

**Clarence and Joann Schlather**  
**by Bill Rose**  
**May 6, 2003**

[START TAPE 1, SIDE A]

**Bill Rose (BR):** *This is an interview with Clarence and Joann Schlather, who have resided in the same house on Bay Crest Drive since, what was the date?*

**Clarence Schlather (CS):** 1964.

**BR:** *1964. The interview is being conducted on May the 6<sup>th</sup>, 2003 at Westgate Regional Library. The interviewer is Bill Rose, representing the Tampa-Hillsborough Public Library system oral history collection project.*

**CS:** My name is Clarence Schlather, as the interviewer has already stated. I was born in San Marcos, Texas in 1928. And over the years, my wife and I moved with our family to Shreveport, where we started out with the Gillette Company. And in 1964, the Gillette Company moved us both and our family to Tampa, Florida, where we picked up our residence at 4902 Bay Crest Drive- a subdivision all of its own, but yet, still, a part of the Town n' Country area.

As I said, we arrived in Tampa on January the 9<sup>th</sup> with our five children and one Collie dog. Our children were Claire, nine years of age; her brother Jerry, age seven; along with her two sisters, Sandra, five; and Denise, three; and their young brother, who was nine months old at the time.

**Joann Schlather (JS):** My name is Joann Schlather. I was born in Houston, Texas. Lived there until I married my husband, Clarence, whereupon he was in the military, and we began traveling. We've lived in many places. We've been in Tampa for quite some time- almost forty years now. We've seen many changes in Town n' Country and in Bay Crest.

**BR:** ( ). *Did you want to review?*

**CS:** Yeah. No, no.

Our family moved into our home, located in Bay Crest subdivision, on Saturday, January the 11<sup>th</sup>, 1964. This home was built by G&E Construction Company, and was a model home when the family purchased it. The construction company was named after Morty Gould and Gene Eisen, two developers from New York that came down to start Bay Crest subdivision.

Our introduction to Tampa was through the old L-shaped Tampa Airport, located at the end of West Shore. From our Holiday Inn located on Dale Mabry, we

drove out West Hillsborough to see the new home. Hillsborough Avenue was two lanes at that time, from Eisenhower west to the Memor--, to Memorial. And Memorial was also two lanes, from its intersection with Eisenhower on the east and Hillsborough Avenue on the west.

There were two grocery chains in existence: Pantry Pride and B&B Supermarkets. The latter store later became U-Save Supermarkets. There were two drug store areas, also in the area: Lefers Drug Store, alongside of Pantry Pride, and the Rexall Drug Store in the B&B strip center.

The only school in the area was Town n' Country Elementary, and later on, Dickenson Elementary. The changes began in 1970, with Memorial being widened to its present four lanes, with turn lanes. Later on, Hillsborough Avenue was widened to four lanes, and then its present six lanes. The Memorial widening meant that the oak trees planted after World War I had to be removed. They were there for the men from the county that lost their lives in World War I.

Tampa's jewel of an airport placed Tampa on the world map, with its main terminal, and four airside buildings connected by shuttles.

I was transferred by the Gillette Company from Shreveport, Louisiana to call on Publix Supermarkets and Eckerd Drug. In 1964, these two chains had 96 stores and 39 stores, respectively. Upon my retirement some twenty-five years later, the chain had 454 Publix stores, and Eckerd was a giant in the Southeast, with over 1,600 stores. During these twenty-five years, the state of Florida growth in population meant that these two chains also had to grow.

We saw the Tampa Bay area awarded an NFL football team. And along with many others, we saw the now famous 0-26 start by the Tampa Bay Buccaneers. And now they are the Super Bowl Champions.

Our family has always participated in local events. I was a Little League coach for three years. And during the same time, I was a scout master of Troop 304, sponsored by the First Reformed Church. One of my committee men, Mr. Tom Parsons, first started out in a Quonset hut next to the old Ace Hardware Store that later moved across the street. Tom moved his office to its present location, but was in a mobile home for years.

The widening of Hanley from two lanes to its present four lanes took place in the early '90s. Waters Avenue was also widened during the last ten years.

Department store openings and closing are a history of the Town n' Country area. First Zayre's gave up. Then K-Mart moved from Memorial and Hillsborough to Waters, and now it is closed. Wal-Mart has taken over this type of business.

When we first moved into Tampa, there were no banks in the area. I have not bothered to count them at this particular time. The closest bank was National Bank of Tampa at Himes and Hillsborough, which later became Dallas National Bank, then NCNB, and is now Bank of America. And also, as the narrator has mentioned, we had no bus transportation out in this area, which later became known as HART- Hillsborough-- . [Pause] What is it?

**JS:** HARTline.

**CS:** HARTline. Yeah. These are the changes that we have seen in this particular area, as we have lived here now for over thirty-nine years.

**BR:** *I would say that between the two of you, you possess a wealth of information about some of the other aspects of this area's development. And as a relative newcomer-- we came down here in 1975-- I'd be interested in knowing your opinions and your perceptions on things like crime problems. Have they--? I mean, of course, the flip side of living in Town n' Country or--, and/or Bay Crest-- . I mean, I think it's a great place to live, but there are problems: congestion, traffic problems, crime. We've had a lot of good weather and a lot of bad weather, too. So any of these things that you'd like to address? The ups and downs of your many years in the area: Hurricane Elena, gang problems, anything that might be a factor that stands out in your mind.*

**JS:** This is Joann Schlather. I would like to add a few--.

**BR:** *Is it on?*

**JS:** Yes. I would like to add a few remembrances to those that have gone before. I specifically, as the mother of five young children, did extensive use of the library. It was a great resource to me. It was located across Hillsborough Avenue on the south side in a little strip center. It consisted basically of one large room with a fairly good supply of books for the area. They had a very good supply of children's books, and we borrowed them extensively. And make good use of it, and it was an invaluable resource to a young mother who was raising children.

You people were always helpful and willing to answer any question. I remember once they called me and told me that I had not turned in a book. And I said, "Well, I don't mean to dispute your word, but I did." And they took my word; they accepted the fact that I had turned in the book. I remember turning it in, and had taken it into the library. So libraries are always been important to me. And we're very blessed with the one we have here in Town n' Country now.

I also remember the B&B Cash Grocery, which was across Hillsborough Avenue. They gave green stamps. And today's generation, I don't think, know as much

about green stamps, but they were important to us then. We saved green stamps, and got various items through the catalogs.

We also attended a local church- we went to Bay Ceia Baptist Church. We were very active there for many, many years. And it's still in existence; it's still on George Road. It has not changed that much since we attended there. And ( ), there was First Reformed, there was a Lutheran church, and of course, down on George Road was Bay Ceia. And Incarnation Church and School was much, much smaller than it is now, but still a force in the community. And church is very important to any community.

We saw several schools opened. Our children started in Town n' Country Elementary. And living where we did, that was difficult to get them there. Then Dickenson opened. And they were transferred to Dickenson. Our middle daughter went to first and second grade at St. Paul's Methodist Church, which is now Wesley Memorial. And school was held there for two grades. We also saw the opening of Webb Junior High. Our oldest daughter went to Leto High School. And our son, who was two years behind her, opened Jefferson High School- the new Jefferson. So we have seen churches, ( ), and also schools open and the neighborhood grow.

When we first moved here, there were very few homes. There was nothing north of Waters at all. It was palmetto patches. And we have seen many changes- Twelve Oaks sprang up.

We have been blessed in our area not to experience too much crime. I know there are extensive problems in the area. There are a lot of gangs in Twelve Oaks, I have been told. I've not experienced any of them. But to my knowledge, there are no gangs in Bay Crest, where we live. The other areas I really can't speak to, because our children are older.

But we have been blessed to see the houses spring up all over town- the area grow, I think, for the better. The traffic is a nightmare, but that comes with growth.

**CS:** As far as crime in our area, it was our experience one year that when we left to go to Houston for my wife's mother's funeral, just as we had taken off the night-, that night, somebody broke into our house. I always feel that it was a youth in the neighborhood, knowing that all of our children were going to go with us. And they took a TV, and they took a ( ) that my son had put money into, saving it up. But literally did not do any more damage to our house, because I had been painting our bedroom and had taken everything out that was my office into the den. And they walked around every stack of material that they could have, just to get to the TV.

As far as storms, we have experienced quite a few hurricanes through this area. And our first example was one that came through, and we did not, or had not, been forced to evacuate. But our children wanted to stay up and have a hurricane party. And about a year later, when we were going through the Biloxi area, and we were coming back from Texas ( ) from vacation, they saw the results of what a terrific Class 4 hurricane could do to a city of Biloxi. And they then realized that they did not ever want to see a hurricane come into the Tampa Bay area again.

We have had, on one occasion, had to evacuate, since we are in zone 1. And we left for about twelve hours. Couldn't find a place to stay. Had our dogs and couldn't get into the local shelters, so we waded back from Memorial the 2 ½ blocks to get to our house. And water was in the driveway, in the front yard, and the nor--, the corner of the yard that is close to the canal. But no water had ever gotten into our particular house.

We have seen the Bay Crest area change, where we do have a racial mix. I've seen Orientals in the area; I've seen Afro Americans in the area. And I'm sure that there are various people from other countries, especially those of Cuban descent or South American descent.

[LONG PAUSE IN TAPE]

**JS:** People during the hurricane immediately stormed the stores and bought up all the bottled water and the flashlight batteries and everything they could get their hands on. And knowing that we might need supplies, we asked our daughter, who at the time was about twenty-two, I think, to go to the store and get some emergency supplies- whatever she could get. She came home with an extra-large bag of Snicker's candy bars and one jug of bottled water. And I said, "Well, Sandy, is this your idea of emergency supplies?" She looked at me with a grin and responded, "Well, it works for me, Mom. That's what I'm going to eat. I'm not going to go hungry, and you guys can drink the water!"

**CS:** Growth is always going to continue to be with us. There are more and more people moving into Florida each and every month, based on what we hear from the city of Tampa in the way of water connections. We know that there is always a thought that we're going to be short of water. And this is the reason they built the desalinization plant: to provide us with that type of water. It'll be interesting to see how that water that we now have running into our houses will change when that water is then supplied to, in our particular case, by the city of Tampa. We get our water from the city of Tampa.

Growth, as I've already said, is going to continue. And there is nothing that we, as individuals--. We can protest; we can go to the county commission's meetings and protest. But they know that their hands are tied. And the state is not going to close the gates, say, on the interstates or the airlines, bringing new and

prospective ( ). When people come down to retire, they are going to have to have services- from hospitals, from doctors, from banks. And as they move into new areas, all of these facilities are then going to spring up. My wife and I do--, we plan to remain in Florida. I've been retired from the Gillette Company since 1988. But I have continued to stay active in various endeavors of earning additional monies for our income.

***BR:** Well, thanks to you-- both of you, Clarence and Joann Schlather-- for sharing your experience. And it's hopeful to me that people with such strong roots in the community here have decided to stay and watch it change, hopefully for the better. God bless and good luck.*

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[END OF INTERVIEW]