Masonic Lodge, and that's where they had their lodge meetings, upstairs over the restaurant. Now, there was apartments up there also. A good friend of mine, Mickey Geebo from New York, Long Island, he was a linotype operator for the Venice Gondolier, and we'll get into that a little later, but he lived up there.

Now next to this building was a big vacant lot, which is now the parking lot for the post office. Now on the corner, was the Gulf Breeze Hotel, and it was quite a beautiful attraction. And there wasn't a whole lot going on, but we did have dinners and affairs and graduation parties and things like that at the hotel. And any time dignitaries would come to Venice, this is where they were entertained and stayed, and so on. 'Course, at my age back then, I didn't pay much attention to that kind of stuff. And then, across Harbor Drive is where that was, there was a vacant lot, but on the corner of that vacant lot was a gazebo. Now this gazebo was a little park area, and it was very nice. And the biggest thing about the gazebo was this was where the high school held its graduations. It was an outdoor ceremony, and course we only had small classes, which was very interesting and a lot of fun.

And then from there, the next block was vacant, and that brings you up to... let's see, now let me back up a minute... The Gulf Breeze Hotel was on the corner of Venice Avenue and Harbor Drive. And then from there I was talking about the gazebo... Then you go to the next block and it was vacant, all the way down, and I think the street's Alhambra. And on that corner, Mr. and Mrs. Orbrey Crawley lived, and they had a daughter named... Claire, and a boy that I went to school with, Bob Crawley. And Orbrey was a building contractor. He bought lots and built houses for sale. He didn't build for individual people, he built and sold his own houses. And then from there to the beach was all vacant land.

Now, then you hit the Beach House, and, if you turned right, and you go all the way out to the jetties, from there was a one lane dirt road. Now that dirt road was not where the road is today, and people were not, back then, as interested in building on the beach. The reason for that being is because the jetties caused erosion, and the sand and all would be washed out, and they knew that if they built a building it'd be washed away. That's before the days where they decided they were gonna dredge, and build the beaches back up. But, and speaking of that, going out toward the Venice jetties, the first buildings you came to was on the right, was Higelville. Now Higelville was a little community. Clyde Higel lived there, and he was mayor of Venice. Now if you go back into the history of Venice, you would see where the Higels had come there years and years ago. But in Higelville, there was George Higel, and there was Raymond Higel, and I forget the others. But, Dr. Caplan, when he came to Venice, he had a home right behind there on that street, behind... in Higelville, and that's where his mother and father lived, and Sarah and Dr. Caplan lived, for quite a while. We'll get to that later.

Now if you go on out to the jetties, when you got to the jetties, it's not like it is today. First of all, the dirt road ran into a little parking area where they had brought a barracks from the Venice Airport, and they put it on the water way. It was known as Tarpon Center. And Mr. George Gibbs owned all of that, and Mr. George Gibbs owned all the land out and around the Eastern part of that land. And he at that time, he was buying the barracks housings from the Venice airport, and he would take 'em out and place 'em on the lots, and you could buy a lot and a house on the waterway for \$5,000. But back then, \$5,000 was a lot of money. And, then we'd go out to the jetties, there was no homes or any buildings out there, and you'd go out to the jetties. It wasn't like it is today; there was no asphalt paved walkway like they have. If you wanted to go out there and fish, you'd go out there and crawl from rock to rock and try to find a place to stand so you could fish. Now, uh, I used to do a lot of fishing in the evenings. I did more shrimping than I did fishing. At the Tarpon Center on the dock you could put a light down there, and you could take a dip net and you could stand there as long as you wanted and dip shrimp. And you'd get all the shrimp you wanted and we'd put 'em in a bucket and pack 'em in ice, and then the next day I'd take 'em up to Nelson's Sporting Goods store and fish store... we'll talk about that later too... and he'd sell the shrimp. Now, as a kid, I wasn't the only one, and we'd go out there on Sundays and swim in the Intracoastal Waterway. And you had to put on long pants and tennis shoes and long sleeves, because the barnacles on the rocks were so sharp that you'd get cut, and you had to be very careful. But people

would fish, and then get hung up on the rocks, and it was funny 'cause we used to dive down and unhook the hooks, and they'd flip you a nickel or a dime sometimes. We had a lot of fun doing that.

Let's go back up now to by the Beach House. When you come off the Beach House, there was a road to the right which was called Apalachicola. And my daddy bought the land in there from Mr. Baynard. Eventually... we didn't live there then, but eventually, in about 19, I'm thinking '52, we built our home there. And today that's where the Canterbury Condominiums are on Apalachicola.

Now, let's back up. When you come off of Tampa Avenue, everything north of Tampa Avenue, all the way down to Nassau, was one big massive orange grove. And Mr. Baynard owned... that was part of the land that he got from Dr. Albee, and he went with the plan that Nolan had laid out. And Mr. Baynard cut the streets in and developed all of that part of the land. Mr. Baynard was a very, very generous man. He helped everyone. It might be noted at this time that Mr. Baynard, at one time, owned a piece of property in every county in Florida, and he said he never had to worry about keeping up with his taxes because the newspapers would keep that up for him. And we used to laugh about it... And my daddy built Mr. Baynard's house in St. Petersburg, and he used to travel up to Palmetto and take the ferry boat across. This was way before the Sunshine Skyway was ever thought about. And I got to go over there quite a few times and be with him. And Mr. Baynard's brother had a funeral home in St. Petersburg, and maybe that was one of the first inklings that I ever thought about... I kinda liked some of that. And eventually I went to work for Robarts and Shannon funeral home in Venice... we'll talk about that later.

Let's go back now to the Beach House. And then we turned, and go up Venice Avenue, that whole first block going east was vacant, and you didn't come to another house until about the LaPelly house. Now, the LaPelly house was owned by Mr. and Mrs. LaPelly. Mr. LaPelly was President of the National Bank, or NBC they call it, the Farmers' National Bank in Chicago. And, next to him was a house, a big house that's still there today with a wall in front of it, and that house belonged to Congressman Kunson. And, next to that, on the corner of Park Blvd and Venice Avenue, was a big home that's still there today, but this home was the Lambert house. Now the Lambert house, the Lambert's owned Listerine, and that was there. Now from there all the way up to... was vacant, until you got to where City Hall is today.

Now let's back up a little bit. On the right-hand side, just before you got to the City Hall, people bought that corner piece of property and put in a motel. Um, I think this was about '53. But, when they built the hotel, or the motel, it didn't last long and they converted it to apartments. I think it's still apartments today. Now the city building, as I spoke a minute ago, was a barracks that was brought in from the air base. And, this was City Hall, this was the police station, this was our community building. This was the largest structure we had in town other than the Gulf Breeze Hotel, to do anything. We had a city orchestra, with Paul Goldsmith--Goldenstein, I'm sorry-- he conducted and he ran the... and had the players. And they practiced there and performed. If we'd have any dances in the town, 'specially the high school kids, our dances were held in this building. And, lots of little things, organizations and one thing another would come in. I think they...as I

remember, they had a ladies' night, and they played cards or bingo or something. I don't know...

But then you'd go on south on the other side of Harbor Drive, going east. It was a vacant lot all the way down to where Bill Wimbish had a floor covering business. Now, Mr. Wimbish... I worked for Mr. Wimbish one Christmas vacation from school, and I didn't care for putting down flooring, linoleum, and tile. And we hung drapes, we hung curtains, oh whatever the family or the people wanted. We went up and down Casey Key and Manasota Beach and Englewood, wherever they got a call, we went. Now, this building was a 2-story, big building, and it was owned... this was the Blackburn building. The Blackburns were very prominent people if you go back in the history of Venice. Anyway, which... I don't know if it was Albert Blackburn that owned it, or which of the Blackburns... But this building was very interesting because as we go east next to the floor covering, Joe Jossart was a plumber in town, and Louie Adorian was a cement finisher, and they owned a bar.

And next door to that bar was the Venice Gondolier, and Pete and Janie Conover owned the Venice Gondolier, and I think that was, I don't know, maybe my second job. Working there, with Pete and Janie, sweeping up the floor...cleaning up, and folding newspapers, and... we had a bunch of good people in there. Lonnie Briley, he was a linotype operator, and he'd run the press. And then like I said, Mickey Geebo was a linotype operator as well. And we had a lot of fun with the newspaper 'cause Woody Thayer had an office upstairs, in that building. He was the town photographer, and if you go back now through the history and looking, you'll see lots and lots of photographs that were made by Woody Thayer. Woody was very, very...ambitious, and did a lot.

Also in that building, next to the Venice Gondolier, people by the name of Larson. They had a bakery in there. Now next to the bakery was Nelson's... Nelson's Sporting Goods store. They sold mostly fishing tackle, and things of that nature, and that's where I'd take my shrimp to, to sell. And eventually, a couple years...he was there, and I don't really remember what happened to he and his wife, but Al Finesod came in there and took over that building, and opened a Western Auto Store. Al Finesod was a very well-known man in Venice. He was very productive in the Lion's Club, I think he was one of the original organizers of it, and he became one of the executives and secretary for the Lion's Club of the state of Florida.

[short break]

Alright, we're talking about the Blackburn building. Also in the Blackburn building, upstairs, on the second floor, was where the WAMR radio broadcasting station was located, up there. Then downstairs, Paul Goldenstein, as I had talked about before, he had a music store in there. Paul Goldenstein was head of the orchestra in town. He also, well, was the band master for the high school. We had a little band, it wasn't much, and he'd come over there and direct the band. And I might note, Mr. Goldenstein was the only Jewish fella in Venice. We had a... and the Catholic church, where it is now, only it was on the corner, a little wooden church, that was kinda funny because we had very few Catholics in town. It was a very small area... but this was no problem.

And then, on the corner of that building, right there on Nassau street, that's where Bud Weimmer first had his real estate office. Eventually he moved it over on Miami Avenue, but he had his real estate office on that corner. Then as you went further east across Nassau street, on the corner, was a little store. The building's still there today. That building was a candy store, an ice cream store. It was, it sold tourist novelties and things of that nature. Now just beyond it, on the same side of the street, was a bowling alley. We had a bowling alley in there, and eventually when the bowling alley closed, Jim Tom Blalock's nephew Jay Lumley, Jay opened an insurance office in there. He ran this insurance agency, and next to that bowling alley, it went on down to the... to the, El Patio Hotel.

Now the El Patio Hotel was owned by Mr. and Mrs. Miles. And, anyway, in the El Patio Hotel, the western corner of the hotel, was Dick and Meadow's drug store. It originally, in '40... in the late '40s, it was Pappas's. And Mr. Pappas had a partner, I don't remember his name, but Mr. Pappas moved to Naples and opened a drug store in Naples, and his partner had the drug store in Venice. And he sold out to Jim Dick and Jerry Meadows. Now Jim Dick and Jerry Meadows were brother-in-laws, and they had the drug store, and they had a... not only was it a drug store, they had a food counter in there. It was a real, real neat drug store.

Now in that arcade, there was an arcade underneath the El Patio Hotel, on the right hand side, behind the drug store, was a barber shop. Elihu Robarts ran the barber shop, and he did for years. Now Elihu was well known; he was of the original Robarts family, up on Robarts Bay and so on. Now he had a son named George, who I went to school with. Now across from the barber shop, was the post office in the arcade. And Dorothy Fields was the postmistress and ran the post office. And then, next to that, Don Schrode had a little jewelry store in the arcade. Now eventually he moved his jewelry store out on the main street, next to the Dick and Meadows drug store. They expanded and put it out there, and Mr. Miles closed up the lobby, eventually, of the hotel, and made it into different store fronts. And he had stores, knickknack stores, and things of that nature in there.

And then going on east next to that was the Nestlewood. Now I could be wrong there, maybe it's reversed. The first store you had was Bowden's IGA Store. Now Mr. Bowden had the grocery store there... and then, yeah I think that's the way it was, and then next to it was the Nestlewood shop, and then the next building was Mr. Lowe had a grocery store. Now that was the only two grocery stores in town at the time. And next to the grocery store, Frank Rayburn had a shoe shop, and that's where you got your shoes and all fixed. Now I might note a little here, Frank Rayburn eventually got his real-estate office license and opened a real-estate office up off of Tampa Avenue and Harbor Drive. But anyway, Frank, he had the shoes. And then on the corner, there was a... not a... it was like an antique store, and it was real interesting. Now, along this building, all upstairs, the second floor, was apartment houses, and people lived up there. Now on the next block, it was all vacant, all the way up to the Trail. As I said before, this is where they put the first traffic light in Venice.

Now let's jump across the street, and we had Dick Rich's gas station. And Dick Rich's gas station was kind of a gathering place, uptown. Now, you remember when I said before about the Sinclair station. Well there was an island, just like it is now in the middle of the street— 'course this is way before the bridges and the ditch and all of that—well, I'll go on down the street first, come back to this. Behind the gas station was the Venice baseball field, and that's where we played baseball, and then in '50, when we started football, that's where our football field was. Where the Masonic temple is today, and Babe's Hardware, that was our football field. We called it "Sandspur Stadium." And thanks to Bill Washburn, who was a state representative, and DeVon Hough who was a train master, and people like this, they got together and got us a football team. Course when we played football, it was six man football. We had a center, two ends, a quarterback, and halfback, and a fullback. I was lucky enough that I got to be the first quarterback for the first three years we played football. George Robarts played on that team. He was the fullback... and um, Milton Mikeslle... Bud Ledom... Harry Edge... I could go on and name all the ball players.

But anyway from there you went on east and you came to the Venice Lumber Company. And the Venice Lumber Company, um, let me think... was owned by the Arnolds and the Bellamy's. They owned the Venice Lumber Company. And, one of the big fellas that worked in there was Harry Sheldom. And Harry had two daughters that went to school with us, but Harry ran the yard and took care of all the stuff in the back for the Bellamys in the Venice Lumber Company.

Now beyond the Venice Lumber Company, you had Ma Beans bar, on that side of the street. And then it was vacant all the way up to where Venice Avenue ended. Where the bypass is today, that's where Venice Avenue ended. Now if you turned right there, you could turn right and go down—it was still paved, for 3 blocks, and we called that section of town "Edgewood." And there's three streets over there in Edgewood, and a lot of homes were built over there, and most of your working people lived over in the Edgewood section of town.

Now if we come back up to... Now let's bring out right now, from Venice Avenue all the way to Snook Haven was a one lane dirt road. Well, when I say from Venice Avenue, it was a boulevard till you got to the end of that block, and then it was a one lane dirt road. Now you went out that dirt road, the only house that was on the left hand side, that was the Hanchy house. Now Herb Hanchy was the chief of police back then, at that time, in the late '40s. I forget the name of the people, back then, that owned Snook Haven. But out on the Myakka river there, that's where the Boy Scouts and we used to camp, and do one thing and another there.

Now let's come in. On both sides of Venice Avenue going out there, was all farms... on both sides of the road. Tomato fields and cucumbers, you name it. It was all truck farming, on the Blackburn property. And then in the first part of the '50s, the Blackburns decided that they were going to develop and make East Venice. And they started, and they put streets in there, and started selling lots and building houses. The real-estate office was kinda funny because, the real-estate office they built right in the middle of Venice Avenue, and you had to drive around the real-estate office on both sides. It was a little different.

Now if you come on back, on the north side of Venice Avenue, out there, was a meat market, and then you come on up to the fire station. Dewey Stevens was the fire chief. Now behind the fire station was what we called "the Quarters," and that's where all the Black people lived, in that area, that's what that was. Now if you come on up from there, then you came to Johnson's Lumber Company, and Johnsons had a lumber yard in there. And then you came to the Venice Depot, the Seabord Depot, and DeVon Hough was the postmaster in there. Mr. Hough was also a *poet!* Now his son and I, Grady junior, we went to high school together and played sports together, and were very very good friends for many years.

And then, coming on west now, you came to the... it was vacant, and they brought a barracks in, and they had the Venice Women's Club. Now, the Venice Women's Club was more than just a 'woman's club.' It was a library, the Red Cross, you name it, that was a very active little building. And then on the corner, was a house, eventually was kind of an office thing, that eventually Mr. Baynard moved into, but it was vacant for a long time until he built that. Alright, now let's go back to some of the other things in Venice and catch up here...

Okay, here's a note I made, I don't know if I said it before. On Venice Avenue, the grass used to grow up between the cracks, and you had to mow it with a lawnmower. There wasn't enough traffic. In fact, in the summer time, the city of Venice didn't even turn on the streetlights. No, they had to wait for the, snowbirds to come down and fill up the town a little bit, and then they'd turn on the streetlights. There wasn't a whole lot because people would leave and go north, and they'd board up all the store buildings, because they're afraid of hurricanes. And it was kind of a desolate looking town, with all the store-buildings and everything with plywood all over, covering up the windows, one thing and another. We were kinda happy when they came down because they took all the stuff down and the city looked nice! Haha!

Now, let's tell a couple stories here. Uh, I think it's kind of funny, maybe it's not to a lot of people, but I got a kick out of it. The KMI's and the boys... of course, the local boys didn't like it, 'cause the girls went for the KMI boys--all them fancy uniforms and all that. But anyway, I had a good friend of mine, Bob Spiegel, that went to school with us and graduated. Bob played the trombone, and he's a real good trombone player... unfortunately Bob's left us. When you played in the KMI band, you didn't have to wear your uniform. You wore slacks and a white shirt. Well, I dressed up in the KMI uniform, and I have a picture of that, and I went to the KMI dance. And it worked good until the girls started hollering over what I was doing there, and then Colonel Richmond who headed the school, he came over and uh, nicely helped me be escorted from the dance. Well, in the meantime, all my buddies had gone out to the tomato fields and got boxes of tomatoes, and they start bombarding the dance with tomatoes. Well about that time, here come the police car, and Herb Hanshee and John Jockey, and of course we all fled, and nothing was ever done about it. Haha!

Now most of this that I want to talk about now, I'm gonna kind of read it... is that alright?

AS: Sure, go ahead!

DP: Okay. Now some of the notes that I referred to back and forth... Some of the other things that we did, the KMI's had a flagpole, out there in the parade ground, and it was on two pipes, so that they could--when they left town, because of the hurricane season, they'd pull the bolt out and they'd lay the flagpole on the ground, and then when they'd come back... Well, the way it was configured, the bottom of the flagpole was a steel pipe, and it was hollow. And we used to take those big jumbo firecrackers, and take a piece of tape and tape 'em in there and then light 'em. And when it went off, you could hear that thing all over town. Haha! But we did a lot of things around town and had a lot of fun.

I'm gonna go back and make some notes here... To the street that goes to the Venice High School now, was where Carl Wolfe had a Pure Oil station. Now, he was a brother to Elmer Wolfe, that had the Sinclair station. And this is where the middle school and the high school is now, but before that, that was a grass airfield. That was the only airport we had in Venice, because the other airport was the military Air Force base, so your local pilots, they had a grass strip there. Now where the Publix shopping center is now today, that's where the Venice Golf and Country Club was, in there. And it was very very nice. A lot of things went on out there. But that's how come the trailer park is named "the Country Club Estates," is because when Earl Edge and Jimmy Ponger and the Brittons and some of the others bought the golf course, then they developed and built the Country Club Estates. Now, another note-- where the Venice Little Theater is today was the KMI gym. And we were the only team in the conference, basketball, that had an indoor basketball court. All the other schools, we'd play outside, and if it rained, we didn't have a basketball game. I remember we went to LaBelle, and played, and everybody kept hollering, "Don't lose the ball! Get off the court, 'cause an alligator'll get it!" and things. But we rode those old, un-air-conditioned school buses to all these games out of town. And we played Naples, and we played Wimauma, and OLPH in Tampa, and Turkey Creek... and some of the little towns that are bigger now, but we're talking about when Venice was, like I said before, less than a thousand people.

Now, along Tampa, no, Miami Avenue, let's go over there for a little bit. Along Miami Avenue was a building, down close to where Nassau Street is. It's a long building, and it's still there in existence. But Eddie Roush had a sign-painting shop in this building, and Stony Grey had a photography... but Stony Grey didn't come to Venice until the late... I'd say, uh, the mid-50's. Now, I'm getting a little, years ahead of what we were. That's where the funeral home was, on that street there. Now where the Robarts and Shannon funeral home was first built, or put in, was in a building that was occupied by a trucking company, and then the city took it over and used it as a shop to repair and fix city equipment. And, Willie Robarts bought that building, and they converted it into the funeral home. And that's where I got the name "Digger," because I started working for the funeral home--mainly because I liked the ambulance. 'Course, the only training we had was, we went and took first aid classes, and things of that nature, and then the doctors helped us. I think I was 17 years old when I delivered my first child. Dr. Caplan told me if I was going to be in that business I need to learn, so he took me into the operating room in the hospital,

and I got to watch him deliver a baby, and he taught me what to do and how to do. And, in my lifetime, I've delivered eight children. Which was something. Now, we didn't have a hospital in Venice... well, let's back up again, let's talk about the funeral home.

Let's talk about the funeral home a minute. Willie Robarts had the funeral home. He had Robarts and Shannon funeral home in Venice. Willie Robarts came from Alachua, Florida, and his brother Howard Robarts, they went to Arcadia and opened a funeral home in '36. Willie went on to Sarasota and got with Mr. Shannon from Bradenton, and he opened the Robarts and Shannon funeral home in Sarasota. And in 1951, Willie Robarts came down and opened the funeral home on Miami Avenue. And ambulance service. And, in 1955, Earl Rawles, who worked for Willie in Sarasota, bought the funeral home from Willie Robarts. And I had worked with Earl at the funeral home in Venice, and then I went to Saras... well, before Earl had it, I worked at the funeral home in Venice, and then when I graduated from high school, I went to Sarasota and worked at the funeral home in Sarasota. Until '55, when Earl Rolls bought it, then I moved back to Venice and worked with Earl Rolls, 'til '56, when I went to Chicago to mortuary school. And, that was a story there. I don't think we need to go into the history of the funeral home at this time. But it's just some of the things that I wanted to bring up.

There was three doctors in Venice: Dr. Thompson, who I spoke before, Talmage Thompson, who's on Venice Avenue; and Dr. Sam Caplan, who opened his office on West Miami Avenue, down beyond where the Roebucks lived; and the other doctor was Dr. Donald... no, Jim Blades, and he had... his office was in Nokomis, and he had a building in there. He had some store buildings, that he had built when he built the building that he rented, and his office was where now would be located right across the street from the Matthew Curry Ford in Nokomis. That's where Dr. Blades' office was.

Okay, on the South Trail, going out of Venice, where Darby Buick is or whatever the Buick dealership name is now, there was a restaurant in there. And this restaurant was Adrian's. And it was a, it was a family style restaurant. You went in and sat down and they had a jar on the table, and you put your dollar or whatever it was, dollar and a quarter, it wasn't much, and you put your money in the jar, and they passed the dishes and everybody ate just like as at home. And when you get done eating, you picked your dish up and put it away and left. The next person'd come in and sit down at the table, and that's how it operated, and everybody really enjoyed it. Now, the Adrians were a family that was quite well-known in the area, and the name still goes on today.

Now, let's talk about, over, when you went out Center Road. Of course the road, well it's called the bypass now, it didn't have a name, but it dead-ended after three blocks like I told you. But if you went out Center Road, and there was a crossing lot there, and on the corner where Perkins and all that is now, was Hood's Dairy. And Jesse... Rodney and Jesse Heglar... ran that dairy there, and they never did buy it, but they were really, really good people. Let's see, there was something else

here that I wanted to talk about... Oh, when we had football, we'd dress out at the Venice High School, Venice-Nokomis High School out on Nippino, and we'd run to Venice. We'd run over there to the KMI parade ground, and that's where we'd practice football. And then we'd run back, to Nokomis, and change into our clothes. And, most of the time that we played ball, since we didn't have locker rooms really, you'd dress out at home, and you'd come to the game in your uniform, and when the game was over, you'd wear it home, and your mom and dad... mostly our moms... washed our uniforms, or you washed 'em yourself. We didn't have a--well, Chuck Ryder had a laundry in town, and eventually Chuck Ryder took over washing our uniforms. Now, on Venice Avenue, going south from Miami Avenue, on the right hand side, Hoke Bowden, he moved his grocery store off of Venice Avenue and put an IGA store in there, and it was a real nice store. And then when he closed that store up, Chuck Ryder took it over and made a laundry out of it. Now Chuck Ryder is well-known in the Venice area for his participation as sports announcer, and little league baseball, and one thing and another... thought I'd bring that up.

I do remember when Harbor Lights Trailer Park... Ben Dunn and Bob Baynard dredged in the bay and put in the land there, and they built the Harbor Lights trailer park. And they also pumped in, next to the old bridge... let's see, I've seen four bridges go over the creek. They pumped in land, and Ben Dunn and Bob Baynard built what they called the Fisherman's Wharf restaurant. And it was kind of a joke in town that, people said... (now this is in the early '50s, not '49 or '48) ...anyway, people thought it was funny because who'd go out of town to eat. But it was a very successful restaurant, and it went quite well. Another thing we need to talk about is, going out Harbor Drive... Well, let's go back on Miami Avenue first. Mr. Woodard, across from the Baptist Church, Mr. Woodard had a feed and seed store there. Well, my brother, when he... eventually, he had two or three jobs... but he married Mary-Jo Miles, who her daddy had the El Patio Hotel, and uh... I won't go into that either. Anyway, later on in years, my dad and my brother built that Pattison building on the corner... and, my brother died when he was 60 years of age, in '92. And my family still own that property there.

Let's go back up now on Harbor Drive, going out on Harbor Drive. Harbor Drive originally didn't go all the way to the airport. And when... Mr. Baynard, Bob Mahone, uh... Sam Herron... and Spidaro, Joe Spidaro... they bought all that land, and by then it was called "Golden Beach" and one thing and another. And of course I haven't mentioned the fact that my daddy was a builder, in Venice. My daddy learned the building trade in St. Petersburg, from his grandfather, and he came to Florida in '24. He learned the brick-laying trade, and he went to work in Venice for Joe Spidaro, building apartment houses out that are still there, and he was instrumental in building the McArthur Beach Hotel that was tore down. Now... but, they developed all that, and, Mr. Spidaro... Oh, that's a story in itself. Mr. Spidaro came from New York. He had built the man-holes in New York, and he came to Florida, and he had the contract to build the dyke around Lake Okeechobee. He brought all this equipment, and he built the dyke around Lake Okeechobee. And Mr. Spidaro was a very... productive man, in the fact that, he owned four hotels: he owned the Morgan Hotel in

Fort Myers, he owned the Sarasota Hotel, and the Orange Blossom Hotel. And he and his wife had gone to Boca Grande and tried to get in a hotel in Boca Grande, but because they were from Sicily they wouldn't rent 'em a room. So Mr. Spidaro ended up buying the hotel and firing everybody. Now, this is way before Mr. Spidaro and Bob Baynard built the bridge to Boca Grande. They eventually did that. But, it's... How I know so much about all of this, is when Joe Spidaro died in 1952, and when they had the leftover concrete, out at building his development, they put it in and built... he had a concrete bunker built. The walls were 2 foot thick, and it was a 2-story building. He was afraid of hurricanes, so he stored all his equipment in that building. Well when Tony Spidaro died in the early part of 1992, the family wanted to sell all of the holdings in Venice. Well, they owned the property where the... across from the hospital, where the Bellbree Diner was. And Pres Bent had a service station, that was in the family, plus a lot of the holdings that he had in this building. Well, my brother being an appraiser, he got the job to appraise everything in this building. So my brother and I went out there, and we had the privilege of going through this whole warehouse and inventorying everything. And in that warehouse, when Joe died he had a '52 Cadillac *coupe de ville*, and Mike Blewittee bought it at the auction. He had Caterpillar tractors, and he had all the silverware out of these hotels that he had bought, Roger Brothers sterling silver, and it had the name of the hotels on it, the plates, the glasses. There was all kinds of stuff in this. Plus all the records, where he used to pay Mr. Parkison, who was a good friend of mine in Clewiston, when I opened my funeral home in Clewiston. And, they'd get a check every week from the Chase-Manhattan bank in New York, to the First Bank of Clewiston, and this is what kept the bank open, and paid the workmen around the lake. And then when the dyke was built, Mr. Spidaro moved to Venice.

Now, anything else you want to know about all of this, we'll have to do at a later date, but I think that's about it for today. I'm getting hoarse, and my brain's getting tired. [...] I don't know how much more we need to do... I don't know where we're going to end, is what I'm saying.

AS: Well, I can send you some follow-up questions if you want, just some more details that I'd like to know about, and to clarify some of the stuff you've talked about today.

DP: Okay, I would like that! If you do that today I can read it tonight, and then why don't you come back tomorrow and we can wrap it up. [...] Well, I'd like to tell you about... We're getting away from the time in Venice. Like, our family connections to the Robarts arena in Sarasota, and about the circus, things of this nature, you know, little things... About building roads in South Venice... I think it might be interesting to some people, I don't know.

AS: Yeah, absolutely! I'd also like to know more about what your life at home was like, and what it was like growing up here, and like, going to school. But I'll send you an email with some questions.

DP: Well I do know one thing, we never had an air conditioner in the house, until... I think I was 22 years old. Nobody had air conditioning, we just opened the windows. It was a different time. You

know, people complain about the heat today, but back then, nobody complained, that was just the way of life! We went to school... and people today drink bottled water, well we drank sulfur water-- you ever taste sulfur water?

AS: I haven't!

DP: Well, I guarantee you'll never have a... It's not filtered, it's the water that comes out of the ground, and there's sulfur in the water. And it smells! Oh my goodness, it's.... but this is what we had, and you drank that or you didn't drink no water at all! Things aren't like they are today. You know, I get a kick when I look and I hear today, "Oh I don't have this and I don't have that." My goodness gracious! You know? It wasn't like that!

Interview #2

DP: Now, did you want to ask me some questions before we get started?

AS: Um, well, you said you had some stuff you wanted to talk about, right? It's up to you, but if you had anything you wanted to start with that's all great!

DP: Well, you asked me about my family. [...] Well, I'm very, very, very proud of my family. My mother never worked, she never had a job. Her job was to take care of and raise my brother and I. I had a brother, and older brother, Don. And, Don died of cancer in 1992. My brother was a very... I don't know how to say... My brother was a property appraiser. He did most of the property appraising in South Venice, South Sarasota County, I'm sorry, in the Venice area. And he bought land, and he and my dad built. My brother grew up like I did, working with my dad. My dad was a building contractor, but my dad was a physical builder. He laid brick, he cut stone, he laid block, he poured concrete, he did carpenter work. My dad'd do a building. If somebody didn't come to work, he could do the job-- and he didn't care what it was, he could do the job. And, my daddy was the kind of builder that when he built something he was on the job. He didn't go and have an office where he went and sat and talked on the telephone. And he built so much stuff in the Venice-Nokomis-Laurel area. He didn't build much in Englewood because he didn't have time. He didn't sublet a lot of jobs. He had people that, like, would pour concrete and lay tile. Terrazzo he didn't do. But, and the painting, he'd get contractors to come in and do the painting. But, basically, all of the *construction*, he and his helpers did himself. So me and my brother grew up working with my dad, in the building business. And I had so much of it, I didn't want to become a builder. And as I said before, I went to St. Petersburg, and... I got interested in the funeral home because of Mr. Baynard.

Now, my mom, unfortunately, was sick most of her life. Which was... not very convenient, but we lived a good life. And I grew up mostly on the beach. I could go down there and go swimming in the Gulf, and we had a fun life. I had a... I think my first riding vehicle other than my bicycle was a

1947 Cushman motor scooter. And I loved that motor scooter, I could go everywhere. And I had a lot of little jobs like I told you yesterday, with Mr. Cox and the paint store, and I worked at the Venice Gondolier, I worked at Bowden's IGA store, I worked for Chuck Ryder and his laundry, I worked for Bill Wimbish, putting down floors... and I also drove a dump truck, for Herb Hanchy. When Herb quit being chief of police, he opened or started a trucking company, and he had the contract to build the roads in South Venice. And I, and a bunch of my other buddies that were in the Vagabonds, we drove dump trucks, and we hauled dirt off of River Road, down Center Road, and built the roads in South Venice. Back then we thought, who in the world would ever buy lots and live here? We had no idea or ever dreamed that Venice would grow like it has grown. Um, what else...

There's one thing that... My daddy had a trademark, and he did all his life. My daddy carved *monkeys* out of peach pits. And a peach pit's hard! And he'd take his pocket knife, and he'd whittle peach pits. And if he liked you, he gave you a peach pit. He never sold one. So I'm gonna give you one of my daddy's monkeys. And he carved that with a pocket knife, out of a peach pit. So that way, you'll have a remembrance of me too.

AS: Wow, thank you so much! That really means a lot.

DP: It's a cute little thing, isn't it? Everybody, even at his funeral, they said, if I wanted to ask a question, and have a vote, I wouldn't ask you to raise your hand, I'd ask you to raise your peach pit. They said, I don't think the 300 and some people here, don't have one. I mean, he just... And it'd take him quite a while to make one.

But...I had very strict parents, to a degree. They were good to us, they didn't overrule us. And my brother was very educated. My brother came out of Korea when my mom was sick, and after mom got a little better, we went to Danbury, Connecticut. Now this is after the Venice Vagabonds, let's back up a little bit.

We started the Venice Vagabonds at Venice High School. The purpose of the Venice Vagabonds was to help other people. When I say 'help other people,' we had little cards printed up, and we'd help somebody. The card read, "You have just been helped by a Venice Vagabond." If you run out of gas, you needed a flat tire fixed, you needed your car get started, if you needed to go to the polls, to vote, if you had a doctor's appointment... they knew they could call a Vagabond and they'd take them. If a lady needed to go to the grocery store... Whatever we could do to help the people in the area. Because it was a small community, and everyone knew everyone. So we participated that way. As I said before, in the winter time, the town blossomed because of the influx of people. In the summer time, there was nothing. As far as "doing things"... other than just hang around and talk, because everybody had a job and worked during the day, and the night... there wasn't a whole lot of "socializing," so to speak. And we was all into cars. I was dating a girl by the name of Caroline Rice, and she came out of the school house... Let me back up here a minute. On Friday, if you was into cars, which, back then, most everybody was... We wore Levi's that were rolled up at

the bottom, and white t-shirts, and engineer boots. And she came out of the school one day, and we was all out around the flagpole, at the school house in Nokomis. And she said "Y'all look like a bunch of vagabonds," and that's where we got the name. The emblem that we have— the little tramp, with the cigar in his mouth and the scrunched hat—was a little rubber toy that I had hanging on my mirror in my '39 Ford coupe. That's how that got there.

Um, but back to my brother and I going with my mom. We went to visit folks, and my brother and I decided that we'd drive to Boston, 'cause we'd never been up there. And we went to Boston, and on the way back we decided we'd cut through Worcester, Massachusetts. And I saw this '32 Ford coupe in a junkyard, and I went in and I bought it for \$50. We went back the next day, I put a motor in it, put the radiator on it, and, we cranked it up and put tires on it. I stuck the fenders and the running boards in the back end, put wooden floorboards in it, cranked it up, and drove it home. Then, after I got here, I started rebuilding the '32 Ford coupe, and put a Rocket 88 Olds engine in it, and I had a lot of fun doing that. But we used to get together to help each other build cars, and we did a lot of street racing, drag racing, down on Center Road, and on the Venice Airport. We used to go out... where Sharky's is now, they called it "Red Lake," where the golf course and all is, and we'd go out there and tear down cars, and we'd race out there, in jalopies, hitting one another and banging around. We built stock cars, and we had a race track on the Manatee-Sarasota county line off of 41. They called it "Sara-Mana Speedway," and we all went up there. A lot of us had the privilege of getting to race at Sara-Mana Speedway. A lot of famous people ended up being part of that, but we won't get into that.

Alright, let's... okay. My dad was a builder, like I said, he laid block, and brick. The stonework on the Venice hospital, that's still there today, my daddy laid that stone and cut it.

Now, you talk about going to school... We only had the school house. The grade school was in Laurel, on 41, and the middle school and high school was on Nippino Trail in Nokomis. Now, Mrs. Cochran run the bus, and the Cole boys would take a boat, and go to Boca Grande, and pick up a couple, bring 'em to Placida. Mrs. Cochran would take the school bus from Placida, pick up kids, stop in Englewood to pick up kids, and bring 'em to Venice to school---er, Nokomis. And after school, it was a return thing as well. And Mrs. Cochran was the secretary in the principal's office. We had a lot of good school teachers. Our schools were not air conditioned. It was funny, if you wanted to get out of class, all you did was dive out the window, and you was gone, you disappeared, haha. We had a lot of fun at school. We ran track on a dirt road, and, we had a pretty good track team. We went to Plant High School in Tampa, and they had a professional track, they had everything. Some of us ran in bare feet, some of us had tennis shoes on. And we didn't have these fancy shoes but we still held our own and won races, and it was quite an experience. We had a very good basketball team. We'd go to the state every year. And, we'd travel the area, sometimes by private car, sometimes in the school bus, and play these little teams... Moore Haven, LaBelle, Alva, Wimauma, Turkey Creek, OLPH, Admiral Farragut... a bunch of these little towns. And they all liked to come to Venice. Most of the times we held the tournaments in Venice because we're the only ones with an inside gym. I think I've mentioned that before.

Alright, jobs that I've had in Venice... I think my first job that I got my Social Security card was, I worked for Venice Food Store, which was owned by Mr. Low, on Venice Avenue. And then I worked for Mr. Bowden, in the IGA store, and, uh, I worked for them. Okay. Now let's get back to the funeral work. I started at the funeral home in 1951, and I worked at the funeral home, and I was part time to start. Then I was on full time, with the ambulance and the funeral home. This is how I got involved in becoming a funeral director. When I graduated from high school, Mr. Robarts let me go to Sarasota, because back then when you served your apprenticeship, you had to register with the state of Florida. You had to spend 3 years as an apprentice, and you had to embalm 50-100 bodies before you were allowed to go to school. It's not that way today, but that's how it was then. And while I was working in Sarasota, Mr. Robarts asked me if I'd go over to his brother's funeral home in Arcadia and work, because somebody wanted to go on vacation. So, I went over to Arcadia, and worked in the funeral home for a couple weeks over there. And, they had a daughter, by the name of Patricia, and that's when I met her. And she had a brother Bill. And I lived upstairs in the funeral home there, like I did in Sarasota, I lived upstairs in the funeral home. The funeral home in Sarasota was the Robarts funeral home on Links Avenue, where the Sterns' bank is today. If you go across the street, on that corner, you'll see there's a memorial in memory of Wilfred T. Robarts. And the sports arena in Sarasota, is named after Wilfred T. Robarts. A lot of people pronounce it *Roh-barts*, but its *Rob-arts*. Anyway, we'll go on from there.

When Earl Rawles bought the funeral home from Willie Robarts in Venice, in '55, I moved back to Venice. And in 1956, I went to Chicago to mortuary school. When I graduated from mortuary school, I came back to Venice, and I was drafted into the United States Army. I served two years in the United States Army, and they put me in what they called "Graves Registration." Today it's called "Recovery and Disposition," or "R&D." And my job was to teach boys how to recover, identify, and prepare our soldiers to be brought home. This was my job. After I got out of the Army, I went to work for a lady, had a funeral home in Clewiston, Florida. Her husband had died. Elsie Futch was her name. And I went to work, and I worked two months, and then I bought the funeral home from her, in Clewiston, Florida. I had a funeral home there, I had an ambulance service there, for Hendry and Glades County. I had a... we dug our own graves, we had our own vault business, we had our own monument business, and the whole nine yards. And, later on, another story-- we also had an air-ambulance. I became a pilot, and I had two other employees that got their pilots license, and we ran an air- ambulance service. And it was kinda funny how we got into that, if I'll deviate a minute. It's kinda funny because a fella wanted to buy a bar, and he was with a telephone company, and they were merging with another one, and he had to give up his position. And he wanted to borrow or sell me an interest in a flying club. So, I told him I couldn't fly and I wasn't interested in an airplane. How wrong I was! He said, "Well let me tell you, the airplane was flown by a club member... to Texas. And a hurricane went through, and the plane was demolished. So, you're going to get a check for \$6,000, and I need the \$3,000 to buy into this bar." So I bought into it, with the welcomes from the doctors, and a couple vice presidents of the US Sugar, and an automobile dealer, and a cattleman. There was 10 in this club. Well to make a long story short: when they got the check, I went to the meeting and they asked me, which new airplane

did I want to buy? I wasn't getting a check. Well I couldn't fly, so I had to learn how to fly. And then, from that, I sprung out and bought an aircraft, and we had an air ambulance service, air hearse removal, and so on. So I did that as well.

Alright, let's move on. Um, Patti and I lived in Clewiston. When I bought the funeral home, the surrounding property I bought. My dad came down, and we remodeled an old house, and my wife and I lived in that house. We have two children, my son, Howdy Pattison, and my daughter, Katherine, we call her Kathy, and her last name is Duyn, D-U-Y-N. And she married Roland Duyn, and they have three children. I have three grandchildren: Cathy, Nash, and Aubrey. Now, that's the only grandchildren I have, my son and his wife do not have any children. Nash and Aubrey are twins, and they were born in Sarasota hospital on the morning of 9/11, 2001. My son is in the citrus industry, in the orange groves, and my daughter-in-law graduated from the University of Florida and is in agriculture. They have a ranch in Indiantown, Florida, and that's where they live. Now, I'm very proud and happy of my family. My daughter is a nurse. She was a nurse at Sarasota hospital for 23 years. My wife was a nurse, graduated from Jackson Memorial hospital, and when she wasn't raising the children, she worked mostly in nursing homes and things of that nature. She did work for the Hendry County Health Department, as a day nurse, but later on she worked in Venice, for many years, as a nurse and a...uh, care center, in Venice. She doesn't work anymore, like I don't.

Now, what else have I done? I skip around, I know. Let's see here. One thing that I prided myself in, and I don't like to... I don't know how to say this.... but, I was taught, in the funeral service, that the idea in life was to help other people. And I feel I have always, in my life, tried to help other people. I won't get into things today because there's so much different. But, I did not prey on peoples' sympathy when they had a death. I think that's wrong, and I never had to worry about meeting the family or a friend the next day, because of anything that I did. I tried to be honest and fair with people, and I have all my life. While I was living in... We moved to LaBelle in 1974, I'd opened a branch funeral home in LaBelle in '73. And, while living in LaBelle, well between Clewiston and LaBelle, I was very active in organizations. I was part of the Elks in Clewiston, I belonged to the Masonic Lodge, I was an instigator of the Everglades Eye Bank, and we used to do the eye nucleation, at the funeral home. I was the instigator of the Medical Examiner Bill in Florida. We used to have... we covered the Everglades, and we used to have a lot of unidentified people that were murdered, or died, and... back then, you had a coroner, and a justice of the peace, and they signed the death certificates. Well, they didn't know any more about what the person died of than the other average person. So, Dr. Joe Davis and Reed Low, a funeral director in Miami, and myself, went to... Took us 2 years in Tallahassee to get the Medical Examiner Bill passed, that we have today, and I'm very proud of that achievement. I spent 7 years on the board with the Funeral Directors and Embalmers of Florida. I'm very proud of that. I had a lot of good associates in the funeral profession. What else have I done? While living in LaBelle, I had a good friend of mine, who, as I said yesterday, was in the KMI. He had a trucking, uh, he drove a truck, between New Jersey and Florida. Well, I helped him get a new truck, and we was in the trucking business. And

six months after he got his new truck, he quit and gave me the truck. So I hired a fella and started Fort Denaud's Trucking. Well, Cecil, one of the boys I work with and ended up selling the funeral home... That's another thing, I brought fellas that worked with me for many years, about 18 years, into the funeral work, and got their license, and then I sold my funeral homes to my employees, and helped them get started. The funeral homes today are still in existence, and *their* children are running the funeral homes. It's been a hand-me-down thing. And I'm very proud of that! But anyway I got in the trucking business, and one truck led to two, two trucks led to four, and I had a trucking business hauling produce, and all, out of Florida. After I sold my funeral homes, in 1978, I decided that I was going to drive a truck too. So I went coast to coast, and drove a semi-truck, hauling whatever needed to be hauled. And finally I gave that up, that was no place for a married man, to be out on the road, driving a truck. But I'd been tied up in the funeral home, so many years, every day, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. It was time to get out and do something else. Course I'm also proud of the fact that I was able to take my children, and my wife and I, and we traveled. And I've had my children in every state in the United States except Hawaii--and because I couldn't drive to Hawaii, we didn't go. But we've... from Alaska, to Florida, to Maine, to Southern California, I've had my children in every state, and I'm proud of that.

How many other businesses have I been in? Quite a few. When I came back to Venice, I had a hog farm, and I used to trap the hogs. In the cemeteries, I trapped the hogs in these developments, on the golf courses, and things of that nature. And about once a month, I'd haul a load of hogs to the market in Ocala. Besides the hog business, then I got into making soap, and I had a soap company with my partner Richard Spencer, and we made soap, mainly for the car washes, and the boat people. It was a cleanse-all type of thing. We made it in six different colors, and we sold it to different people who bottled it and sold it under their label as a de-greaser, and I'd laugh at people because they'd say, "My green is better than your gold!" and "My red is better than your blue!" and... and it was all out of the same barrel, just a different color. But we made soap for the car washes as I said, we made suds, because the suds doesn't clean the car, it's the spray that you see... but I won't get all into that, that's too much. I don't know a whole lot else to talk about. Let's take a break here and you can ask me some questions.

AS: Okay, yeah! So, jumping back to what you said about travelling around the States, do you have any favorite stories from that, or any favorite places around the country?

DP: Yes, I did! Every year we'd plan a trip. We started out, with a station wagon and a tent, and we camped up in North Carolina... North Georgia... things like that, and I'll get back to that in a minute. Another thing I want to talk about, my cabin... But every year we planned to go someplace else. We went to... one summer, we went to Washington D.C., and that area, and we went through the Smithsonian Institute, and all the places around there. Another year we went all up into the New England states, and visited all in there. Another year, now, as I said we started out in a station wagon and a tent. The next thing we went to was a pickup truck with a camper in it, and I remember one year we went to New Jersey for the national Lion's Club convention, and we took the pickup truck, and the kids. Well, the kids were starting to get a little bigger now, and we found

out four of us couldn't ride in a one-seated truck. So I traded the motor home...or, the pickup truck camper, on a motor home. So we had a motor home for quite a while. And that's a funny story too... I'd had a funeral in Ortona, which is out in Glades County, and I had forgot to put the temporary marker on the grave. And my wife and I went out there... was on our way to Daytona, to the races. We used to--15 years in a row, we never missed a race at Daytona. Another couple and us, we'd go and take the motor home. Well we went in the gates of the cemetery, and my wife was driving 'cause I was sick, and we hit the gate, and she tore the side of the motor home up pretty bad. Well when we got back, I went to West Palm Beach to get it fixed, and I traded it and got a bigger motor home. Well from that, we ended up traveling. We went to California, Arizona, and all out in that part of the country. We put 60-some thousand miles on that motor home. And the last we had the motor home, we drove it to Alaska. I sold the motor home in Alaska, and we flew back, and then traveled. It was interesting because we went to Seattle and stayed in a hotel and rented a car, and we travelled for almost two weeks in the Northwest. And then we got on a train, and went across the United States on a train, to Chicago, and that area, and then we flew back to Florida. But, it was fun, because the teachers used to laugh and say it was interesting when the kids came back to school because they could tell about their vacation all over the country, and it was educational... And I think my children, they never met a stranger, and they still don't today, because of these experiences, of being out, and going.

Now, another thing I want to bring up, on our camping trip, with the station wagon. We was in North Georgia... Clayton, Dillard, in that area... Tiger... and we liked it. We liked it a lot. We ended up buying a piece of property up on Screamer Mountain, on a waterfall. And we kept that. We bought that in the late '60s, and we kept that piece of property until after I had retired, or semi-retired, whatever, til 1994. And in 1994 I went to Clayton and spent two summers up there, in a pull-behind camper, and built my own log cabin. I poured the floor, I laid the block, put the sub floor up. Then a company came in off of my design and laid the logs up, and then my dad came in and helped me, and we finished out the inside, and put the doors and the windows, all the partitions, all the cabinets... and we built the whole cabin in North Georgia. And I sold it a couple years ago. We had it for 21 years, in Rabun County, Georgia. I was very proud of that, and I loved it very dearly.

When we came back... now, how are we here today? We lived in Venice, where my mom and dad was, and we took care of them until they passed away. My cousin--not my cousin, my wife's cousin-- opened a funeral home in Arcadia, Florida. And he asked me if I'd help him out. So I went over there, and I drove back and forth for a year, 'cause my mother was still alive. And I helped by running the funeral home in Arcadia. When my mother passed away, we moved to Arcadia. No, we moved there just before she passed away. Anyway, we ran the funeral home for a couple years, and then I retired. But we kept on living in Arcadia. We lived in Arcadia for ten years. And then I decided, it was time... all my doctors and all... had all been in Venice, were still in Venice, so we decided to downsize, and we moved to North Port. And we're here today. And... what a wonderful

life. What a wonderful life.

Now, what else can I tell you?

AS: Well, I was also wondering... about the funeral business, what was it like for you working in it? Like that's not such an ordinary job I guess.

DP: Gee... Well, I was brought up in the funeral service that...the funeral service was next to the church...that you were there to help people in a time of mourning and need. It wasn't about money, it was about helping somebody, and doing. And I pride myself that I tried to keep the costs low. I pride myself in the fact that, at the time of death, people have the feeling that they have to have the best there is, because they love the person. Well, they're trying to buy... I don't know, I shouldn't say it, but... I think they have a guilty feeling that they didn't spend enough time with their loved ones, and they feel by spending more money--now this is my own opinion-- I tried to talk people out of spending a lot of money, because they would need the money to help raise their family and do other things. And that's why I say, I... I was very conscientious about this. The caskets that we sold, back when I was in the funeral work, you can't even buy today, they don't even make 'em, because they were least expensive.

I buried the Indians. I was very proud of that. The county used to give me \$75 to bury the Seminole Indians. Today their funerals are over \$10,000 a piece. But, when I went to Clewiston, they would put the Indian in a casket, in a wooden, cloth-covered casket, and send 'em on a county dump truck to the Indian reservation. I stopped that, started putting them in the hearse, taking them down, and having a service. Well the Indians were very graceful about that, and they made me their undertaker. I had a jacket in the ceremony, and when it was time for the white people--or, the people who weren't Indians, I should say--they had a private ceremony--they had to leave while I got to stay. And, we educated them, and brought 'em up a little bit... in their way of life. When I knew the Seminole Indians, they lived in the Everglades down there, in South Hendry County, on dirt roads. And 'course we ran an ambulance service down there too, and helped them. But they all lived in tikis, and Quonset huts, and uh....the Federal government went in, in the early 60's, I say about '64, and start building houses for the Indians. The Indians would put their animals in the house. If the animals lived, they moved in. They didn't move the animals out, they lived in the houses with the animals. Now the old custom of the Seminole Indians, when the man of the house died, they burned the tiki, and everything the head of the household had went in the grave with him. So all his personal belongings, I don't care what it was, went in the grave. That's the way the Indians believed, and it's still today, there's a lot of this goes on--not everything, because they have more now than they ever had. And... so the Indians have come a long way in Florida. I was very privileged that the Seminole Indians allowed me to bury Billy Bow Legs the 3rd, and work on the cemetery. I was very proud of that honor, and I still am today.

AS: That's gotta be a hard industry to work in, right?

DP: Well, I was 17 years old when I started, and unfortunately, I had some very tragic deaths in

Venice, of people I knew. And I handled it, and I was proud of the way I was able to handle it. And it made me feel good, to learn how to help people at that time. And I loved it, and I wanted to be in it, and I stayed in it. It is a difficult thing because they're emotional, and you can't get... you gotta hold your own emotions, to do what you need to do. You know, it's funny, if a family's gonna have a wedding, they plan 5 or 6 months. When someone dies, they want the same kinda thing done in 2-3 days. So, you really gotta hop, and know what you're doing and how to do it, and coming up with ideas. And I always felt in the industry, in the funeral service, the more *personal* you can make a service, for the loved ones that are left, the better. If he was a golfer, naturally you had his golf clubs there, and one thing or another. I pride myself, later on in the industry, when they came out with all this new photography and all, to do this video-type of pictures from their past, at funerals. I just, I liked it, and when an idea would come up or I'd come up with a new idea, I tried to instigate it. Like I said, we dug our own graves, we used to dig 'em by hand until I got a little back hoe, and then we started digging them that way. And, yes, the day I sold my funeral home, I dug a grave that morning... because that's just the way it was. If you couldn't dig a grave you couldn't work for me--or, work with me. I didn't call it, I never considered any of my employees as employees. I always considered them as part of our group, our family, and I never asked anybody in my organization to EVER do anything I couldn't do or wouldn't do. But, dealing with death... it's a thing that very few people get involved with, because you never see a happy situation. But it's a good feeling when you see somebody that you tried to help, and they come through it. Anything else?

AS: What's been one of the most important things you've learned from it? Or, well, the most interesting, or affected you the most...

DP: (pause) That's a hard question to answer.... That's a hard question to answer... I've seen so much tragedy. You know, families getting tore up in car wrecks, people going into canals, and us going in the canals and opening up the doors and getting people out of cars. You know, I had a high way patrolman shot, and saved his life. I've seen so much of this, that, to just pick out one, or two... I really don't... I've had families that lost loved ones in Vietnam, and all of that. And it's rough. I've had murders, family feuds, uh... unpleasant situations, where one family will have a funeral for one part of the family, and then the next day have a funeral for the other half the family.

And one thing I'd like to bring out, too. When we went to Clewiston, we weren't integrated. And, white people... I was not allowed to bury a Black. I could do the Indians... And, the Black people had to go to Fort Myers, or Bell Glade. Fort Myers was 65 miles away; Bell Glade was 35 miles. So, I made a deal with U.S. Sugar, and they let me have a piece of land, out in...where the Black people lived, in Harlem, and I built a Black funeral home. And I hired a Korean war veteran, one leg, was a licensed funeral director, and he ran the Black funeral home with me. Well, when Mr. Taylor, in Bell Glade, he wasn't too happy about that, because it was cutting into his business. So he said that... his son-in-law was a funeral director, and he thought he could live in Clewiston, and rather than buy my funeral home, he took a little house and made a funeral home. And when he did that, I closed the Black funeral home, and made a rooming house out of it, and sold it. I didn't want

to be in competition with him, but under the circumstances, we had to do what we had to do back then. Today they're integrated, but back then, they weren't.

Is that the right kinda... stories?

We had a lot of cane fights in the sugar fields, with knives and things... Uh, plane crashes into Lake Okeechobee... It was kinda ironic, when a plane would go down in the lake, or a fisherman would drown in Lake Okeechobee, I'd get notified by the Sheriff's department, 'this is the accident that happened,' and they'd tell me, like in Glades County for example, 'Go to Hardy Pond Canal,' or wherever in Clewiston. So I'd go to that spot, and of course at that time I was just waiting, and what they would do, the Sheriff's department would call the illegal fishermen, that fished with nets, and they'd inform them, and they'd take their nets out and recover the human remains and bring them to shore, and then they'd leave and I'd call the Sheriff's department on the radio, and tell 'em they washed up on the shore, and then we'd make a report, and that's how we recovered the bodies in the lake. Hm.. I lived in Clewiston when there was islands in Lake Okeechobee. There still is today, but people lived on the islands in Lake Okeechobee. The farmers, they would farm on the islands, in the lake. Truck farming, just like they did everywhere else around Bell Glade, Pahoke, and Clewiston... beside the sugar cane. Um, so.... It was a neat way of life, and I enjoyed it. 'Course I was only 24 years old when I went to Clewiston and started, and it was a new experience for me, 'cause...

Well, let's get back to my wife! I had an ambulance call-- I had a sailor, up in Glades County, that had wrecked his car. And I went up there and picked him up, and I brought him into Clewiston. And Dr. Shupe asked me if I'd transport him to Miami, to Jackson Memorial Hospital--that they couldn't handle him in Clewiston. So, I took him down there, and they took him into the hospital, and... I saw this nurse, in the hospital. It was Patti Robarts. And I hadn't seen her since I worked for her daddy in Arcadia. And, I asked her if I could take her out to dinner, and she says 'Yes,' so I went back to Miami, and I took her out to dinner. And then I started going to Miami, to date her. Well, she ended up moving back to Arcadia, so I'd go to Arcadia when I could, sometimes I could call, sometimes I just went up there and took it for granted, and I sat and talked to her parents because she had a date. Well, then she informed me that she was moving to California, her and a couple of the other nurses, and a friend of hers. So they moved to California, San Francisco. Well I tell you, the telephone calls and the writing the letters, got a little much. So I got on a plane and I flew out there, and asked her. And I said 'I think it's time you come home.' And she agreed, and this was in August or September. And she came home. And then the following February, we got married in Arcadia. But that's how I met my wife. And I'm very proud to say, we've been married.... mm, she's gonna kill me... 52 years, I think that we've been married. And I'm proud to say, my mom and dad were married 73 years! Yeah. So, I'm very proud of this. Anything else?

AS: Well, so we covered the tragedy, what are some of the happier things that have happened in your life?

DP: The happiest things? I think some of the happier things-- Well, besides marrying my wife! I think some of the happier things that have happened to me is, my daughter marrying Roland Duyn, and my son marrying Wendy Johnson! Um, I'm very very proud of both of them. They have wonderful relationships with their spouse, and they take care of each other. My two children are very very close. They stay in communication and they help one another, and I'm very proud of that. Another happy occasion... There's been so many that nothing really jumps out, in specific. I love every day, and we just feel so fortunate that the Lord takes care of us and looks after us... and that's been a big thing in our lives, moreso my wife's than mine, but I felt for many years that, I didn't have time. But I found out I was wrong, I should've taken more time. And, now I'm proud that I do, and the good Lord's been very good to us, and we're very comfortable, and my children and I are very very close, to both my wife and I, and our grandchildren are very close to us. I don't know any other great thing that ever happened, you know. I'm no rocket scientist, I don't know... But I do have hobbies, I like to make things with my hands, I do a lot of woodwork now, and I've always liked making things and building things. Now I have a little woodworking shop.

AS: Do you have any favorite books, or movies?

DP: Books? I like John Grisham, uh... I like Demille. Lately I've been reading Carolyn Higgins Clark, I've been reading her books, I like those. As far as movies go, I'm not a movie person. People ask me did I see this movie or that movie, and who was the actors... I never got into actors. I love Nascar, I love racing. I love football. I don't care for pro', any sports in pro. I like college baseball, college basketball, and college football, but as far as that goes, the pro's, no, I'm not interested in that.

AS: Any specific reason for that?

DP: Well, I feel when a man graduates from school, he needs to go get a job and go to work. And to me, that's not employment. That's my personal feeling. I'm not against him doing it, everybody can do their own thing! I believe a man and a wife should be married, I'm not this, I'm very dead-set against this woman-and-woman or man-and-man... no, no, no... And another thing, people say 'well you're prejudiced.' Well... I... maybe I am! But I look at life this way: I think everybody is equal. I think everybody ought to live their own life, the way they are. When I say, I'm kind of prejudiced... I don't believe in intermingling in marriage. The Lord didn't mean for us--and the reason I say that, you don't see gardenias growing on a rose bush. You don't see cows and horses grazing in the fields, in the same pasture, but breeding on another. I mean, there's a limit to what the Lord actually felt us to be. And I'm a very strong believer that, if he had wanted all of this to cross, that it would've been. But I don't think the Lord---he has different people living in different parts of our world, that are different religion, different denomination, different everything. I think these people ought to live where they are, and if they come to America, they ought to live like Americans, and if Americans go to their country, they ought to live like those people! Now maybe that's old-fashioned, but that's how I feel. As far as race goes, I'm not a racist, I'm not against the Blacks, I'm not against the Mexicans, I'm not against... any of that! I think

everybody has a place in the world for their own. Now, you asked me, and that's how I feel. And I think everybody's entitled to their own opinion... and that's my opinion.

AS: Alright, well back to sports, do you have any favorite teams?

DP: I like the Florida Gators, for football. And next to the Florida Gators, I guess it would be the Clemson Tigers, in South Carolina. Um, and Nascar. I watched Nascar, Nascar is doing itself out, the rules they have today and all of that. I don't care much for Nascar anymore. As far as golf goes, I watch occasionally, golf, because these guys are performing on their own, and I love the beautiful settings, where they play, the greenery, and the trees, and the water. I love more watching the scenery than the players, haha!

AS: Do you ever play any golf?

DP: Oh yeah, and when we lived in LaBelle we lived on the golf course. And yes I play golf, I used to, but also carried my fishing rod, in my golf bag, and as soon as I'd get away from the club house, I could go out in the ponds and I'd fish. They'd think I'd be playing golf, but I'd be out there fishing in the lakes. Ha ha! And I liked that. Uh, hunting, I used to go to Colorado and hunt deer, take my brother, and we'd go out there and hunt and do things like that, and I really enjoyed that. Yes I miss my brother, he was very smart, very educated, and we were very close. And unfortunately that was a sad part of my life when I lost him. But... the family, we owned a lot of buildings in Venice, the family still owns a lot of buildings in downtown Venice. But that was all with my brother, and I don't want to get into all of that... but I don't need to. I'm sincere, and happy with what I have. I have a very good wife, she takes care of me like... You know I tell her all the time, I live in the best adult supervised provisional around, ha ha! I'm lucky. I'm very happy. I've always been happy, I love people, I love to laugh. And to me, I try to make everything...a joke or as funny as I can, to absorb it. I look at things different, and it's kind of a comical thing. I watch on TV, here's this guy out there trying to sell gold, because of the investment of American money. Well, why is he selling, to get American money, and getting rid of his gold? This doesn't make a lot of sense to me! If it's so precious, why don't he keep it? Why's he trying to sell it, to get something, he's telling us, that's.... That's conflict of interest to me. That's the kinda way I look at things, you know, is the bottle half empty or is the bottle half full, you know, ha ha, it's the same thing.

AS: So now just to kinda wrap it up, do you have any advice you'd want to share with young people today?

DP: Advice? Be yourself. Be honest. Be fair. Don't take advantage of people. Give, and don't worry about receiving. You don't do something for somebody else to get something in return. If you go to work for somebody, you do a job like you would expect the job to be done if you were the boss. And that's how you should act, and that's how you should do. And one of the first things that I feel a person... when you go to get a job, if you have to ask how much it pays, you didn't want the job anyway, all you wanted was an income. And I don't believe in that. If you really want the job, if you do the job correctly, the income will come with it. I do not believe in a minimum wage,

I think people ought to be paid of their value, of what they can do. If you work for someone and you do a good job, you will be reimbursed for it. If you don't do a good job, then you don't need to be there. I do not believe in Welfare, to a degree. Welfare is for those that need help. But, I do not believe in people living off of Welfare, and taking advantage of the government, and living off of taxpayers' money, off of people that work hard. They ought to have a job. I'm not saying people don't need help, but when you give somebody help, they ought to do something back in return, and thanking them for their help. And I don't think that's too much to ask. That's my opinion!

Experience is a lot of things in life that you learn the hard way. You can't tell a young person! Oh, they know it all! And now, as they get older, in life, you know, they look back and say 'Oh maybe they knew more than I thought they knew!' And if you do the same thing twice, then you're pretty dumb. We all make mistakes, but... you try to overcome, and forgive, and forget. I've had a lot of bad, um, investments, in helping people... they've taken advantage of me. I overlook it, I walk away from it, and I live a better life. They have to live with it, not me. And that's just how I look at it. You try to help people the best they can, if you was looking for something in return, like I said, forget it--you're not doing it for that reason. If you get something, then great. Eventually you'll get something in return--whether you know it or not. That's my philosophy in life.

AS: Alright, well I think that's all I had, did you want to add anything?

DP: Not a thing! I appreciate you coming, I hope we've done a good job, and I'm very very glad to know you! I hope I hear more from you, and your parents should be very proud of you. I mean that! My wife and I are very impressed with the way that you act, and how you carry yourself, and I really mean that! And the reason I gave you the monkey, is because I want you to remember us.