

Oral Memoirs
of
Elizabeth Bridges

An Interview Conducted by

Trish Thompson

2010

Celery Soup

Creative Sanford, Inc.

Creative Sanford, Inc.

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Interview Histories

Interviewers: Trish Thompson

Transcriber: Freddie Roman-Toro

The recordings and transcripts of the interview were processed in the offices of the Creative Sanford, Inc., Sanford, Florida.

Project Detail

Creative Sanford, Inc. is a non-profit organization created to manage Celery Soup community theater productions. The original idea for the Celery Soup project came from Jeanine Taylor, the owner of a folk-art gallery on First Street in Sanford, Florida. The first production was *Touch and Go*, a play focusing on the people of Sanford and the town's determination to overcome various obstacles, including the Freeze of 1894-1895, the fall of Sanford's celery industry, and the closing of Naval Air Station (NAS) Sanford in the 1960s. In the process of producing the show, Creative Sanford decided to rehabilitate an historic building, the Princess Theater, which is located on 115 West First Street and owned by Stephen Tibstra. The Creative Sanford offices are housed in the Historic Sanford Welcome Center, located at 203 East First Street.

Legal Status

Scholarly use of the recording and transcript of the interview with Elizabeth Bridges is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on 2010.

Abstract

An oral history of Elizabeth Bridges. Bridges discusses what life was like in Singapore as a child in the 1960s. She also talks about how she met Victor Green, her first husband. Green worked on an oil rig in the Pacific Ocean for HuffCo. Bridges tells what it was like for her husband to work for that company. She had to learn how to cook Southern food and adapt to life in America. Her first husband died of lung cancer in 1991. She then met Jack Bridges, her second husband, and married him in 1998. Jack was an attorney with a drinking problem. After he overcame his problem, he ran for city commissioner in 2005. He brought many positive changes to the city and was a well-known and successful attorney.

Elizabeth Bridges

Oral History Memoir

Interviewed by Trish Thompson

2010

Sanford, Florida

0:00:00

First and second husbands

Thompson Tell me a little bit about how you and Jack [J. Bridges] met.

Bridges Jack was a former attorney for my first husband, Victor Green. They don't call him Victor Green. He goes by his middle name "Mapes." Mapes and I were his clients.

Thompson Is that his mother's maiden name or something like that? That's an unusual name.

Bridges Yes, because they didn't want to call him Victor or Junior, so they called him by his middle name. He's known here in Sanford. Everybody knows Mapes, but he was another generation. so the Greens and the Bridges were here in Sanford and they didn't live too far from one another — 3 Grandview Boulevard,¹ which is the former airport. So Alfred Green worked on the railroad with Jack's daddy, and I think Alfred Green was the supervisor. He was higher in rank than Alfred. We have always seen Jack as our attorney [*laughs*].

When my husband passed away in [19]91, we were all living in the same neighborhood, and Jack was divorcing in '91 too. I think he and Beth [Bridges] separated when they were [inaudible] April, and they got divorced in '91. My husband died in December of '91. A year later, Jack and I met, and he was patrolling the neighborhood, but he has a very commanding voice. I had always heard that he was a very good trial lawyer, and he would speak to me with that tone. I would have to remind him that I'm not his client and that we're not in a courtroom — to tone his voice down.

Thompson Well, Jack was a fabulous attorney. I always heard it. I was never a client of his, but if anybody was ever going to be in a trial with him, they were scared.

Bridges I think it was because of his practice with Mac [Cleveland]. They gave him all of the cases that came along, so he wasn't afraid to get his hands dirty, so he tried them all.

Thompson Okay, so Mac Cleveland wasn't a trial lawyer? Did he do more estate work?

¹ Correction: Grandview Avenue.

- Bridges** I don't know anything about what he did, but I know Jack was a junior attorney at that time, and Mac would let him do a lot. I think that in '91, they split up the firm. Mac wasn't practicing that much and Jack was doing a lot of cases, so he told him he'd like to split it, so that's why the name of the office used to be, "The Law Office of Jack J. Bridges." Jack didn't do too well either. He was on his own with...
- Thompson** Oh, a little bit of drinking.
- Bridges** But later when he quit that, his business picked up.
- Thompson** I didn't realize that his business went down because of his drinking.
- Bridges** Yeah, it was bad. When his business picked up, even the lawyers would call him so he would represent them. He would do it.
- Thompson** And then he was city commissioner.
- Bridges** Originally, he wanted [inaudible] to run city commissioner and all this is new, because he had two positions before. So he told Jay [Bridges], "You should take this." He wasn't too sure if people would accept him. I've heard other people ask Jack, "Why didn't you become a politician?" Jack says he couldn't have, because people could not accept him, because of what he was.
- Thompson** Did he not have confidence?
- Bridges** I think his past—it took him a little while before—we got married in '98, and he ran for city commissioner in 2005, so it took him a couple of years. He wanted to get established and let people know he really meant what he said.
- Thompson** I remember that Mayor [Linda] Kuhn just loved him to death and everything he said was golden.
- Bridges** Well, he knew—he knows his business and he always looked ahead for the city. Remember the parades every Christmas? They always had parades, but Christmas was the only time that families would join in and throw candy. After I went to one of the parades, he told me to quit giving out candy. and it was because of me that they had to quit giving out candies. Jack was sitting on my right and I was on his left, and when I throw candy it's kind of hard for me to throw this way, because I'm right-handed. So since he was in my way, some of the candy fell and he was very afraid for the kids. He told the mayor that they couldn't allow it any longer, because they would sue the city if any kids came by.
- Thompson** So he was always looking out. You did a really good thing.
- Bridges** No, I was embarrassed. I thought, *It was just because of me.* I felt bad. Then they had that "splash pad." Do you remember that they had that "splash pad" when they built that? Everything went well. They had it built and all, and Jack thought

about it and says, "Have you ever thought about the lightning that comes with this Florida weather? We have no insurance and if the kids get hurt..." So they had to look into that and I think they got insurance, but then they made sure to close the splash park. when the rain was coming.

Thompson I know they do that at [Walt] Disney [World] at one of their wave parks. Because I remember being there one day, and they said we had to leave. And we thought it was weird, because it was sunny out, but they said, "No. we have radar and there's a storm six miles away." Everybody had to leave. and it was the worst storm in the world when it came.

Bridges This was just a splash pad, but if lighting comes—so he warned the city. When he sat on the Board, he and Nicky always wanted to move Sanford forward and not backward. Sometimes I can see that he gets very frustrated. They move forward one step and move back two steps. He says he doesn't enjoy that part.

Thompson Does he have any stories about his famous cases or when he was a kid?

Bridges No, he doesn't share the cases that he tried, because of client-attorney privilege. They're confidential, so he can't share.

Thompson Well, I'm thinking more of personal stories that he might have shared with you of growing up. Anything about his parents or about how Sanford was when he was growing up?

Bridges I can't think of too much right now, but he was raised very poor. He said he was very quiet when he learned in school. He always made better grades and the teacher would compare his grades to his brother's, and his brother didn't like that. His teacher expected his brother to make grades as good as Jack's.

Jack was always quiet in school and I think it was because of his background. and I told him that there's nothing wrong about being raised poor. A lot of the rich people were poor when they were growing up. I say, "At least you're humble and honest."

Thompson Well, tell me stories about you when you were a little girl.

Bridges Let me finish one part of Jay and Jack working on the Ritz Theatre. He was the usher, and then he became a chief usher. And when he's home, he can watch movies over and over again and I have seen those movies so many times.

Thompson He can watch the same movie over and over?

Bridges That doesn't bother him. He'll watch different movies. If it comes on, it doesn't bother him. He'll watch it.

Thompson Probably because he was an usher at the theatre and he watched the same show over and over again. [*laughs*].

- Bridges** Then he'd pick up little words from the movie. He'd say, "Buzz off." Don't you remember they'd say that in that part of the movie? I couldn't remember what show it was and say, "Okay." [laughs].
- Thompson** So he would quote movies to you? [laughs].
- Bridges** I'm not Americanized. We weren't raised with televisions, you know? We don't have American movies. We'll watch every now and then, but we don't have that. I don't understand the humor and all of those things, because I was raised in Singapore. They taught us the King's English. When we were at home, we spoke Hainanese. It's one of the dialects. They're so many – Cantonese, Hakin, Taichu, etc. If they write in Chinese, I can read it and tell you what they're saying, but...
- Thompson** So the written word is the same, but the dialects are all different?
- Bridges** When I went to school, we would have to learn English, so we wouldn't speak English at home. Only in school. We have Indian neighbors now that are Muslims. We don't understand what they speak at home, but if you speak English, we could all communicate. We also had to learn Mandarin as a language, just like you do Spanish here. In my later years, when my brother went to school, half the subjects were taught in English and the other half were taught in Mandarin. They wanted everybody to be bilingual.
- Thompson** So Mandarin was the official language there?
- Bridges** It was the official language for all Chinese people.
- Thompson** When you were in school and you learned the King's English, did you have an English professor from England that taught you?
- Bridges** No, they were all local, but they went to English schools. We² got our independence in '57. That was the year I was born, so when I went to school in the '60s, we were all taught by English teachers.
- Thompson** Then you came to the United States?
- Bridges** Yes, I married my first husband, and I met him as he was working in an oil field in Indonesia. When he had his break, he came to Singapore. My friend introduced me to him. That was Mr. Green.
- Thompson** Oh, so he worked in the oil fields? See, I thought he was agricultural. I don't know why.
- Bridges** He was in charge of all the heavy equipment – the ship, the boats, the crane, the fleets, etc. He was the supervisor and the Indonesians loved him and did the work.

² Singapore.

Thompson What did he do when he came back home?

Bridges When oil prices went bad in the '80s, it was much cheaper for them to hire the English and the Australians than to hire the Americans, so they didn't want to renew the work permit, so they sent us home. When they hire the Americans over there, they give us vacation time one week every six months. Another six months later, and we have 35 days to come to the states, and they pay for it. Other families that have kids in elementary school—they have their own schools over there. They bring the teachers over there. But when they go to high school, they have to send them to Singapore. If they want to come to college, they come stateside. Then the mother gets to come here twice a year, and the kids fly over there three times a year. All of this is paid for by the company. They pay for the schooling too. They provide housing, cars, gasoline. The house is furnished, etc.

Thompson Which company was that?

Bridges Roy M. Huffington, Inc. was the company. Have you heard of *The Huffington Post*? It was from Houston, Texas.

Thompson Oh my goodness.

Bridges Yes, they were big companies.

Thompson Boy, they sound like they were wonderful to their employees.

Bridges We didn't have to pay for the house. We didn't have to pay for the utilities. If a light bulb needed to be fixed, you would just get on the phone and call them and they'd come and fix the light bulb. The pay was about \$65,000 tax-free. That was the incentive. The only thing you have to pay is food and clothes. My husband would tell me, "Enjoy." I didn't understand, because we didn't have a home here, but then we came back and I saw what he was talking about.

We had our own bowling alley and our own swimming pool. We had our own commissary too. We could buy our own food. Every other month, a shipment would come in off the coast of Texas.

Thompson Now, did he have to go out on oil rigs? Could he come home at night?

Bridges No, it was close to home. That was the second job. On the first job, he had to go away. On Monday morning, a bus would come and then they'd fly them over on a helicopter. On Friday evening, they'd come into town [*laughs*].

Thompson The honeymoon's every weekend [*laughs*].

Bridges Yes, they had to do it that way, because they figured it was cheaper. For a while, they would work two weeks and then they'd have one week off. All the families would stay in Singapore. We were civilized there, but when you moved to Indonesia, you had to stay in the jungle.

Everybody has to get along with everybody, so what the women would do was, they would have cooking class. Have coffee once a month. I would go to Sears[, Roebuck & Company] and buy this sewing stuff and bring it over there. I like the felt stuff. You know how you sew on it? I don't like the glue stuff. I like the sew-on like stockings and stuff. Some people were good at cross-stitching and needlepoint and they'd teach. That's how we entertained one another.

We had cooking classes too. Sometimes you get to know your neighbor well. She was from Houston, Texas, and she taught me how to cook American food. She'd write me a recipe and I'd go back and look at the ingredients and call her and ask, "What does half-and-half mean?" [laughs] I would ask her, "What does 'a stick of butter mean?" That's because our butter would come in one pound, and she said, "You have to cut it length-wise." I'd say, "Okay." That was a big help, because that prepared me for when I came to the states.

A lot of people overseas don't ever lock their doors. You can knock on the door and come in. The coffee pot's on, you pour yourself a coffee, and sit down. Over here, I don't know my neighbor. We feel so lost, but our friends are scattered all over the United States. We would get in a car and go all the way out to Texas, Louisiana, Kansas, etc.

Thompson To visit all your friends who were in Indonesia with you?

Bridges Then they'd come and reciprocate, because of Disney World.

Thompson I bet you had a lot of company with people going to Disney World. It's wonderful that you made such life-long friends.

Bridges Even now, I still communicate. There's this lady in Boise, Idaho. She's a widow now. She used to do needlepoint and she'd even do weaving. She loved to lace stuff and she would crotchet. She must be up in age too. We write once a year. We send Christmas cards.

Thompson Well, it almost sounds like the military. My parents were Navy and they made life-long friends with the people in their stations. When they got out of the service, they always kept in contact.

Bridges I know of a lady from Texas who would babysit her neighbor's children. When the wife went out of town, she'd take one kid, go out, and get some dental work done, and leave the other kid with her husband. Now, you know men can't cook, so she would take the kids when they got out of school and she'd feed the husband too. They would do the same, so they were all very close. Once you get to know a few families, they're all very close.

Thompson When you came here did you find a family that you could be friends with?

Bridges No, I don't know them very well. I kind of miss that.

- Thompson** There's good Oriental contingency in Seminole County, I know. Not very...
- Bridges** I don't practice that anymore. I don't cook the food anymore. I don't long for the Chinese food anymore. Not like some Vietnamese that I know like [inaudible] fiancée. They always have to have their rice. They always have their Chinese food. They cannot sub, but I can, because my first husband was American and now I'm with Jack. I say, "If I don't have bread, I'll have potato." [laughs].
- I found out that they have their Chinese squash and everything, but the zucchini is almost the same stuff. You can use it to sub for the Chinese squash. But they have to have it exactly the same as before.
- Thompson** Isn't that strange that they can't adjust?
- Bridges** I have a friend in North Carolina and she could adjust. There's some who can't and they go back. They say, "America is not for me." It's a cultural shock. I couldn't do that, because I made up my mind, because I married an American. I said, "I married an American. This will be my country and you have to adjust."
- Thompson** And you learned how to make your first Southern food. What did Mr. Green say when you made your first Southern food?
- Bridges** He didn't like my biscuits. He said they were too hard [laughs]. Everything we had to do was from scratch. We didn't have the stuff that you do. It's very convenient.
- Thompson** Yeah, you can have it frozen. "Oh, you want biscuits? Here's half a bag." [laughs].
- Bridges** I used to make my own bread and hamburger buns. We used to invite our neighbors and ground beef meat was very expensive. They'd say, "These hamburger buns are so good." My husband would say, "That's because they're homemade." In Singapore, the bread didn't last very long, and the flour would have weevils in it, and American women would teach me, "You take it and sift it twice."
- Thompson** To get the weevils out. Why were the weevils—because they'd been in storage?
- Bridges** I think that it's because when they shipped it, they shipped the old stuff to us. By the time it cleared customs, the humidity would get to it. We were so excited to have American stuff. We loved Cheetos in a can [laughs]. We would all grab American stuff. We would grab toilet paper, because we didn't like the local stuff. It was stiff. It wasn't soft, so we'd buy a whole bunch. We figured that if we left the country another family would buy us the stuff. When we knew there was a new shipment, we'd run to the coast and load up, because you don't know when the next shipment would come in.
- Thompson** So you were doing "bulk" before Sam's [Club] ever showed up [laughs].

- Bridges** Over there we just buy a bunch of stuff. We buy our meat. We buy the whole piece—the whole pork loin. We would go to the supermarket, buy it, and tell them to freeze it. We'd tell them when we'd want it picked up, so they'd wrap it up and put it into boxes. Then they'd tie it and tape it and all, and we'd pick it up and we'd bring it to the hotel and tell them, "We want it in your freezer." Then we'd tell them at what time we'd come to get it and our bus would come to pick us up and take us to the airport.
- Thompson** To go from Singapore to Indonesia?
- Bridges** The flight would last two hours and 20 minutes. Then we'd rest and catch a 45-minute flight. If you pack them well and you only open them once, you should be pretty good. Prime rib was \$15 a pound. This was back in the '80s.
- Thompson** Oh my gosh.
- Bridges** We'd usually try to bring a few pieces of meat. We'd live on seafood a lot over there. When you buy fish, you have to buy the whole fish—head and all—and the fish 50 cents a kilo.
- Thompson** A fish for 50 cents? Amazing.
- Bridges** Usually the fish is about two to three pounds, but it was fresh. We'd also have a lot of shrimp and lobster too.
- Thompson** I bet you know a lot of great recipes for shrimp, lobster, and fish, don't you?
- Bridges** No. I didn't have to cook very much over there. I buttered them a lot and broiled them. Seafood was abundant. [inaudible] I would go to the local market. They would always have some trouble with us, because they don't encourage you to go outside the city.
- Thompson** Was it dangerous?
- Bridges** It wasn't dangerous, but if an American like you—a Caucasian—goes there, you'll be surrounded and you'd be shot. They don't like Americans. For me, I'm Asian with an Asian [inaudible], so it's a little bit better. I learned that when you carry your basket to town, you just let the boys carry it so they don't bug you. You pay them 100 rupees. That's 10 cents and they walk with you while you buy your groceries and they put it in a cart for you.
- Thompson** So if one of the boys that you see on the street comes, he attaches himself to you and then none of the boys bother you? That happened to us in the Dominican Republic. A boy attached himself to my mother and he went everywhere with us throughout the whole day.
- Bridges** This was only in the market though. That way you get rid of them, because they all want to help you, and you end up paying extra money. I also found out that

we'd pay the lawn boy \$5 a month and we'd pay the maid \$15. \$15 is the maximum, and they say \$10 is the going rate. One of our doctors from Texas would pay \$15 and the maid would carry laundry from the city every day. After they worked for the Americans, they'd go work for the nationals expecting to get paid \$15 a month, but the nationals would only pay them \$10 maximum. They'd say, "That's not fair." They'd tell us we couldn't spoil them.

Thompson You see? We'd look at that as entrepreneurship. If you do the best, you get paid more.

Bridges Right. They also liked blue jeans, so what we'd do is come to the states and buy blue jeans and give it to them as a Christmas gift. That's why they like working for the Americans.

Thompson Well, your husband was very right when he said, "Enjoy it." [*laughs*].

Bridges Well, I didn't understand, but now I do.

Thompson What was your first shocking experience when you came to the [United] States? Did you come in through Texas?

Bridges No, we came in through Maryland. Yes, because his Army friends stayed at Fort [George G.] Meade, so we'd stay with our friends. The men would go somewhere else and the women – was very nice. She took me to the commissary. I said, "I want to go to the commissary." I walked in and I said, "Oh, look at the eggplant. It's so nice. Look at the lettuce." Because our lettuce is terrible-looking, but we still ate it, because that's the best they had to offer. She just looked at me [*laughs*]. I said, "I want to buy this. I want to eat this." Of course, we had more money than they did, so we paid for the groceries, but she let me pick what I wanted. The green peas were so green and narrow, but over there they were kind of bulky.

Thompson So the first big shock was the groceries? I bet the food was a lot cheaper too, wasn't it?

Bridges Yes, because any canned food that came over into Indonesia were three times more expensive than here.

Thompson Did you ever go back?

Bridges I went back to Singapore, but not to Indonesia. It's not the same for me anymore. I guess I've been gone too long. The heat and the humidity is like Florida weather in the summer. I can't take it [*laughs*]. Jack always wanted to go there, but he never made it. I went back in 2004, when my brother had just died of lung cancer. And Jack wanted to go but he couldn't. so I said, "I'll go." Do you remember the bird flu³ that went around? They said that if I came back, I'd have

³ Avian influenza.

to be in quarantine for 10 days. Jack was a little sick at that time. I think I wanted to go in November, but I went in the spring.

Jack said he always admired the Chinese culture. He handled one or two cases and he said he had yet to see a broke Chinese person. I was raised Chinese. During the New Year, you have to pay off all your debts. We didn't owe anything. Jack said, "What about your mortgages?" I said, "Well, I guess that's one thing that you can't pay off, but everything else has to be paid off." Another thing is that you never lend to friends or family, because you'll never get it back. That's very, very true. Jack would say that the Chinese and Egyptian cultures are very, very old but he likes them more.

- Thompson** It's also a very good practice. You're not in debt. So many Americans are in debt.
- Bridges** Yeah, but when I was talking to Jack's mother – she's old school. It parallels what the Chinese do.
- Thompson** Yeah, not to be in debt, because she lived in the [Great] Depression. She's of that generation.
- Bridges** Yes, and she's very frugal just the way I was raised.
- Thompson** What did your parents do?
- Bridges** My mother was a homemaker and my father was the chief electrician, so he was gone a lot. My mother raised us, and when my father came back, we would like it, because he would spoil us. He let us go to school early, and my mother didn't like that. We started school at 7:30 and were off at 1:00. The next year, you go from 1:00-5:00. That way they use the school, so the school isn't sitting there empty.
- Thompson** Did they always have a group in there?
- Bridges** Yes, all the time. They alternated it so one year a student goes in the morning and the next year he goes in the afternoon.
- Thompson** And then it's hotter. It's cool in the morning and hot in the afternoon.
- Bridges** Yeah [laughs]. That way the school is used many times, so that they don't have to build that many schools. Property is very expensive in Singapore. It's like Hong Kong. Everybody lives in patmas. They call it "flats." The government will build them and let you buy them. and you could use your Social Security number to buy them.
- Thompson** So they're like condos, and they're subsidized by the government. And anybody can buy one?

- Bridges** Not everybody. They have three or four bedrooms, so it depends on your family's size. The government will tell you if you're eligible.
- Thompson** So you can't just have four bedrooms for two of you [*laughs*].
- Bridges** And you can tell them what location you want. Not a problem. If they build, you put your name in and they were very cheap. I remember my mom got a three bedroom for 15,000 in the '70s.
- Thompson** Wow, that was a wonderful deal. Even back then.
- Bridges** The dollar was like two to one. That's cheap. Now, you can't buy a patma for that cheap, but it's subsidized by the government, and the government wants everybody to live better in wooden homes, because they take up a lot of land. They don't want that. The island isn't that big. It's 25 miles across from east to west and 15 miles from north to south, and it's got a population of two million people. It's the cleanest city in the world.
- Bridges** The crime rate is very low. They will not tolerate drugs. It's a law and order country. Do you remember that Michael Fay went down there and got caned? He got caned, because he took the stop sign down, and his family got sent home.
- Thompson** Yeah, I had heard that about Singapore. That was an international incident.
- Bridges** [Bill] Clinton, the American president, pleaded and the government said, "This is a law and order country."
- Thompson** And there are no exceptions.
- Bridges** This lady brought drugs in. I don't know if she's Australian or what, but they asked the Queen of England⁴ to plead and they said, "No."
- Thompson** The Queen couldn't help. Well, just think – if it's 25 miles long and 15 miles wide, it's the same size as Sanford's 22 mile square. so your whole island is probably the size of Sanford. It has two million people there and we only have 54,000. People don't understand how lucky they are to live in a place like Sanford.
- Bridges** Right, because over there it's very competitive. You have to do well in school. If you don't do well in school, you get a terrible job. My mother always said, "You see that road-sweeper? That man that sweeps the street? That's where you're going to end up. Digging the ditch." [*laughs*] Then when they came up with that machine that cleans the street and she said, "See? They don't even need you anymore." [*laughs*] She pushed education, because both my parents were raised on a farm on Hainan Island in China. Do you remember where our plane landed in China? It got confiscated by the Chinese government.

⁴ Elizabeth II.

Thompson No. I don't remember that.

Bridges An American plane landed there and they wouldn't let us take our plane home. They had to go through and check, because they wanted to check out what the Americans had in equipment and technology.

Thompson So it was probably a military jet that crash-landed there or something?

Bridges I don't know how it landed there, but I know it landed there. The Chinese government got involved and I remember saying, "It's Hainan Island. That's where my mom and dad were born." My mother said that the communist government would give you two pieces of material and that's all you get. She patched them and they would look like embroideries, and she was very frugal raising us.

Thompson So it was two pieces of material per person in the family or just two pieces?

Bridges It was two pieces a year. That's all you get. We always had hand-me-down clothes because my aunt was from American Families, and the kids had all the clothing, and we got to pick what we wanted to wear. so if I said, "I don't like this dress," she wouldn't throw it away. She would pack it up and send it to China. It was for her nieces, you know?

Thompson Yeah, so whatever you didn't like went on to another family.

Bridges Right. She wouldn't give it to the neighbors or friends they could use it. She would send it to her family. My mother – she didn't work, because she raised us. but she knew that education was very important. When we'd come home, we'd speak the dialect. We didn't speak English. And we'd bring our report cards and she'd say, "What does it say? And "You'd better tell me the truth, and if it's not what it says here, you're in trouble." [*laughs*].

Thompson So she taught you how to be honest.

Bridges She didn't mind us going to school, because that was the only way we were going to do better than her, and many Asian communities are the same way. A lot of my cousins are in Virginia. My aunt does not speak English and my cousins speak broken English, but their children are very educated. They're honor students. They're doing real well and they're taking care of their mom and dad.

Thompson Well now, did you ever have children?

Bridges No.

Thompson So you have step-children from...

Bridges My first and second husbands.

- Thompson** Oh, both. That's wonderful. Do you see them?
- Bridges** Originally, [inaudible] lives in Orlando and the other two live in Pennsylvania, but now they're back in Florida. They love the Florida weather. We brought them to Florida. We took them to Disney World. they always have a place to stay, and they loved it so much. They got tired of the snow.
- Thompson** Who wouldn't be? I like Florida too. My sisters wanted me to move to Tennessee, and I said, "You know, I like Florida. I love you, but I don't love your weather." [laughs] She said, "But you have hurricanes." I said, "But I don't have snow."
- Bridges** Well, Jack's son was born and raised here. Jack only had one child.
- Thompson** Oh, is that right? Is it John?
- Bridges** No, Tory [Bridges] is his child. Tory's mother, Mary Carly, is in the insurance business on Lake Mary Boulevard when you pass – that's Jack's first wife.
- Thompson** Oh, Debbie or something?
- Bridges** She married Brent Carly. He owns the insurance business on Lake Mary Boulevard.
- Thompson** I know Mark Carly. He's Brent's brother. I know him better than I know Brent. I believe it was you, Jack, and Jack's brother that made it out to the restaurant one time and I was able to meet her once.
- Bridges** Yeah, she's in assisted living now – Spring Lake Hills on Lake Mary Boulevard, across from the forest. She has a bad case of dementia and she gets very excited. She can't sit down for too long. I think that's part of the disease. When I went to see her right after Jack died, she kept asking me where Jack was and we told her. And her cousin, Linda, told me that when she went to Jack's service, she thought she was at her husband's funeral.
- Thompson** Oh, so her dementia was really bad.
- Bridges** When I see her she asks me how Jack is and I hate repeating it to her, because it hurts me to tell her to tell her that Jack's gone, because I'm grieving and it's hard for me, so I say, "He's okay." Then later she says, "Oh, he's gone isn't he?" I go, "Yeah. he's gone."
- Thompson** So sometimes she will remember that he did die.
- Bridges** Now instead of saying that Jack is coming to take her home, she says that her mother is coming to take her home. They go back. They revert to their childhood. She doesn't remember her other son, Stevie [Bridges]. Stevie does not come around too often.

- Thompson** Well, that's the one everybody compared to Jack, so he didn't feel too good about it.
- Bridges** Yeah, but they always favored Stevie a lot. Stevie stayed at the house with them, but he later moved out. Maybe they catered to him, because Jack was a family man. They figured he was married and Stevie never got married, so they took care of him more. I don't know.
- Thompson** What kind of work does Stevie do?
- Bridges** Well, he went to college and got his degree from University of Florida. I don't know what he majored in, but he decided he didn't want to use what he learned in school, so he worked for a welding company and became the chief welder.
- Thompson** Yeah, because I remember seeing him in work clothes, like a working person – blue collar.
- Bridges** Right. They told him they would give him a desk job, but he said no. He preferred to be blue-collar. That's what he wanted. Then they let him go and he was applying for other jobs. I don't know. It didn't work out.
- Thompson** So he's not working at all now?
- Bridges** He turns 60 in February and he said he's going to wait and draw retirement and Social Security [Insurance].
- Thompson** Well, he's got two years until he can do it.
- Bridges** He has a big payout and Jack was trying to tell him how to invest. and I told Jack, "If he was smart enough, he would have gone back to work and worked 'til he was 65, and let that money build and draw better Social Security." That's what I'm doing.
- Thompson** Well, I worked 'til 62, but my husband was very ill. So I just went in and said, "I'm closing the restaurant."
- Bridges** I don't blame you. You had your hands full. That's different. Being a caregiver takes all your energy.
- Thompson** It does. I had two years with him. We were very lucky. On July of 2008, I walked in the door and said, "We've got parties that we're doing on the 4th of July and we should be out of food by next Wednesday." I said, "We're closing the doors of The Rib Ranch forever on the 8th and 9th of July." I put a big sign up saying, "Come and say goodbye." Everybody came and got barbecue, but on July 2nd, the guy who owned the business right next door to me made me an offer for my property, and I took it and we had our closing 15 days later. I had two years completely free to be with my husband, because he couldn't drive anymore. He

was going blind. He had a lot of physical problems. I spent a lot of time going to doctor's offices.

Bridges It's like what Jack said towards the end. his social calendar towards the end was all doctor's appointments. Jack got sick in 2009. He was in this hospital and then they told him they had to send him up to Shands[?]⁵, because he had abdominal blockage. They said, "You need surgery. There's a tumor right there. That's why it's doing that. Shands might be able to get you in." The doctor that tried to get him in just got back from church and he said, "There's a bed available." So he was happy, and I packed four days' clothes. stayed there three and a half weeks. He wouldn't let me come home. He said, "Don't leave me." He was very lonesome.

Thompson He needed you.

Bridges I had a lot of vacation time, so I called Penny Fleming and she said, "Take it." I was planning on coming home and working Monday through Friday and then go up on weekends, and she said, "Well, whatever you want." Then I decided, "Well, maybe half a day on Friday." She says, "That will be better and you won't have to drive during the night." Then I told Jack what she said and Jack said, "No."

Thompson He needed you there.

Bridges He wanted me there.

Thompson Well, the thing I found out about, when your husband's sick, is that even though I depended on him being smart and understanding everything. He was being stoic, but he wasn't comprehending what the doctors were saying, because, internally, he was panicked. He would say, "What did he mean by that?" I would have to research it and find out what the doctor meant, because he wouldn't tell him he was scared.

Bridges Jack was the opposite. Jack was very sharp and he still had a sense of humor. I remember they almost put him on a ventilator one time up in Shands. Scared me to death. Jack didn't like too much medication, but they gave him medication and he crawled to bed. And when he came in, there was this person sitting in his room and he woke up and said, "Oh, have you met my warden?"

Thompson Who was the person sitting in his room?

Bridges It was the nurse. And they had to explain that he was trying to climb over the bed. When he was up there, he would tell me to do things he wasn't supposed to do. He wanted a Slurpee and he said, "Go get me one." and I'd say, "The doctor

⁵ Possibly the University of Florida's Health Shands Hospital.

says you can't have anything." He'd say, "If you don't get it for me, then I'll go down to get it." I said, "Then what do you want?" He said, "Strawberry."

At that time, he had that abdominal problem and they had to pump it out. There was a little container behind him and the doctor could see the red from the strawberry and he panicked, "Oh, it's blood." Jack said, "No. I just had strawberries." [laughs] The doctor shook his head. Jack said, "My mouth is very dry, so I asked her to get me that." The doctor said, "How about changing the flavor?" Oh, he was something else.

Thompson So what's happening with you now?

Bridges I'm just back to work. I'm just doing my routine and putting in my time working at the Sheriff's Office until my retirement. I've got 10 years to go. I've already got 14 years. I hate to retire so early, because what am I going to do for health insurance? If I retire right now, I've got eight years. 62 is early retirement. They penalize me five percent for every year under. I figure I don't have much going right now, so I just try to keep myself occupied.

Thompson I think that's a good thing too. If I didn't have all this, I'd be going crazy.

Bridges But I sure miss him though, because every time I go to the parades, I see all the people and politicians and it kind of depresses me a little bit.

Thompson Well, what do you think he would have said about everything that happened with Trayvon [Benjamin Martin] and the city?

Bridges I don't think he would have let the case go as far as it did, because he would know how to tell them. Who is it [inaudible]? He said he didn't know the legal procedures or the steps to take. He said it wasn't right that [Bill] Lee didn't arrest [George Michael] Zimmerman. but if you can't prove anything yet, how can you arrest somebody? There's no evidence.

Thompson I thought it was really strange that people don't understand that the police investigate, but it's the state attorneys that say they have a case and have them arrested. My illustration was, "Haven't you seen *Law & Order*?" Half the show is about what the police do and the other half is about what the attorneys do.

Bridges Well, I think that on the legal side, you have to have evidence to show before you can convict and arrest a person, but there's nothing to prove him guilty. People were so upset. They wanted them to do it now and it got worse and worse. When it came to the commissioner, people were saying Commissioner Lee wasn't doing his job.

Thompson And none of those commissioners...

Bridges They don't understand the legal system.

Thompson It would have been good if Jack were still there.

Bridges Linda would have been good too, because she worked at the state attorney's office. It would have helped the city.

Thompson Maybe if we had had a better city attorney. I mean, I don't know Lonnie Grout, but maybe a stronger criminal lawyer mind would have helped. Who knows? Jack is really missed.

Bridges Yeah, I feel like he served. The Lord wanted him home, and I feel like Jack knew he was sick but he did not tell me. He knew what was going on. He was talking to Dr. [inaudible] about it. Remember when they put the shunt in? He [inaudible]. I think when they pull it out too fast it can create a clog. That's what my friends told me. Linda [inaudible] said that was a clog when she saw his hand, and she was right. His hand just got bigger and bigger like my thigh. I asked the nurse, "What happened?" She said, "Oh, nothing wrong. We're just trying to stabilize." When Dr. [inaudible] was talking to him, I came in at the tail end of the conversation. Dr. [inaudible] said, "If we have to, we'll remove it." I found out after he died by talking to Dr. [inaudible] that he knew he was going, but he didn't tell me.

Thompson I don't think my husband knew he was going.

Bridges He didn't want me to be upset, and I feel that it's not fair. At least he could have prepared me, because he went in on a Friday, assigned Saturdays all over the weekend. I had to bring him his Jell-O mixed with fruit. He didn't want the hospital Jell-O. He wanted iced tea mixed at home. He wanted chicken noodle soup. He didn't want the can one, so I'd bring the hot broth to the hospital for him to eat. I saw him Saturday, Sunday, and I called Jack's son about Friday or Saturday to let him know, because we're working people. We're always so busy. Maybe we would have more time on weekends. He could have come to see his father, but he didn't come to see his father until Monday. Jack's secretary was there on Monday too, and she said, "What is Tory doing here?" I said, "I told him he could come see his father, but I didn't tell Cathy that she could come."

During one of our meetings in the room, the doctor came in and he was a very good cardiologist and I liked the doctor very much. And she started asking him questions and the doctor felt—I could see the look on his face. he didn't want to be interrupted, and he looked at Jack and me. He knew who I was, but I didn't introduce myself. He didn't like it. I said, "Next time, I won't let her come to the hospital to see him, because what if the doctor has to come in and she interrupts everything?" That time she called me from outside the hospital and says, "Can I come inside?" What can I say? She's already at the hospital, so I told her to come up. After everybody had seen him, he said he's tired and that everybody has to go.

Thompson This was Monday?

- Bridges** No, it was Monday night. I said, *Okay. I guess he wants me to go home too so he can rest.* Everybody left and I was packing my stuff and he said, "No. you stay a little bit." I stayed and he said, "Give me a hug." He wanted me to kiss him. I think he knew. He must have known it was getting close. so on Tuesday I worked half a day. I was going to do a whole week. On Tuesday, I got a message from the doctor saying, "Come right away." I dropped everything.
- Thompson** So you had just gotten home and then you had to go back and he had died?
- Bridges** No, I was heading towards the hospital to bring his stuff, but when I got the message I just went straight and left everything. He said, "Come right away," but he was already gone by the time I got there.
- Thompson** Well, you can be angry with him, but...
- Bridges** But we had a good life. It was a short time with him, and Jack and I had an age difference of 11 years. We both had November birthdays, and we're 11 days apart. When he died we were married 11 years and 11 months.
- Thompson** Oh, 11 is a really important number then.
- Bridges** When he started having the cancer in December, he said that he would like another 10 years, but if God would give him five he would take it. In December, he showed me he wanted to go to church. I'm a converted Catholic. Every now and then he'd go to the church. He got very bored. I was surprised he went, and that was the last Christmas.
- Thompson** Well, it's tough when we lose them like that.
- Bridges** Jack changed his whole life around from what he was. He went to the opposite end of the spectrum.
- Thompson** He really did, because he was a rounder. He was a party guy, wasn't he?
- Bridges** He was. I remember when he told me, "When we get married, I like to go out with my boys once a month." But he never did it after we married. I let him run as far as he wanted to, but he never did. He always wanted to come home. He knew he had a home to come to. I think that when he was struggling with his alcohol, there was no one to communicate with him emotionally. With my military upbringing, he learned how to be soft to people and love them. I think he felt most sturdy and he said I was his rock.
- Thompson** You were the stability that he needed.
- Bridges** He turned his life around after that. He learned how to give and found that it was very rewarding and he turned into a public servant. He got what he wanted. He had the intelligence to go along with serving the city. I'm very happy for him. I hated seeing him go, but he achieved what he wanted to do in life.

Thompson I think that's great. I had a different situation with my husband. I'm so happy that he's gone, because I loved him so. He was a sports lover and he loved *Sports Illustrated* magazine. He had to read about his sports. He told me on Wednesday, and he died on a Saturday, "Cancel my subscription to *Sports Illustrated*." That just floored me. I think now that he passed away, that if he had lived the two years they said he would, he would have been blind. He was in renal failure, so if he lived through that, he would have been on dialysis. He had diabetes and he was losing his legs, so this is not the life he would have wanted. This wouldn't be living. This would be torture. He wasn't a man who had the will to live through anything. He had his comforts. I'm so glad he was able to go the way he wanted to go, before these awful things came. He was a very proud man and very private. He hated having nurses having to help him go to the bathroom or go take a shower. It got to me that he had to go through that.

Bridges The last two years of Jack's life, he was sick and he knew it, and he cried. He said he didn't deserve it. He was throwing up and there was nothing but liquid coming up all the time. I had to empty his can, because I didn't want him to smell that all the time. He was already sick. I made sure everything was close by and the less he moved, the better he felt. I'd get his medication, *Sports Illustrated* magazine – whatever he needed. He said he didn't like being sick like that. He would say to me, "You're too good for me." and he'd cry. It got me emotionally, and when I'd get to the kitchen, I'd cry. I'd almost be in tears, but I wouldn't look at him. He'd ask, "Are you alright?" I'd say, "I am." Then I'd go to the kitchen and cry, because I didn't want to show him I was weak. But he was ready to go.

Thompson Mine was too. At the time I was mad at him for leaving me, but I got over it. Now I'm just grateful that I had him for as long as I did and that he's not suffering.

Bridges My first husband went very fast. He was up and walking and he fell. One of his blood vessels burst. They called it a "pontine hemorrhage," because of the pons. It's like an aneurysm. I was kind of mad, but they say – I was shocked. I didn't know he was going to go. There was no goodbye or anything. Then God was graceful enough to put God in my life. I had only been in this country for six years – '85-'91. I didn't know my way around. I had to learn how to drive when I got here. And my sister and brother-in-law were very good to me and helped me with the funeral arrangements. Then Jack came into my life and I said, "Oh God. At least you could have prepared me." I didn't know he was going to get sick. It takes a lot to be a caregiver. You're not prepared, but that's life. Jack went so fast, no one expected it. We thought he was doing so well when he came from Gainesville, and they detected cancer and he went for his radiation [therapy] and chemo[therapy]...

Thompson How long had he been back from Gainesville?

Bridges He had surgery in August.

Thompson Yeah, but when did he come home? Because when he came home, we had an appointment and I think he died the next week.

Bridges He died in March.

Thompson So he wasn't in the hospital in the spring?

Bridges Yeah, he was in the hospital. He went in on Friday afternoon and he died Tuesday afternoon.

Thompson I'm thinking of a month before that.

Bridges He had been in and out of the hospital then. They had to put him in hydration, because of his radiation and chemo. They said he got very dehydrated and he had been in and out several times.

Thompson Well, I talked to him on the phone and he was either in the hospital – it might've just been the day before he died. I can't imagine that though. But I talked to him. maybe a week was either right before he went into the hospital or the day before he died. Because I was completely shocked.

Bridges I didn't expect him to go into the hospital. Maybe you talked to him that Monday and he was fine, but then the next couple of days, his arm just got worse. By the end of the week, I figured he better go to the hospital, because doctors are not around on weekends, so I needed to admit him. I couldn't get a hold of his doctor so that's why he went in on a Friday.

End of Interview