

Sarasota County Water Atlas
Oral History Project
New College of Florida — Fall 2014

Interview with: Beverly Fleming
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Interviewer: Kaylie Stokes



Beverly Hargis-Fleming grew up on Boca Grande island before moving to Sarasota when she was seventeen. Beverly went on to live in Maryland and work for the Government for many years before retiring back to Sarasota. From 2000 to 2006 she owned and operated an art gallery in Towles Court Artist Colony where she would show her own, and other local artists', work. She continues to paint and show her work around the community. Beverly has many fond memories of growing up on the island before the bridge was built.

Stokes: Could you introduce yourself?

Fleming: I'm Beverly Hargis-Fleming, and I grew up in Boca Grande, Florida, and I've lived in Sarasota quite a few years.

Stokes: You said you lived in Boca Grande, how was it growing up on the island?

Fleming: The island was wonderful because at that time there was no bridge to the island. We had a ferry that took cars over, go to the mainland which was Placida and we would drive and go where we were going to shop or had the car worked on because you didn't have full facilities on the island and no big department stores. We also had a train, a passenger train that came down once a day and brought the people in from wherever. We had a lot of people come from the North that had homes on the island. It was always exciting for us because they would come in, for instance Mrs. Crowningshield — she was a lot of excitement because she had her whole entourage of some family, some employees, servants, whatever, even her little dogs and her chauffeur would be waiting for her in her touring car. It was an open car just with no windows but a roof. Then of course it brought the mail over every day too so we congregated at the post office and we waited until they rolled the cart down to the post office and waited for the mail to be put up. Those things really meant a lot to us and looking back it's such a unique experience to recall. We had a school that went from the first to the twelfth grade. We were very active in school. We put on plays, sang in cantatas, we had our churches that we participated in, and Christmas would be held at the community house. We had a big Christmas tree and the whole

island was invited to come and Mrs. Crowningshield and her group of friends provided a present for each child on the island and Santa Claus would call each child's name and that child would go up to get their present. It was just a wonderful place to grow up. Of course we had the beaches every day. And if it was so hot that we really didn't want to be out in the sun playing basketball practice or softball or anything like that they'd let us bring our bathing suits and we would walk just a block down to the beach and go swimming for Phys. Ed. That was usually the last period of school and then we'd go home.

Stokes: Do you have a specific memory of growing up there that kind of encapsulates the experience for you?

Fleming: Well it's such an accumulation of things that everything was very important. We didn't realize how important until after we grew up. The people that nurtured us — teachers and ministers. I remember one instance that — we called them the beachfront people, Mrs. Crowningshield and others — had the community house built for activities to take place at, meetings or dances, and they would provide entertainment for us. One time — this is really significant, because coming from a family of artists, this was always exciting for me — they had an artist come to the island and do a presentation of her glamour bird demonstrations. She was a very small petite woman and her name was Joy Pastal. She told experiences of her traveling and going on a boat ride down a river or lake and seeing nature and she would sketch and draw with colored chalk. She started telling this story and took her chalk out and as she'd sing she would draw this bird. I was so impressed with her. She would sing this nice sweet song and then tell the story as she drew with chalk on large paper. It just never left my mind. It was so exciting to see this woman doing this and I wanted to be a part of something like that, because my mother's and grandmother's paintings were in the house when I was growing up. But what was so unique, to me, was I've never forgotten her and how beautiful she was and her drawings. March 2014 I attended the biennial celebration in Atlanta, Georgia. I'm a member of the National League of American Pen Women, and the president of the Sarasota branch. There was a room where the artists, crafters and music writers displayed their work and when I walked in I saw books lined up on this table and there was this woman's name on the book. It was a book on her life and I just, I was amazed, after all these years, never knowing where she was or ever seeing her again and I was so excited that the writer was there selling her books and pictures that Joy had done, and books about Joy. So I told her, Judy, the author, how I had met Joy when I was in grammar school and what an impression she had made on me. That was something exciting that I experienced on the island and then in future I met the author of the book. And there were so many other things that happened, like I said the Christmas tree, we put on plays, we had a wonderful teacher Miss Boone that read books to us. She instilled in us the love of the written word and exploring these books.

There were so many things, we'd have dances and even the parents would come. We'd have a fireman's ball. We'd wear long dresses and it was something very special. The churches had

programs like the Cantata, we'd join together and put on a cantata during the Christmas season at the community house, so I participated and there was, one time they were putting on just little skits at the community house and one of the boys in the choir and I sang a song, "If You Were the Only Girl in the World," and I wore a long blue dress with a big blue and white bonnet underneath an arbor. So you know these things you get to experience that you would carry through your life and mean a lot to you. After I left the island when I was 17 and got married, we lived in Sarasota and Bradenton. All my children — three of them — were born in Bradenton Hospital. I worked for several businesses, Yarnell Warehouse was one when they had an office on Ringling Boulevard. I was an office clerk typist and secretary, scheduling interviews or appointments for the salesmen. My aunt and uncle, Carlson was their last name, and we all called him Slim and Hadie. My aunt was my stepmother's sister, and they had children my age and older. That's where I experienced Sarasota in my teens and all the good memories of being here when the Greatest Show on Earth was being filmed and the parades and just exciting times. The teenagers would go down to Smack's to have a hamburger and a Coke and gather and just hang out. It was a wonderful place for the teenagers to go. We just had wholesome good fun. But Smack's was one of the big things that the teenagers were at all the time.

[Break to get water]

Fleming: A big thing too for the ones who played basketball, the boys' and the girls' teams. We had games that we had to go off of the island to play. The bus would get on the ferry and go to Placida, and we would go to Venice, we played Venice High School and it was in the military academy there. It was the Kentucky Military Academy. We went to Fort Myers, Naples, Everglades City, La Belle, all of these little towns we'd play. The boys and the girls would go at the same time because it was more convenient to do both instead of so many games off of the island. Of course we had the principal with us. He kept order; he had to keep the girls and boys from holding hands. He wouldn't permit it, and he wouldn't permit us doing it in school in the hallways. The hallways were always open because it's a Spanish style school with open hallways with arches. Coming back it would be late at night so there were boats waiting for us at Placida to take us back to the island. This one time it was raining and it was so cold and of course the boats were open boats. One time when it was so cold and rainy they put a tarp over us so we wouldn't get wet so we were all huddled under that and it would probably be as far as, maybe even a little further than the Ringling bridge, you know from the mainland to the island. So that was exciting, a lot of fun. Of course we had games at our school also. These other schools would come to the island, but in sixty-something, sixty-five or so the bridge was built. They started then busing all the children over to Englewood to go to school.

Stokes: How many people were living on the island around that time?

Fleming: Oh gosh, I'm not sure if I could even guess. Five hundred? I don't know. There were a lot of families and of course there were hotels there that sometimes brought their own

employees. But there were small hotels for their workers to stay, and then that's just seasonal. Of course now that's changed, I think they have things going on all the time there now.

Stokes: What was it like growing up in that small of a community; did you find that you knew everybody?

Fleming: Oh definitely! It was like one of my friends said, "Where did you play? Like, what did you do?" And as far as we were concerned the whole island was our playground. We could go anywhere. No crime whatsoever. So we had no fear of being out at night, walking to the movies. We had movies twice a week in the winter. No movies in the summer. What I think what was so neat was we felt so safe and secure because everybody knew each other, that somebody was looking out for us no matter where we were. But like me, and the others too, there was a time that I knew that I had to be home. But the children were no problems, we had no criminals, no fights, no nothing. There was nothing to worry about. We just enjoyed doing any and everything we wanted to do. Swim, etc.

Stokes: How would you normally spend your summers, when you weren't in school?

Fleming: Well, I guess, I used to go to Arcadia. That's where I was born. I had relatives there and mom and dad would put me on a train when I was about nine or ten to go to Arcadia. I'd go to one aunt and uncle's house, I'd get off at the train station and they'd be there to meet me. But my other aunt and uncle lived in Nocatee which is a little community outside of Arcadia, not far, but there wasn't a train stop so my uncle was out waving a red handkerchief at the train to stop, and they'd stop. Conductor would come and put the little stool down and I'd step off and there was my Uncle Grover and Aunt Bonnie, and that's how I got to Arcadia. But it was just things that, and well it was a long time ago too. Before a lot of things improved or grew.

Stokes: I had a quick question about the woman you were talking about at the beginning, Mrs. Crowningshield. Who was she?

Fleming: She was a du Pont, she married a Crowningshield, and her name was Louise Crowningshield. My second daughter's middle name is Louise, because Mrs. Crowningshield was so wonderful to everybody on the island. She sent some children away to a school in Tampa. Mrs. Crowningshield had the Girl Scouts over to her house for a picnic and we were out in her garden where she had a big cage full of birds and it was just bluebirds and love birds. She was so gentle and so sweet, she was a heavy-set woman, and she wore very simple nice clothes, and a big straw hat. She treated us like one of her grandchildren. She nurtured the island and she got the Kiwanis [Club] started, the [Boca Grande] Women's Club, and several other things. They would come down in the winter and go back then by summer. They were from Delaware. In fact I went up to Winterthur, it's where the du Pont's have a museum and I went up and saw that and Mrs. Crowningshield's home that she had. She donated it to a research place.

Stokes: She sounds like an amazing woman.

Fleming: Oh, she was. And then there were other women too, I think Mrs. Bradley was a beachfront person. When we say that it means they came from the North and they were very wealthy. They were very friendly but they didn't really mingle with the island people unless it was something that they were involved in. Mrs. Crowningshield would permit the children to swim in her swimming pool when they were up North, so in the summer we got to go swim in her swimming pool and her caretaker would be there to make sure everything was okay. It was just nice.

Stokes: That's really nice. What was it like living in a place where you had a population that was only there for half of the year?

Fleming: Well, I guess when the people came down for the winter, we didn't do anything different, they just did their thing pretty much and they stayed in Boca Grande, just a little town, a village, of the island. There was Fugate's Drug Store. They just opened a Fugate's on Main Street here in Sarasota so I've got to go check that out. That was my first job, at Fugate's. I was a soda jerk, they called them then, where you work behind and serve ice cream and sodas. I worked there when I was fifteen and I think most all the young people at one time on the island worked there. I guess we really didn't socialize with the beachfront people other than the community things, the parties that she'd have for the Girl Scouts and all. Another woman that came down for the winter and rode her bike all over. You know just a very nice, down-to-earth woman. She wore a big hat that has shells on it. It was just wonderful, they were nice people. Wonderful.

Stokes: You talked about there being a community of fishermen on the island. Could you talk about that a little?

Fleming: Yes, that was located on the north end of the island. As you're going over from the mainland to the island on the train, the village would be right there at the very end of the island. They had wooden homes with a sandy yard. There was a fish house on the other side of the railroad tracks. The village was on the west side and the fish house was on the east side. The fishermen would unload their boats at the fish house and spread out the nets to dry on a large wheel that they wrapped around. It was a community for the fishermen and their families. In fact my step-grandmother lived there at one time and their family were fishermen and we'd go down and visit. There was a little island at that time that wasn't connected to Boca Grande, it was out in the bay and a couple of fishermen and families lived there. The children would take a boat to the island to go to school. And then another island, Bokeelia, there were children there that were brought over by boat to go to school on the island on Boca Grande. They participated in many activities, some things they couldn't because they lived on another island but they were very involved in football — at the time they had a football team — and basketball.

Stokes: So you moved to Sarasota when you were seventeen. How was that?

Fleming: Yes, I left the island in 1952, married and lived in Sarasota and Bradenton. When I was ages 14, 15, 16 I'd go to Sarasota to visit my aunt and uncle and my Uncle Slim was the superintendent of the water department. He worked there and my Aunt Hadie was secretary and office manager of the office of the water department and that's where she hired me after I left Boca Grande and was looking for a job. She taught me office procedures. I worked there for a while and learned a lot from her.

During ages 14-16 I spent time in the summer with my aunt and uncle. My cousins were a lot of fun. Billie, my cousin, and I would get on the bus and go downtown and wander all over town and go to a movie where the Opera House is now. There was another movie [theater] on Main Street, another location at one time. But it was just a nice small town and had a five-and-dime store, Kresge's. The Building is still there.

We'd go to Lido Beach, swim in the pool. And it was so incredible, oh it was so much fun, because it was up high. You could go swim in the pool or you could go swim in the Gulf, the beaches were wonderful. I think they've improved the beaches a lot, made it wider. I remember when they filled in and connected Siesta Key with Lido Beach, there used to be an opening there from the bay to the Gulf and they let that fill in and they still have talked about at some point opening that up again and then it gets put aside or decided not. But we'd go fishing out, with my uncle, we'd go fishing out on a bridge that goes from Sarasota over to Siesta Key and it was like a little humpback bridge and we'd go there a certain time of day and we'd catch fish and it was just really a laid back wonderful town. It's still a wonderful town. But it was wonderful then too, as a teenager, to be able to be free and we didn't have a lot of crime then, even at that time. The bridge that Ringling put up, the Ringling Bridge, was the flat one that this one replaced. That was all I knew, was that bridge until they put the new one. And then Bird Key they built up and put houses on it and connected it to the mainland. It was just; you could see things happening to Sarasota. But then I started raising my family, had three children. We used to go out, my cousins and I, we'd go out to this pasture land and, we'd go down and we'd cut down — not me — the guys would cut down palmettos to get swamp cabbage they called it. You know what I'm talking about? And they'd cook it. They'd chop it up and cook it on the open fire, and then we had steak and we'd grill the steaks on an open fire. This was out towards Myakka somewhere and we used to go out there all the time and do that. It was a lot of fun. We'd ride horses and my daughter had a friend that lived in our neighborhood that had a horse, and they kept it there a lot of times and they'd go riding and take my daughter with them sometimes to go riding.

Stokes: How was it raising your kids in Sarasota?

Fleming: It was fine. Nothing would ever happen that was bad at the schools. We never had any problems with our child walking to school, for instance. One time we lived off of Fruitville Road. That was before Beneva was extended beyond Fruitville Road to the south. It was a dirt

road, but there was a little two-lane road going north. That's where the circus people lived. We could go down and they didn't mind if we stopped and watched them practicing on the high wires — they weren't really high then, it was like practicing. And that was neat to see at that time, and to see how it's grown and has become so successful now with Dolly and Pedro. Pedro and Dolly are the owners. The circus has come back into its own in Sarasota again with them, and I think that's been wonderful. That's always been a good thing. And then the Sailor Circus started. We moved up to Maryland in '69. And I stayed up there until I retired from the government in '95, then I came back to Sarasota. My daughter Rilla moved to Sarasota and started working and so she was here, way before I was. I'd come down and visit and I could still see Sarasota growing. And then to watch the high-rise buildings were kind of disappointing, but it's nice in a way. It's wonderful to see a town progress, and the arts became more successful and they started taking more interest in the arts like the Asolo [Theatre] has been there for years, and then the [Sarasota] Art Center — I've been a member of the Art Center and entered shows and participated there. There's so many galleries that are opportunities for artists to exhibit. I bought property at Towles Court Artist Colony in 2000 and had two houses on it. I opened a gallery in one of the buildings and I lived in a little house for a year or so and then decided to expand my gallery and bought a house to turn into another gallery. I had local artists showing in there with me. Instead of having them give me commissions on what they sold I would rent out wall space to them. At one time I had about twenty artists in the two buildings and they were all local artists. I loved the fact that I never had to advertise, I always had artists come to me, "Can I be in your gallery? Do you have room? Would my art fit?" And I did interview artists. I'd welcome them in, look at their art and some would even come from the east coast of Florida and talk to me about having a show. I would feature an artist each month. When I was a member of the Ringling Museum Fan Club they were trying to put art into businesses, so that our art would be in businesses in Sarasota. They came to my gallery and asked if they could have their party at my gallery, and with the two buildings I had put an awning over so it would be open with some protection in case of rain. And we had all the refreshments. They provided a bartender and everything, and it was wonderful. It was a wonderful experience with lots of people. They did that at a couple other galleries in Towles Court at that time. It was a pretty busy art colony then and it's still open and artists are still there. Every third Friday night they'd have art walks and that's always fun. Galleries would put lights out and it was very festive. Now there's a restaurant where my property was, on the corner of Links and Adams Lane. I was there for six years and sold it in 2006 and started showing in galleries. It was exciting because there were a lot of businesses and a lot of galleries opening. They used to have, in January, Arts Day, where artists set up booths in Main Street and Palm Avenue. The ballet put on a performance on a stage. It brought the art out to the people.

Stokes: How did your passion for art come about?

Fleming: When I was in elementary school. I'd already been influenced by my mother and grandmother who were both artists, and my three aunts were artists as well. I had brothers and a

sister that were artists, but they didn't pursue it like I did. I did not know my mother and grandmother as I was three when they both passed away. We had their art in our home. My aunts would tell me about my mother and my grandmother, so it was always a passion inside of me that I knew I had to do. I was determined I was going to do anything, everything. So I would start simple. I used to draw profiles of movie stars, or I'd draw cartoon animals for my children. I always had that urge, "I still want to paint." When I moved to Maryland I joined the Laurel Art Center up in Laurel, Maryland. Then I joined the Southern Maryland Art League, which was a larger league, with more opportunities for me. So I began to do workshops through the art league and learn more. Then we would have a group of us meet in someone's home or studio, and paint and discuss it and they'd give you tricks, or they would show you methods that they did. I took workshops through the Southern Maryland Art League. I took drawing and then I took Sumi, the Japanese brush painting, by Yolanda Mayhall. I've not pursued the Sumi that much because I've got into so many different things. We had shows in malls, in Maryland and Virginia, and in offices. I won best in show with my clown. I still have it. I was at a dinner for a senator in Maryland, and we were sitting at a table with about ten people, and I was talking to the man next to me, introduced myself, we were all introducing ourselves and he turned to me later and he says, "That name sounds so familiar, Beverly Fleming, where do you work?" And I said "I work for the government and I'm also a painter and I've sold paintings through the Southern Maryland Art League" and he said "I have one of your paintings." It was exciting, mostly for me to see somebody enjoy my art. I started painting commissions for people. I would do anything they wanted me to do. I did grandmothers' houses, farms, barns, and boats, Thomas Point Lighthouse in Maryland, on the Chesapeake Bay. I lived in Maryland for about twenty-five years, worked for the government for twenty-two. When I came back to Sarasota it was a big shock — when I moved back in '95 — how much it had changed from when I left, even though I was coming back to see my daughters and family all those years. You just didn't see it as much, but it was really growing fast. When I moved down and I got into an art gallery located at Towles Court. The city helped in the way that they had our area zoned as a special zoning, so we could live, work and sell on the property. That was a special — that I thought the city was wonderful to have the foresight to do that. That was in the '90s, that the area started developing into an artist's colony. The owner was going to sell or tear them down and the artists wanted to buy them and fix them up. So he decided to do the whole area like that. When I was showing my art in a gallery there I wanted to purchase property to have my own gallery. I then bought the property that was for sale and was able to open my own gallery. [Gets up for water]

Stokes: Is that your wedding picture? [Pointing to framed picture on side table]

Fleming: No, that's my oldest brother and his wife. I don't have mine out.

Stokes: Is Fleming your maiden name or your married name?

Fleming: My married name is Fleming. I was a Hargis.

Stokes: Do you have any more stories about Lido Beach or the circus?

Fleming: When the circus was closing they were filming a program in a building, a big glass building, that the circus owned and they were going to have a performance there and have it televised. I was invited to attend with one of my children. I don't have souvenirs, but that was an exciting time.

Stokes: You said something about a parade the other day when we were talking.

Fleming: They had a big parade with the elephants, animals, clowns, and performers marking down Main Street. We saw the parade, and then they had Carleton Carpenter, who was an actor and singer, and then this other singer, female, I can't remember who that was. They had a platform that they were on, on Main Street singing these songs, and of course I was just up there visiting at that time, with my cousins. So we got all that, just the whole day of everything going on. But then when I went back home to the island I had a friend, my girlfriend, called me and said, "Beverly, Cornel Wilde is here with his girlfriend." And he was one of the performers in the circus and she said, "He says if you brought your camera down you could take some pictures." So I got on my bike and rode down to the place where they were going to go out fishing, and they were so nice and he was so handsome. And so I got my picture taken with him and his girl, and then he said, "Well if you've got more film left if you want to let us take your camera we'll take more pictures on the boat." So I let him have my camera, and they did, and those I can't find. I've got them put away somewhere, but I guess over a period of this many years you get so many things that some kind of get shoved aside and you don't see them for a while. But it was great living in this area and being part of Sarasota, and coming back and being part of the art — and it's just really exciting to become connected with art and being asked to be in a gallery. I'm having a show in December at the Episcopal church out on Longboat Key that has an area for artists, and they have artists each month, different artists. So I'm going to be there in December. So that's what I'm preparing for now, so it's going to be Florida's wildlife and water media, other media arts. So that will be — I do experimental art and water media, and that's a method that has so many different methods to it. It's amazing, what appears out of that, that you don't control really. It's when it dries that it is what it is. It's not painting it in, it's pouring or manipulating and all various things and it makes some really unique forms, and some that you can imagine, or people point out different things in it that they can see. But I've been blessed, I guess really, growing up on the island and being exposed to some culture. I guess I've always been kind of like a dreamer, growing up. And not really knowing what I wanted to do, and just getting into things, I knew I wanted to paint. And Sarasota always fascinated me, I always loved Sarasota and just being a Floridian, my home close by, you know, where I grew up. We still stay connected. We have a website called Boca Grande Old Days, and also Sarasota Historical Society has a Sarasota website for people that grew up in Sarasota, and my daughter started going. I went to lunch with them one day, they were having lunches at different restaurants, so I got to know some of the people. But I was so busy doing other things that I

didn't get involved in them that much. But they're a really nice group.

Stokes: So you paint a lot of Florida, and Florida wildlife?

Fleming: Yes, I love the birds and that's always been my love, and the water. But like I said, I would paint anything. People would bring me photographs and it would be — even a couple wanted me to do a painting of an area in France where they had vacationed, but they didn't have photographs of exactly how they wanted it to look. So they gave me about three or four different photographs or so to put it together, to give them the angle that they wanted. And to get that angle you would have had to of been in the middle of the little canal. So it was a new experience, or a really different experience to do from somebody's photos, but I've done a lot of them and I've even had people send me photographs of birds for my supply.

Stokes: You obviously really love the area. How do you think growing up here influenced you?

Fleming: Being here, I think it was the culture that was here, when I was a teenager. And I loved Sarasota beaches, and the theaters. It was just a different era. And a different setting from Boca Grande, because here you got this town that's in the midst of growing and I've loved being a part of it.

Stokes: Can you think of any other things you want to share about living on the island before they built the bridge?

Fleming: Let me think. Well we did the usual things, like caroling. That was a big thing. Everything can be so exciting, and we'd go to the beachfront homes. They would always tell us "Make sure you come." They always loved us to come and sing carols for them. They would bring hot chocolate out for us and treats. And of course you got to sit and snuggle with your boyfriend, riding in the car. We had the Women's Club cook for the Kiwanis Club. So I would be involved with helping them at the community house to serve — and then there would be some of the beachfront ladies there who were involved too, and it was just like they were becoming involved in things too. And we had celebrities come down. Lyndon Johnson came down; the Bushes go down there now a lot. They'd come down and golf, and stay in the Gasparilla Inn. I worked in the drug store when I was fifteen, there was a yacht that came in and it was Lana Turner's yacht. And just the way the island people were — we weren't crazy and going screaming and all of this, we just respected them. We were in awe of them and we didn't make a big thing about it. Lana Turner came into the drug store and was looking around, and I was working behind the soda counter. She was just very sweet. Dressed in summer clothes, shorts and everything, and then she said that she would let some of the teenagers come to her yacht if they wanted to go and see her yacht. We just never got involved with them. And they would just come in and do what they wanted to do and nobody would invade their space. I think several— quite a few others came down. These were the older ones, back in my teenage days that I loved, and they were just amazing, you know, they were so beautiful. Ships would come in from all

over the world, because Boca Grande has one of the deepest harbors in the world for the ships to come in. And I think they used to go into Tampa, but then they built a railroad down and they had big huge bins that they brought phosphate from where they mined in the middle of the state. There was a conveyor belt that this phosphate would be put on, and it would be carried out to the ships way out. There was a long dock, and the ships could dock there. That was exciting to see the ships come in.

The long dock turned out to be a big fishing extravaganza when the tide was just right, and they let the people on the dock at that time to go out and fish.

So word would get out that the shrimp was running and that the fishing was good. So everybody ran down to the dock, took their buckets and nets, or fishing pole rods, or whatever. And that place would be covered with everybody fishing. We would catch a lot of shrimp, we'd scoop them up in the nets take them home, fix them fresh. A lot of fish were caught. It was a lot of fun, because you had all these island people out on this dock. Then we used to go clamming out in the bay, and dig up clams. We'd go scalloping. The clams, my aunt would come down, and she would make clam chowder for us. Big bowls, pots of clam chowder, and visit. A lot of good things. It was just good clean fun. We might get bored sometimes, but very seldom. There was always something to do. Go roller-skating, or go swimming anytime you wanted. The same here in Sarasota, when I came up for the summer, we were just free to roam around and go to Smack's and meet the boys, and it was fun.

Stokes: It sounds so fun, growing up on the island. It just seems like such a different kind of existence.

Fleming: Oh, it was. It's another world. You know, when I was real, real young, the Second World War was going on and my brothers went over to Europe to fight, and so that was in my childhood. But you weren't — and then we didn't get television until the '50s. We heard all the terrible news, but we couldn't really grasp how horrible it really was. Not until we grew up and experienced things in other towns that we lived in, that we realized we were so isolated there. In the Ringling Hotel — and this is when I was on the island so my cousins told me about this, that lived in Arcadia, they were a couple of girls — that Arcadia had a field that pilots used to train in Venice and Arcadia so my cousins started dating these guys and they'd bring them down to the island and we'd go out in the backyard and make homemade ice-cream, or just something fun, and go swimming. But here in Sarasota, I remember my cousin telling me about Ringling Hotel. It's been taken down and it's no longer there. But at that time they had dances for the soldiers. [Phone rings]... They had dances at that hotel for the servicemen and the young people. Of course I wasn't that age. But it was just so neat to think, that old hotel that had so many wonderful things going on. It just wasn't taken care of and it was eventually taken down. But the war had a big effect on this area up here, but down there we just weren't connected with... [Phone rings].

Stokes: When was the last time you were back in Boca Grande?

Fleming: Oh when was it...? Probably, well, we had a reunion. What's so funny is we didn't have reunions for a long time and then in '94 some young people got together and said, "Let's have a reunion. We can see if we can try and get all the people that graduated from Boca Grande and contact them." So they started contacting me, got a group together that organized it. They really did a fantastic job. Then word got out that so many people heard about it, and not that they had gone to school or graduated there, but they had lived on the island, they wanted to come. It turned out to be an island homecoming. Anybody that ever lived on the island could come, you were welcome to come. We must have had almost two hundred people there. We had it for two days. My brother was living there at the time with his family, so I stayed with him and I flew down from Maryland, I was living in Maryland, and I was dancing in a video at that time — I ballroom danced.

Stokes: You were pretty popular.

Fleming: What's so funny is that he was from a fishing family, and he never really participated, and wasn't on the island all the time. I thought he was really cute, and I liked him but we never connected like the guys who lived — he lived on Bokeelia like I was telling you — the boat would come over — and he was on the football team. Anyways it was so neat to meet those people that you hadn't seen in years. We had a wonderful time, there were so many people.

I wrote a poem.

*There is a place we all know well
With sand and seas and gulls and shells
A place we loved to dream and play
We thought it would always be that way
But as time went by, as it always will
We found our dreams had all stood still
Although the place has changed so much
In our hearts it had not been touched*

Stokes: Oh my gosh, I actually have the chills.

Fleming: I want to cry every time I say it.