

Oral Memoirs

of

Ed L'Heureux

An Interview Conducted by

Stephanie Youngers

July 9, 2010

Museum of Seminole County History

Museum of Seminole County History

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Interview Histories

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Legal Status

Scholarly use of the recording and transcript of the interview with Ed L'Heureux is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on July 9, 2010.

Abstract

Oral history of Ed L'Heureux, conducted by Stephanie Youngers on November 12, 2010.

L'Heureux was born in Gloversville, New York, in May of 1939, but migrated to Winter Park, Florida, at age five. In the interview, L'Heureux discusses growing up in Winter Park, fish fry events, his wife and family, his careers as an insurance agent and as an author, Rollins College, *The Yearling*, race relations in Winter Park, hurricanes, his father's trucking business, his service in the military, and the effects of the development of Walt Disney World on Central Florida.

Ed L'Heureux

Oral History Memoir

Interviewed by Stephanie Youngers

July 9, 2010

Sanford, Florida

0:00:00

Introduction

Youngers Hello, my name is Stephanie Youngers. Today is November 12, 2010. And I am interviewing Mr. Ed L'Heureux here at the Museum of Seminole County History. How are you today?

L'Heureux I'm fine today.

0:00:11

Migrating to Florida

Youngers Good. We would like to begin by asking where and when you were born.

L'Heureux I was born in Gloversville, New York. Upstate New York. In May of 1939.

Youngers And how did you make your way into the Florida area?

L'Heureux My dad and mother moved from New York to New Jersey during World War II. He was in the Coast Guard and my mother inherited some property in Central Florida at the end of the war when her uncle died. And we came down to seek it out. We sold a little farm in New Jersey, and loaded things on a truck like the Okies going to California, and came to Florida with no turning back. And we didn't like the property. My mother didn't like it. It was rattlesnake-infested. But we decided to stay, because we liked Florida.

Youngers Oh, well good. And about how old were you when you...

L'Heureux I was five. Five years old.

Youngers You've been here a long time, then.

L'Heureux Since I was five.

Youngers You might as well be a native.

L'Heureux I wish I could claim the other five years.

Youngers Whereabouts did you live when you moved here?

L'Heureux We moved to Winter Park. Winter Park.

0:01:16

Memories of Winter Park

Youngers So, wow. When, I mean, do you have memories of Winter Park, as far as the way it looked, and...?

L'Heureux Oh, absolutely. There were wooden sidewalks on two blocks in Winter Park, just like *Little House on the Prairie*. You know, out west in that TV show. Wooden sidewalks. You'd clomp along, and then they were torn down about two years later to make way for a bank, but it was a frontier town.

Youngers Really.

L'Heureux All the old cars were still around. People came in the winters and went back up north in the summers. A couple of garages close to Park Avenue in Winter Park, you would see the old Pierce Arrows and Cadillacs and Packards that were there. They'd take the train back up north and leave the car here for next winter. So it was a sleepy, beautiful little town in those days.

Youngers Oh, wow. Well ...it's still a pretty little town.

L'Heureux It still is. It still is.

Youngers It definitely has gotten much larger.

L'Heureux Yes. Regrettably.

0:02:15

Fish fry events

Youngers Did they have any kind of local gathering or events or anything in Winter Park that you attended?

L'Heureux One of the first things I remember were fish fries. They had mullet fish fries. The Lion's Club put them on and brought concrete blocks to the grammar school playground. Put wooden planks on top for tables, and concrete blocks and wooden planks for benches, and they'd cook this mullet and they'd deep-fry this mullet, you could smell it a block away. And it was delicious.

Youngers And it was a whole town event that everybody attended?

L'Heureux Well, it could have been a town event. Anybody could come and pay maybe for a dollar for the dinner. And the Lion's Club put it on about three or four times a year, and everybody came and they strung lights on the playground. Those naked yellow lights – the little bulbs – and a little music in the background. And it was tremendous.

Youngers Oh, very neat.

L'Heureux The whole fish fry. Yeah. I remember it.

0:03:06

Educational history

Youngers So, the schools you attended?

L'Heureux Winter Park Elementary, which is part of Rollins College today. It has been torn down now. But old Winter Park Elementary and Winter Park High School was built in 1923. Went to all three public schools there and loved it dearly. It was a great town. Great town. Nobody locked their houses or their cars. Literally.

Youngers Wow. You can't do that now.

L'Heureux No. You can't do that now.

Youngers So, did you go to college from here?

L'Heureux I went into the Army right after high school, and got out fairly soon, had a little period of time. Went to Stetson University up in DeLand about 40 miles away. I went to DeLand and graduated with a history degree there, went on to law school, and moved back to Orlando and Winter Park and have been in that area ever since.

Youngers And you still live there now?

L'Heureux I live in Winter Springs, which is close. It's north. But that whole area has been my home for the longest time. When I give speeches, they say I'm a native when I'm introduced, but I can't claim that first five years.

Youngers Sure you can.

L'Heureux Wish I could, but...

Youngers Did you work as an attorney when you came back?

L'Heureux No, no, no. I never practiced law at all. I dropped out before I was through. There was a lady there—I fell in love with her and we both didn't like the law that much, for some strange reason. We both dropped out and we were married just under 40 years.

Youngers Oh, wow. That's good.

L'Heureux She passed away in '03 of cancer, but we had a long life together.

0:04:49

Careers as an insurance agent and as an author

Youngers Good. What did you do, as far as a career and things?

L'Heureux I was in the insurance business. I had an insurance agency. I had a Nationwide Insurance agency. I never liked business particularly, because I was trained a[sic] historian and I always wished that I'd been closer to that. And now, late in life, in my sixties and seventies, I'm a public lecturer on a myriad of Florida topics. And I write books. I've written 15 books, and I'm doing what I should have done as a younger man. And late in life, I'm able to do what I wish I had done earlier. So it's kind of nice.

Youngers So, you're writing books. Is that just a passion you always had?

L'Heureux Yes. I had a joint major in Stetson—History and English. And I always wanted to write books. And I always wanted to write books about Florida—novels. And in my insurance career, which was somewhat boring—I hate to say that, but it wasn't really a stimulating thing for me. I had a family to raise, kids to raise, and I went through it and did it and was able to accomplish it, but the fire was not in the furnace. And my dad saw that melancholic hue when I was in my early forties, and he said, why don't you dust off your pencil and pen and write again like you did in college? Because in college, I wrote for the paper. Wrote feature articles for *The DeLand Sun News*, up in Stetson at DeLand. And one day, I was out walking in a field and I saw a story. It just came to me. And I wrote it, and I wrote a second and third and fourth, and took it down to Rollins College, to a friend of my dad's who was in the English department, and he thought they were very good. And my career was launched.

Youngers So you've been doing this now since you were in your forties?

L'Heureux Yes, yes, over 20 years.

Youngers Oh, very nice. And when you do public lectures and things, what do you talk about?

L'Heureux I have a slate of, oh, about 35 topics. All aspects of Florida history. Current, old history. Civil War. Seminole Indian Wars. Many of the industries—citrus, cattle, timber. The early founders. The early explorers. The treasure coast. Over 30 lectures I've crafted and researched and I deliver all around to all manner of places.

Youngers And you do them at the local colleges?

L'Heureux Yes, I do college level. Civic clubs, retirement centers, private organizations—business enrichment for companies that want to enrich their employees with a lecture. All kinds of ways and things. And I'm doing that now, currently in retirement, and I love it.

0:07:39

Wife and children

Youngers Well, you said you were married, and you mentioned you had children. Do you have a special courtship story?

L'Heureux Yes, I do, as a matter of fact. Funny you'd ask that. It's not staged. I'll never forget it. We were in law school together. And I had noticed her, because there were three women in the law school, and the rest were men. And she cut a pretty nice figure and I noticed her early on. And we had never spoken. We had seen each other and she had noticed me and I had noticed her. We were both freshmen. She had come in a semester before me. I had come in on the off-semester. And oh, maybe two or three weeks had gone by, and I had heard that everyone was dating her, and I found out that nobody was. It was just a rumor. We sat next to each other on a bench before class. The first words she said to me were, "I wonder what colors eyes our children will have."

Youngers Oh my.

L'Heureux Just like that. Just like that. And for once in my life, I was speechless. She said it just like that. And the answer was blue and brown, but not on the same child. So we had a son and a daughter, and they were brown-eyed and blue-eyed. The first thing she ever said to me. So I guess that's a courtship story.

Youngers That was very forward. And that's right.

L'Heureux That's exactly what she said.

Youngers That's awesome.

L'Heureux It just—I wonder what color eyes our children will have.

Youngers That's very good.

L'Heureux Isn't that amazing?

Youngers Yes, that's awesome. And do you have any special family heirlooms or keepsakes that your kids share? Do your kids share your passion for history?

L'Heureux Not particularly. That's strange. They don't. My wife was trained as a journalist. And I had the English major, and History, and I had been writing. We both were writers. She wrote in industry.

My son is a[sic] entrepreneur of sorts. He's a very successful businessmen. He went to Georgia State [University] on a tennis scholarship and was an excellent student all the way along. And he operates and owns a company. And he's a businessman and a coach. He coaches his daughters—my granddaughters—in lacrosse. And he's steeped in the business world, but also with his church and philanthropic things. He likes history, but not with the same passion I have.

My daughter is in the insurance business. Similar to what I did for a long, long time. I think mine was 27 years—something like that. And she's got two children. My son has two children. She's too busy to read much about history. So I don't think—even though they're smart children, they were exceptional in school, and

I don't think they have that historic bent. That happens a lot. But they're both successful in their own right, and I'm happy about that.

0:10:49

Rollins College

Youngers You all lived in Winter Park for a long time. Do you remember any historical events that happened?

L'Heureux Yes. I do. A couple I could mention. Rollins College had a very close union with Winter Park. They were joined at the hip, and they loved each other, and they just cooperated all the way through. It was wonderful to see. Rollins had something called *The Animated Magazine* where people would come and speak and tell their life story, or a portion thereof. Some of the greatest notables of the age came. And I was selling newspapers there as a young boy, in my teens and even younger – 10, 11, 12, 13. And I saw some great people. James Cagney, Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings – the writer – Mary [McLeod] Bethune – the educator – all kinds of people from all walks of endeavor. And that made a great impression on me, because I knew some of these people. I knew their plaudits, I knew their successes, and yet I could see them speak from a stage. And here I was scurrying around trying to sell newspapers there. They held it every winter, in one of the months without a lot of rain. They held it outdoors in February. It's usually cool. And I remember in the early days, when I was just a little boy, the women and men would come all decked out. Women would wear hats, you know, all women wore hats until somewhere in the '40s – '50s, I guess it was. And they'd wear their fox stoles with little beaded eyes, you know – and foxes, all heavy coats in the winter time. And men would dress up with hats. I remember that. And I think I got a lot of history from that.

0:12:35

The Yearling

L'Heureux One thing from my youth that I recall, when Marjorie Kinnan Rawlings wrote *The Yearling*, the famous book which won the Pulitzer Prize in 1939. The movie came out in the late '40s. With Gregory Peck and Jane Wyman. And the theaters thought so much about it that they decked the theaters – the lobbies – in a Florida motif. Hanging moss, they had a possum in a cage, they had a raccoon in a cage, they had palmetto bushes in there, just like the big scrub that she wrote about. And it was – everybody was decked out in old frontier days, and you walk in the lobby, you thought you were at Cross Creek, where she lived. And you can't get that today.

Youngers Oh my. And that's the theater in Winter Park?

L'Heureux Well, the theater in Winter Park, the Colony [Theatre], and the theater in Orlando, the Beacham [Theatre]. Today, you've got a multiplex. You know, you've got 20 little theaters. Nobody talks to anybody, you just go in, and there you go. And you can never get that today. But they thought so much of her movie, after she won the Pulitzer Prize. They decked the lobby of the theaters in Winter Park and Orlando in a Florida backcountry theme. Literally. You know,

you could see a possum in a cage, and a raccoon, and moss dripping down, you know. Palmetto bushes, which were cut up and put in there as props. So I remember those things.

0:14:05

Race relations in Winter Park

Youngers Wow. Were there – when you were attending school and things, during the times of segregation and things, do you recall anything as far as when those differences came in? Were there any notable things in the Winter Park area or even Seminole County area that you remember as far as that?

L'Heureux Well, I remember never playing ball against any black boys or African-Americans. Never. You know. They had their own schools. And it was a shame, because they were great athletes. I never interacted with them in high school in any manner. We knew where they were, they knew where we were, and we were friendly to them, you know. But I look back and remember the colored restrooms, where they were marked “colored,” where the African-Americans had to go to separate restrooms.

I remember my dad’s business. He was in the trucking business. And he would hire casual labor every day down in Winter Park in Hannibal Square. And we’d go down there and they’d come up to the door of his car and ask whatever he was paying, and they’d negotiate the pay, and then they’d get in the back seat and go for a day’s labor. When I was out on the trucks with him – because I worked on my dad’s truck from the time I was 12 years old – hauling freight, hauling furniture. We’d go to a diner, and get something to eat sometimes at lunch, and if we didn’t bring our lunch. And the black laborers would have to sit out back. Sit down on the ground out back. And my dad would order a sandwich for them. They would go through the kitchen, go out the back door, and they’d sit and eat it out back. They weren’t allowed in to sit.

Youngers And they didn’t even really have a dining area?

L'Heureux No. There was no dining area, even. And we took the bus a lot in those days, from Winter Park to Orlando. I used to go down to Orlando to a bookstore – McVicker’s – go down to the theaters there when I was a small boy – 10, 11, 12. On the bus, by myself. If I use “colored,” “blacks,” “African-Americans” – it’s interchangeable, because they called themselves those things at various times. But they would come on the bus, and they’d march right to the back of the bus. And sit, and there’d be no question about it. And if one was sitting and a white woman came on and there was no place for her to sit, they were expected to give up their seat.

Youngers Wow.

L'Heureux So I was in the terrible segregation days. Grew up in it. It was terrible. I loathe the fact that it took place. I would like to have interacted with them. I played

baseball – sports – in high school. We never played against blacks ever, that I can ever remember.

Youngers Once they made that change, how did the community react?

L'Heureux Well, some fought it for a long time, because they always wanted something to lord over people. You know how people are. A lot of people embraced it, were happy about it, and glad it came along. But it was a very begrudging thing. It didn't happen overnight. We had *Brown v. the Board of Education* – the lawsuit and the legal argument at the Supreme Court – but it wasn't like turning a light on or off, you know, all of a sudden. There was a transition period of several years. Several years.

I remember when I was at Stetson – my senior year, I was in charge of homecoming. And we had a black entertainer come from New York for a homecoming dance and a concert. His name was Roy Hamilton, and he was excellent. He wasn't quite as famous as Johnny Mathis in those days, but this is in the late '50s – '59 or '60 – and I was in charge of getting him lodging, for he and his wife, and his bass player, and his piano player. And no motel would take him. No motel would take him. And I had to put him up in a couple of houses in the black section of DeLand. And this – this guy was a New York entertainer, he was an RCA Victor recording artist. He was big. Roy Hamilton, back in the '50s and '60s. And I couldn't find lodging for him. He drove – drove down from New York and I was so embarrassed. No hotel would take them. So, to answer your question, it was a long process. It didn't happen overnight.

Youngers Wow.

L'Heureux It's hard to believe, isn't it?

0:18:36 **Hurricanes in Central Florida**

Youngers It is. It is. Is there any other things, like those type of events, that you can recall? I mean, I know the history of just this area – they had the freeze, and they had hailstorms, and the fires, and hurricanes, and things.

L'Heureux Well, hurricanes, yes. I can tell you stories about the hurricanes. The Weather Bureau [National Weather Service] was so embryonic in its stage, and so much in its infancy. We didn't have good rapport with the Weather Bureau, because they didn't have good rapport with the storms. And we had our radios in the early days before TV. We had our little Philco radios. And they'd scratch and you could barely hear them sometimes.

And the indicator of hurricanes was not somebody coming on the TV or the radio to tell you, it was the Australian pines. Australian pines were brought to Florida as a windbreak. And also, a windbreak against hurricanes. And also, because they looked kind of pretty in margins of road and along canals and this kind of thing. My dad had Australian pines on our property. Our warehouses

were next to our home, because we lived in a rural part of town. And the Australian pines would whoosh and you'd hear them make a sound that was different than just a little storm. The hurricane sound was unmistakable. It was a wail – an actual wail. And we'd hear it, and then we'd say, "There must be a storm coming." And a lot of times, it'd be a hurricane. It would be a hurricane, and this was the late '40s, the early '50s. And I can remember some terrible storms that came through Orlando. Rowboats on the street, you know, and the water off, the lights off, for days. But the early warning for hurricanes was so backward, because we didn't have the technology for it. And we missed school all the time. And it would rain for days when the storms were around. I remember distinctly, storms in the late '40s and early '50s that were rough that came through here. Trees down, and power out, but we had no notice. It wasn't like the hurricanes in '26 in Miami and '28 that came across Lake Okeechobee. When they were there, you knew they were there. But not any notice. And even in the '40s and '50s, we had almost no notice of hurricanes.

Youngers Wow. Wow. That's – kind of makes you wonder what we would do without these things.

L'Heureux Exactly, today.

0:21:13

Father's trucking business

Youngers You were saying earlier too that your father ran a trucking business?

L'Heureux My dad had a trucking business, and there's a great story there. He bought an old truck – a 1934 Ford – in New Jersey, where we had our farm. He was in the Coast Guard and almost farmed by night. He farmed with the lights on on[sic] the tractor. He'd farm at night, because we was trying to make a living. And my mother would take the produce and sell it downtown. In an old Pontiac car with a running board, and my sister and I were three, four years old, and we'd go with her.

He bought this truck to transport our belongings from the farmhouse to Florida. My mother inherited this property out near Rock Springs, out near Apopka. And he had money from the sale of the farm. And he built our house that summer. The war was over that summer. And the goods coming in, like [inaudible] nails to build a house were slow. My dad had never built a house. My dad was afraid of nothing. He built a house and not knowing how to do it. He built it. The footers, the concrete block foundation, the rafters – he just built it with the help of two men from town, and had a little money from the sale of the farm.

The summer – and by fall, the money was low, and he had no job. The house was up, we were in the house. So he took the truck down to the railroad station, when the Rollins co-eds were coming in for the year. And in those days, almost nobody drove a car to college. You took the train. Literally. And Rollins was a fancy, expensive school, even in those days. He met somebody down in Winter Park. "I've been here all summer. I need a job." "We built our house. We're in our

house. I need a job now.” He had that truck. The man said, “Why don’t you go down to the train station and walk down through the cars when they stop and tell them you’ll haul trunks to the college – to the dormitories?” He said, “Taxicabs have been doing this for years.”

So my father took his truck down there, and in competition with the taxicab drivers, he walked up and down the train saying, “We’ve got a truck outside to haul your trunk.” So he started hauling trunks to the college for about 10 days, till everybody was down and school was in session, and he was out of work ,because he had worked for 10 days. So he ran an ad in the paper in Winter Park. He had a caption that read, “We will move anything”. And he put it in the paper with a phone number – four digits. You could talk to the operator. And this was right after World War II. And he set up a moving business. And he was in the moving business 28 years.

Youngers Wow.

L’Heureux Trucks and warehouses, and that’s how he had his start.

Youngers Wow, that’s really cool.

L’Heureux I think so. He had a truck and no job, and he put the truck to work.

Youngers Wow. And your mom – did she stay home?

L’Heureux She stayed home and ran the office. And he was in the early years out there in the truck, hauling with everybody else. And then he graduated to giving advice and direction behind the scenes as he got older and his business grew – flourished.

Youngers Wow, that’s a really cool story.

L’Heureux I think so.

0:24:13 **Growing up in Winter Park**

Youngers Well, is there anything that you would like to discuss that I haven’t really brought up?

L’Heureux Well, yes. I guess. Let’s see. I was very fortunate in living as a young boy and young man through probably as wonderful a time in Florida history as there could be. That was from the end of World War II until the early 60s, when all the riots started and all the national trouble with the Vietnam War. There were about 15, 18 years in there that were just marvelous. And I – it was all my grammar school years, my high school years, my college years. It was just a remarkable place to grow up. It was remarkable.

I would ride my bicycle – you are not going to believe this. Nine and 10 years old, I’d ride my bicycle two and a half miles to Downtown Winter Park, go to the

police station, and say, "I was going to lock it in one of their little racks. Would they look after it?" I'm telling you the truth. I was taking the bus to Orlando for the day. And I'd get on the bus at age nine or 10, by myself. You know, you never thought about bad people. You never heard of them. And I would go to Orlando on the old bus, go to McVicker's bookstore and buy a Hardy Boys book. They were popular then. Go to a Saturday matinee and see Roy Rogers and Gene Autry and eat popcorn and Coke. Spend all day in Orlando. Go by the Cub Scout den, the Yowell Drew Ivey's—a great department store. Look for the next badge I was going to get, or a new hat, or whatever. And come back in the afternoons, after being in Orlando for six or seven hours, claim my bicycle from the police rack, unlock the thing that locked it, and ride home at night, and be gone all day. Nine, 10 years old. I'm telling you the truth. Nobody thought a thing about it.

Youngers Wow.

L'Heureux Today, you couldn't even—I was in grammar school! I remember going once when I was 10 years old to Orlando with a \$10 bill for Christmas presents. And I bought my dad a fishing lure at Denmark's Sporting Goods store, which was a landmark—Denmark's. I went to the Yowell Drew Ivey's, and bought my sister a little gift, a Nancy Drew book. Because Nancy Drew was like Hardy Boys. Nancy Drew was for girls, and Hardy Boys was for boys. And I went over to Dickson [&] Ives, went up the floor in an elevator, and bought my mother a nice handkerchief. And I had lunch down there. I had bought a gift for my sister, my father, my mother. And went to the movies and came home and still had change from the \$10 bill.

Youngers Oh, my goodness.

L'Heureux I remember it, I was about 10 or 11 years old.

Youngers Wow.

L'Heureux And it wasn't that I was particularly brave or anything. It was just that you didn't have any worries. Nobody accosted you or anything. There was never any trouble. I'd go to Orlando alone for the day.

Youngers Wow. I don't even go to Orlando alone right now.

L'Heureux Exactly. Exactly.

0:27:24 **Military service and college education**

Youngers So, you'd mentioned too that you had served some time in the army?

L'Heureux Yes.

Youngers Did you serve in the war?

L'Heureux No, no. I'm not particularly proud of that, but it wasn't my fault. I had the wrong age. I was too young for [the] Korea[n War] and too old for [the] Vietnam [War]. Now, I would have been old enough for Vietnam, but I was married by then, had a child by then, and I didn't go.

But I signed in the Army Reserves when I was in high school. I went to Reserve meetings when I was a junior in high school. And senior. That's pretty young to be out there – a soldier with men. I was only 16. And then I went in the active duty after high school. And got out – and we only went six months to active duty, and we were in Reserves seven and a half years.

And I was going to go to Davidson College in North Carolina, because some friends went and I was accepted there. I came back in January, after six months in the service, from June to January, and some friends talked me into going to Stetson for just a semester. Because if I didn't go to school, I was going to be on my dad's trucks hauling furniture. I promise you – I hated to go home on the weekends from college, because I'm going to be on his truck working. So I said, "Going to college is better than working on Dad's trucks." So I went to Stetson and liked it and never went to Davidson. I went on through Stetson the whole time. But that's how that worked out.

We used to – when I finally got a car at Stetson, I could get a tank of gas a week if I'd come home and see Mom and Dad. It was only 34 miles from DeLand to Winter Park. And I would run the gas down to near the E-mark, because I knew how far it was. There was a Pure station in our neighborhood – an old Pure station – and I could get a tank of gas. And of course, I always bought my dirty linens home in a big duffel bag for Mother, you know. I would, time and time and time again. One time, I got down to Casselberry, and I thought that I was going to run out of gas. And I pumped nine cents. Nine cents of gas. And the gasoline was about 32 cents a gallon. I got enough to get me home. Nine cents!

Youngers Oh, my goodness.

L'Heureux There are more, you know, people that are older – a hundred years old – remember the early 1900s, which is even more archaic than what I'm talking about. But you asked me what I remember. That, from end of World War II until the Vietnam War, America was at its zenith, its power, its influence, its peacetime.

And it was a marvelous time to grow up in Florida. Florida was booming. The tourism was starting. The [Lockheed] Martin Company came to Orlando. The Cape [Canaveral] was starting to make some rumbles, and Orlando was really growing. I know in my graduating class – and my sister's – we were about the same size, the year before me. We were 56, 57, 58. We're all about the same. Two or three years later, the class size had doubled, because of the Martin Company and all the Allied Aerospace Company [Allied Aerospace, Inc.]. People were flooding into Florida in the late '50s and early '60s. But it was a great place to grow up. I miss it. It's gone. It's gone.

0:30:43

Walt Disney World

Youngers I can understand that. Do you remember when they first built [Walt] Disney [World?]

L'Heureux Oh, yes. I remember "B.D." – "Before Disney". Oh, I do. I do. I went into the brokerage business and met a man who made a lot of money by being on the inside looking out, and bought land as a speculator. He ran a service station in Beverly Hills. And he owned it. He was blue collar, but he owned it, and all the stars would gas up there. And he flew an aircraft, along with a couple of his buddies. Had a little piper cup group. And the word is, that Disney was coming east. They had Disneyland, and they were coming east, and they thought it was going to be St. Louis[, Missouri]. Proved not to be St. Louis, because Mr. [Adolphus] Busch from Busch – Anheuser-Busch [Companies, Inc.], heard something that they weren't going to serve beer, and he said something at a big gala unveiling, "you can't come to St. Louis and not sell beer." And Walt Disney didn't like that. So St. Louis was crossed off.

The next option was either Ocala or Orlando. So this man from California that owned an old Standard Oil gas station – he was a thousand-aire, he wasn't a millionaire. He knew some of the stars. And they leaked that this area might be it. So he and three of his buddies flew – took a month off – flew piper cubs[?] to Orlando Executive Airport – the old airport – checked into a motel, hired Kelly [Service, Inc.] girls to post themselves in the various county seats – Kissimmee, Tavares, Sanford, Orlando – to see if anything unusual was being recorded – anything deeds or anything. They ate four meals a day, trying to eavesdrop scuttlebutt. They got their hair cut every week whether they needed it or not. They got their shoes shined. They wanted to be where scuttlebutt was, where gossip was, because they were trying to bankroll the buying of land if Disney was going to buy in Orlando. They'd meet every night and confer. "How'd your day go?" "Where'd you go?" "Oh, I ate four meals in restaurants," and this and this and this. And they'd move the Kelly girls around every day. The girl that was in Orlando would be in Sanford and then the next day she'd be in Tavares so she wouldn't be suspicious. And they had a map they put across their bed in the motels there. "Where were you?" It was like a war. They were trying to find out if Disney was coming here. So then money was going.

This is a true story. He gave this story in my living room. In fact, I did business with him. He's dead now. I shouldn't use his name. The money was up, and darn it, we didn't find it. Nothing. Because it was really – only three people in town knew it. The man in charge of *The Orlando Sentinel*, the man in charge of First [inaudible] Bank of Orlando. I mean, it was like keeping the A-bomb secret. Because Disney knew the prices would escalate.

So here's the story. And it's true. They checked out of their motel rooms. They got their planes at Orlando Executive Airport. And they had flown during the month around to see what they could see from the air too. They flew out to present Lake Buena Vista that had a wind sock little airstrip there owned by a

family-kind of a mom-and-pop business. Little wind sock, you know. And piper cubs[?] would land. A place to gas up. So they landed there to gas up. It was a two day flight to California. They were flying to Texas and then on to California. Little piper cubs[?], they go about 120 miles an hour, tops.

Youngers Right.

L'Heureux There was an old boy there at the little airstrip with an old cracker hat on, piece of straw in his mouth. You know, and he was making conversation with them. And they were glum, because they were there and spent a month's salary and nothing. And this guy – and this is a true story. He told it in my living room. You could hear a pin drop. This guy said, "What's going on around here? Mr. Brown down here, he's got his farm for sale. Mr. Smith down here, he's under option with some other people, and Mr. Miller down here, he's selling out too." "And Mr. C." – I'll call him "Mr. C.," because he's gone. I want to protect him. He said, "Oh, really? Oh really, really? People around here auctioning their farms? Yeah, we don't know what's going on. It's crazy over here right now." Well, it was at Bay Lake, right by where it was. And they came in and made some deals with farmers under the rug, and so Mr. C. and his buddies got back in the airplanes, went back to the motel, which was on Colonial Drive – across from a place called Ronnie's Restaurant, which was famous – checked back into the motel, and redoubled their efforts, and found it.

Youngers Oh, my goodness.

L'Heureux And they begged, borrowed, and stole every buck they could from California – their friends, their relatives. And in two short years, they were all multi-millionaires. The guy at the gas-up station at the little family-owned airstrip spilled the beans.

Youngers Wow.

L'Heureux Now, that's a true story, and isn't that a great story? Yeah, it's funny, but...

Youngers It's great that that's how you find out stuff, though. It might not be in the middle of the city. It might just be...

L'Heureux That's right. They had Kelly girls they hired. They were everywhere. Listening – listening in the corridors of courthouses. All of them got fat, he said, because they were going in every restaurant, every diner, trying to sit and hear something, you know. They got their shoes shined when they glistened, you know. Got their haircut too often. They just wanted to be places to get gossip. Because they're trying to bankroll big money. Thirty days – nothing. They leave town, they gas up, and the guy at the place spills the beans. And he said, "It was the greatest thing he had ever heard." He said, "Oh, really? This, Mr. Smith and Mr. Brown?" That probably was not the names, but those were the names he used. It was somebody that was selling out to Disney. And this was all prior to

the announcement. So they went back, and said, “We found it.” And it was Bay Lake. And they found it. And they searched for 30 days and couldn’t find it.

Youngers Well, now, did it really help the area? Initially it brought in a lot of income, and...

L’Heureux Well, I’m an environmentalist. You know, my books have that theme. I love nature. I love the outdoors. And yes, it’s done a lot of good, but I like the old Florida. I write about the old Florida. The backcountry roads, the way it was, you know. The animals. Not that we had them running loose, because we had cattle fencing and all, but I guess it’s helped. If you’re on I[nterstate Highway]-4 in gridlock, and a tractor-trailer’s across the way and you’re two hours late for an appointment, you’re not liking it. There was no turning back once Disney came. It was just – it was just frantic. It was the most frantic thing I’d ever seen. The people coming in here with jobs, and the growth, it was just unbelievable. I like the old Florida. I like the old days.

Youngers Wow.

L’Heureux But that story about Mr. C. is a true story. I did business with him and we had him out to the house one night for beer and popcorn, and had some of my friends over, about 10 of us. Maybe a little more. And we all sat around listening to him tell that story. And that’s just a fantastic story.

Youngers It’s hard to imagine what Florida would be like without that aspect of it, especially Central Florida.

L’Heureux Well, it would have grown despite Disney. It was growing early. The Cape – the aerospace industry really took off after the war and in the early ‘50s, it would have grown without Disney. People had pensions. They had retirements for the first time. And they wanted to get out of the cold. So it had started to grow long before Disney. But not at the rate that Disney brought after that. When they came, it was much different than it would have been. It would have been a gradual increase. It wouldn’t be like it is today. But it still would have been a very big state. So we can’t blame Disney totally.

0:38:54 **Closing remarks**

Youngers No. Well, if you don’t have anything else.

L’Heureux Stephanie, I think this has been fun. And enjoyable. And to learn that you came from the Okeechobee area, which I know also. And I went to college with many people from the towns around Lake Okeechobee – La Belle – also and I so enjoyed being interviewed by you today.

Youngers Well, good. I’m glad.

L’Heureux Thank you.

End of Interview