

**SARASOTA COUNTY WATER ATLAS  
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT  
NEW COLLEGE OF FLORIDA — FALL 2014**



**Interviewee:** Lily Mae Martin

**Interviewer:** Chelsea Driver

**Date of Interview:** November 3, 2014

*Born in 1925, Martin grew up in the turpentine quarters in Laurel and is among the last remaining members of that generation in the community.*

**Chelsea:** We can start whenever you're ready. Do you wanna start by just telling me what your name is?

**Lily Mae:** Oh you want me to—Oh!

**Chelsea:** Yeah!

**Lily Mae:** Oh—good morning. My name is Lily Mae Martin. I was born in Lake Okeechobee, my dear mama told me. And my grandmamma lived up here. So, we moved with my mama up here. We've been in Sarasota County for, like I said, most of my life. We would go off different places, then we could come back. There's that old saying...nowhere like home. So, I've been here for quite a while.

**Chelsea:** What do you remember most about growing up here? [Speaks up for Lily to hear] What are some of some of the things you remember about growing up here?

**Lily Mae:** Well, I remember growing up and it seems like everybody got along fine. I remember my mama, she would leave me with my grandmamma. She did laundry, people's laundry, washin' and ironing. And we used to—I'll remember best I can—we had dirt roads and we lived

over in what we used to call Blackman's Quarters. Over here [points to the left] on this side. And she did washin' and ironing, some of the houses she would go to and others would bring 'em where she lived. So we would walk—she would take me with her—and we would walk down these dirt roads and she would do the laundry and we would walk back and, we used to could go pick huckleberries, but it's built so there ain't no huckleberry bushes 'round no more. And we went fishing down to the bridge, and we just, well life, well in a way I would think it might have been easier for us. Things have just got so different from when I was growin' up. Although the Bible tells us that every generation does different. So, I ain't found no faults.

**Chelsea:** [Laughs]

**Lily Mae:** We lived in wooden houses, but thank God, He took care of us there, too. It was nice to me. I enjoyed it, growing up.

**Chelsea:** Could you tell me a little bit more about—you said the place you grew up in was Blackman's Quarters? Is that right? Could you tell me a little more about that? It was just a section of lots of little wooden houses?

**Lily Mae:** Yeah, wooden houses, wooden windows. Wooden doors. We had wooden stoves, sometimes, then we got kerosene stoves. We didn't have no lights for years over there, no bathrooms, but everything was much cheaper and so. And we did our clothes and hung 'em out on the line—'course I hang our clothes now.

**Chelsea:** Yeah it's...

**Lily Mae:** I mean, the air is good for your clothes!

**Chelsea:** Um-hm.

**Lily Mae:** I worked for a lady, we did her sheets, we hung them out there to dry and put right on the bed. It's good for ya, ya know all them people growed up with different ideas.

**Chelsea:** Yeah, totally!

**Lily Mae:** Let me see, is there anything else about that I can think of...?

**Chelsea:** You're doing great!

**Lily Mae:** Hmm?

**Chelsea:** I said you're doing great.

**Lily Mae:** Well, thank ya but I'm kind of runnin' out. [Laughs]

**Chelsea:** Oh, that's all right! So—is the area you grow up—is that not around anymore—the Quarters?

**Lily Mae:** Uh-uh, no.

**Chelsea:** No, it's all gone?

**Lily Mae:** No. You come in here. When you get to this light, by Publix, where ya have to come across—ya know where I'm talking, right?

**Chelsea:** Yeah.

**Lily Mae:** Okay. Before you get to Publix, it's a trailer park on the left, up by one of them lights. You're gonna get up to a light. I can't think of the name of that gas station. It's a gas station before you get to Publix. So, on the left of that, on the left side of the road. That's Blackman's Quarters. They're all trailers. They've got a trailer park there now.

And there used to be a school sitting where that gas station. So it done built up, so much.

**Chelsea:** When did they tear down all the school and the quarters?

**Lily Mae:** I can't tell you, it's been a long time.

**Chelsea:** Do you know when the Quarters were built? Were they built during your lifetime, or were they already there a long time before you were born?

**Lily Mae:** Yeah, they must have been there a long time. When we moved from 'Chobee [Okeehobee]. They were built, that's where my grandma was living.

**Chelsea:** So, that's why you guys moved here? To be with your grandma?

**Lily Mae:** Hmm?

**Chelsea:** Why did you guys move here from Okeechobee?

**Lily Mae:** Well, my ma just wanted to move up where her mama was, so. That's why we ended up here. [Laughs] So, I think the orange grove's still sitting over there. In front, we were this way [points out window to the right], the orange groves that way [points to the left]. And I think it's still there, 'cause the road to the post office goes to the Old Laurel. Blackman's Quarters, at least. That was Blackman's Quarters, Amran Quarters and Timtime Quarters. There was three. And this community here, [points to the floor] Amran Quarters, they had wooden houses too. Then the Timtime Quarters is back where ya call Mission Valley now. So, we—[laughs]—oh, I'm havin' trouble thinkin' of anything else about it. We used to walk to the first bridge there in Nokomis and go fishing. And when we had little grocery stores. Hmm...

**Chelsea:** Do people still fish out on the bridge now? Where you all used to fish?

**Lily Mae:** Well, they built it up so. 'Cause we used to could come off the highway and go down and, ya know, what I'm trying to tell ya?

**Chelsea:** Yeah, you used to be able to walk right out to the water...

**Lily Mae:** Yeah.

**Chelsea:** And now—you can't.

**Lily Mae:** And sometimes you fish off the bridge, but most of the time, ya did it on the bank, and fished.

**Chelsea:** Um-hm.

**Lily Mae:** And we waded out, and I think about it now, God sure took care of us wading out there fishing.

**Chelsea:** [Chuckles]

**Lily Mae:** Yeah, He took care of us. So, it was nice. To me. We got along. So that's the main thing?

**Chelsea:** Was it a very close community?

**Lily Mae:** Yeah. People were pretty close. Pretty close. We would walk from Blackman's Quarters until we got cars. And we would walk from Blackman's Quarters from the school house. 'Cause see, where it's all built up. all the trees and things been cut down, where there used to be a pass.

**Chelsea:** And now it's not there?

**Lily Mae:** So, I guess I done told you all that I can think of about that.

**Chelsea:** I think you told me last time, the Quarters were segregated?

**Lily Mae:** Yeah.

**Chelsea:** Like, blacks and whites?

**Lily Mae:** Uh-uh,

**Chelsea:** They weren't? They were mixed?

**Lily Mae:** Oh, oh yes. We were separated.

**Chelsea:** Yes, what was that like?

**Lily Mae:** This [gestures around her] began with Martin Luther King. Otherwise, ya know, unh-uh. You went in the back doors, restaurants. Course, I didn't go to them, no way.

**Chelsea:** [Nods head in agreement]

**Lily Mae:** No way. And, you waitressed for anybody, you go in the back door. So...

**Chelsea:** Yeah.

**Lily Mae:** But, ya know, it didn't bother me.

**Chelsea:** No?

**Lily Mae:** Didn't bother me.

**Chelsea:** Were there places you couldn't fish?

**Lily Mae:** No, most of the places you could go fishin'.

**Chelsea:** Oh, I see.

**Lily Mae:** But now, lotta places ya can't.

**Chelsea:** Because it's all private?

**Lily Mae:** Yeah. And all them bridges done growed up so, on the bank. So. Oh Lord, I thought about how—my uncle had been in the service and me and my mama had gone down to Alabama because one of them had gotten shell-shocked, so he was in the hospital for years. And we was coming back on the bus. The bus driver almost had to put a man off the bus. The way he was kinda pickin' on us.

**Chelsea:** Wow.

**Lily Mae:** So anyway, he didn't hurt us. Just, was saying things. So I think the Lord for all this. And we sure have come a might long ways. Mighty, mighty long ways.

**Chelsea:** Yeah, we really have.

**Lily Mae:** So I think I done run out.

**Chelsea:** Yeah? You're all talked out? [Laughs]

**Lily Mae:** Well, ya know, I said what I could think of.

**Chelsea:** Let's see, do you have—do you think have any other memories of the water? Besides just fishing? Did you guys go swimming? Or have a boat?

**Lily Mae:** No. I've never been a person for going swimming.

**Chelsea:** Yeah, not your thing?

**Lily Mae:** Yeah, people went. I just didn't go.

**Chelsea:** I think you told me you guys had farm land and stuff? Did you grow up on a farm?

**Lily Mae:** Oh yeah, yeah! We used to grow tomatoes. Used to be a farm, up the road a piece, coming down. With tomatoes, picked beans, and peas, and cucumbers. Oh yeah, we had—what do you call it—the packing house? Packing celery. So. We worked on the farm.

**Chelsea:** I think one of the photos you gave me said you were a teacher? Were you a teacher at the school at any point?

**Lily Mae:** No, no not me.

**Chelsea:** Hmm, weird. One of these things—a newspaper clipping—said you—

**Lily Mae:** If it's on there, then it's wrong.

**Chelsea:** Yeah, I guess it was wrong, then. So, did you work on the farm for a lot of your life?

**Lily Mae:** Oh yeah, I worked on the farm a long time. I started, I guess, when I was about fifteen or sixteen. We used to catch trucks that picked us up and took us to the farm and bring us back. We had, I think, a good time.

**Chelsea:** That's sounds great, really.

**Lily Mae:** Yeah.

**Chelsea:** It seems like a pretty different place to live, these days.

**Lily Mae:** Yeah, so far, the people seem to be very nice to you. Like when we were growin' up.

**Chelsea:** What's the demographic, kind of, of the town now? Is it pretty different? People who live here?

**Lily Mae:** Hmm?

**Chelsea:** The people that live around this area now, are they very different from the people you grew up with?

**Lily Mae:** No, they ain't no different. No, it's just built different.

**Chelsea:** Um-hm.

**Lily Mae:** But the people are about the same. And people keep building.

**Chelsea:** Yeah. I mean it seems pretty built up—this big highway and all.

**Lily Mae:** Yeah.

**Chelsea:** There wasn't any of that for a while. Right?

**Lily Mae:** Yeah, for a long, long time.

**Chelsea:** It's a pretty recent development?

**Lily Mae:** Oh, yeah. Lots been built. Excuse me one minute.

**Chelsea:** Of course.

**Lily Mae:** You know—where Sandra lives? They done built five houses in there in a year.

**Chelsea:** Wow, really?

**Lily Mae:** Um-hm. People are really moving in here.

**Chelsea:** I wonder what is newly attractive about this area? 'Cause it's close to the water, you think?

**Lily Mae:** Hmm?

**Chelsea:** I wonder why people are moving into this area so much—just 'cause they're building it, or the water, or—

**Lily Mae:** I don't know, I don't know. 'Cause, just in these few years, it changed and they just keep building in here. So. I guess they were just waiting on the time to do it. It ain't hurtin' nothing, I guess, but it just ain't how it used to be. All right, all right, okay. All back—there—it used to be woods all back there. We used to could go on the forest, saltwater fishing, but people built around up there. Ya can't get out there now. It really has grown. People moving in. But thank the Lord, so far, I think we get along pretty well. Of course, I don't know everybody in the community—them I know, we get along fine. And they do so much for us now. Give us food once a month. Ya go around to different churches. They give ya food. We have food, I mean, but to me, from the time the Lord blessed me these many years, it's different. People do more for ya now.

**Chelsea:** There's more reaching out?

**Lily Mae:** Yeah, they look out for ya, if you're sick, if ya need them. But, these nurses, they now call them, they give ya aid, if ya need it. Whatever, ya need them to do. They have them, oh—what's it called? When ya have cancer?

**Chelsea:** Hospice?

**Lily Mae:** Yeah. But I haven't asked for any yet, I've been doing pretty good. If I can do something without asking somebody else to do it, that's the way I feel.

**Chelsea:** It's nice you've been able to stay around here.

**Lily Mae:** Yeah, so far I've been able to stay here. Yeah, I move about. I think they help ya when you're sick. But if you are able to do something for yourself, I think you oughta do it. Be thankful you're able to do it.

**Chelsea:** That's a good way of looking at life.

**Lily Mae:** Yeah, I just sit here, and I just get so much encouragement off the TV. I go to church and I pray my soul be saved. But I see people on the TV in a wheelchair, I see 'em, in their

wheelchairs, racing, I just see so much and hear the ministers. Lord, that helps me. It helps me not just sit here and say “Oh Lord, why me?”

**Chelsea:** There’s so much positivity out there in the world, if you look for it.

**Lily Mae:** That’s right. I know I was supposed to be sick, ’cause if I wasn’t, I wouldn’t be sick. And I look at it that way. And I’m thankful. I pray every day. I read. I just thank the Lord. I have faith, I have faith God will get ready for me. When that day comes, he’ll be ready for me. But, I’m thankful I’m still here. And people say he brought me a pretty long way over hills and mountains. So I’m just thankful.

Ya know, those little common grocery stores, they had some of the best meat. And it wasn’t expensive, but now—whoo-ee.

**Chelsea:** Yeah, cause they didn’t have to ship it from all over.

**Lily Mae:** I’m tellin’ ya. It looked like, I can remember, it looked like the meat was so good. Back then. So anyway, things change.

**Chelsea:** Hmm and they still are. [Laughs]

**Lily Mae:** It’s a blessing to be here, though. Blessing to be around. Blessing, blessing, blessing. So. I think I done told ya all I can think of.

**Chelsea:** You’ve told me a lot of great stories. I hope I didn’t wear you out.

**Lily Mae:** Oh no, I’m really glad you came by. I really am. It’s nice to have some company today.

**Chelsea:** It’s nice to see someone new.

**Lily Mae:** Yep. I’m glad you came by. It’s nice to spend time with someone new.