

**Transcript of an oral history interview in the collection of the  
BREVARD COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
308 Forrest Ave., Cocoa, FL 32922**

- Nancy: Right Brevard Country Historical Commission, 1995.
- Nancy: Well the first thing I'm going to ask is for you to tell us your name, and when and where you were born.
- Helen: Helen Chandler. Helen Osteen Chandler. I was born on the place where this is being taped, Lotus on Merritt Island in 1909.
- Nancy: It looks a lot different than it did then, I'd guess.
- Helen: Yes it did.
- Nancy: What do you remember when you were real little? What's the first thing you remember?
- Helen: Well, we always played in the water. That's one thing that I know. Always, one of us would fall in the river and having be pulled out. There were 10 of us eventually, and because we had such a large family, if there were any children around that were only children, they always came here. We didn't have to go looking for them. For playmates.  
[00:01:00]
- Nancy: Well you were pretty much out in the country though.
- Helen: Oh yes. We went to country school. One room school. There were 7 Osteens in the school, and then about 2 extra people. If the ... Teacher usually lived with us, because we had a large house, and if she did anything that my oldest sister didn't like, she would gather us all up and bring us home, and my father would gather us and take us right back down. The teacher would have her head on her arm crying on her desk.  
[00:02:00]
- Nancy: Well your parents came to this area, didn't they?
- Helen: My father came in 1895, but his brother-in-law had been here, on this home place, and he, the brother-in-law, went back to Palatka where dad was born in 1895. He told my dad that there was good looking girl down here, and that if he knew what he was doing, he should come and ask her to marry him, so he came, and they got married. Then they had 10 children. Mama always had a doctor. When I was in the health department and was being oriented in Jacksonville, I said I wanted to look and see if my birth was recorded. They said oh no, it wasn't required before 1925. That they had to be recorded. I looked anyway, and all of us had been recorded in vital statistics.  
[00:04:00]
- Nancy: Your Mama was already living here. When did her family come?
- Helen: I don't know exactly when, but they had been here quite a while.
- Nancy: Yeah. Did you hear any stories about what it was like when she was girl? Did she ever tell you?

Helen: No. No she didn't. We would ask her where she was from, and she'd always say the big swamp. Looking at my birth certificate, I saw that she came from Elektra, up in the big swamp, which was around Ocala. I looked it up and found that there was a place named Elektra. I don't know whether the town is still there or not.

[00:05:00]

Nancy: The life was different then?

Helen: Yes.

Nancy: No electricity?

Helen: No. We had kerosene lamps, and then dad used the artesian well to create electricity, so we had electric lights. If any of us had on a light on and somebody else turned one on, everybody in the house would holler, "Who turned on a light?" Then he also, with the artesian well, got bathroom, and in the upstairs, and so we had indoor plumbing.

[00:06:00]

Nancy: Well that was very unusual at that time.

Helen: Yes. Yes. Very unusual.

Nancy: How would your mom cook? Did she have her kitchen as part of the house?

Helen: The kitchen was part of the house. We had a big cistern under the back porch, and it was a big cistern and a huge back porch, where some of the laundry was done also. When she ... She'd never ... I was talking to a friend just the other day, and she used to come and spend the night with me, and she said she used to wonder about my mother having to cook all the time, and mom never did mind it. She always had plenty to eat, we did.

[00:07:00]

Nancy: Would she cook on a wood stove, or was it ...

Helen: At first. A wood stove, but just as soon as anything new would come along, my dad would see that we got it, and my father was county commissioner for five terms, and I used to go to Titusville with him, and the way we would do it is we would go row across the river, and go to the railroad track, and when the train would come along, he would hold his hand up, stop the train, and we would get on. I had an uncle, an aunt, and cousins up there. I would stay with them while he tended to the county business.

Nancy: You were a little girl then when that was happening?

Helen: About 9. 9, 10, 11.

[00:08:00]

Nancy: That would have been in the old courthouse building.

Helen: Oh yes.

Nancy: Did you ever go into the courthouse with them?

Helen: No. Nope, but they had a theater there, and I got to go to the movies.

Nancy: What kind of movies did they play? Do you remember any that you saw?

Helen: No. Comedies I think.

Nancy: Yeah, so your family came to Brevard country well before 1900. They were all here before the turn of the century.

Helen: 1895. 75 maybe. 1875 they came.

Nancy: The railroad was just starting to come down. I guess it didn't come til before the turn of the century. How would they get around?

[00:09:00]

Helen: By boat. My brother and a friend [Ben La Roche 00:09:09] owned the Swell. It was a pretty good sized boat, and it traveled from Eau Gallie to Cocoa, and they would stay overnight in Eau Gallie, and then he come and pick up anything that we had to go to Cocoa, and also pick up people, and pick up the mail, and my mother was the post mistress. Then they would ... I took music lessons too. I would go on the boat every Saturday.

[00:10:00]

Nancy: What kind of boat was it?

Helen: I don't know.

Nancy: A sail boat?

Helen: No, no, no. Big motor boat.

Nancy: Motor boat.

Helen: Motor boat.

Nancy: Steam boat?

Helen: That's about most of the transportation that we had. Now we had some roads that were shell. Shell roads. I guess we had some kind of transportation, even before there were bridges.

Nancy: Did you all have mules or horses?

Helen: We had a mule. Dad kept the county horses, and stop.

Nancy: Okay. Cut.

[00:11:00]

Nancy: Let's talk a little bit more about the roads, and trying to get around.

Helen: They were shell roads, and they went all the way ... We really didn't know too much about the north end of the island, but there was, up at Georgiana, there was a cattle guard to keep the cattle from going across, and it was a grill sort of thing. That was just about as far as we were allowed to go. Just by ourselves, but there was Mr. Danner and his sister, and they would have guests come down, and they would come in a great big automobile.

[00:12:00] The men wanted to visit, and the ladies wanted go for drives, so I would walk down to the Danners, I was 9 years old, and I would walk down to the Danners and pick the ladies up, and drive them up to as far as Merritt is. When I would come home, they gave me a quarter each time, and I would have that quarter clutched in my hand. When I would see my brothers, I would show it to them, and they were green with envy that I got to drive the car.

[00:13:00] Then when the bridge was built, we went to Cocoa school, and I was in the fourth grade. When I was 8 years ... When I was in the eighth grade, I was taking all dad's produce to Cocoa in the Model A Ford, and so ... We, some of the students and I would go downtown, and we would have to crank the car, and ... so I was talking to somebody, and they said, "You had to watch out for the police, didn't you?" I said no, "Why would I?" They said, "Well I know that you were driving without a license." I said, "Oh. Well I got my first license at the same time my son got his." That was the first time we had to have driver's license.

[00:14:00] Nancy: You were awfully young to be driving a car. How did you ... Who taught you? Did you just kind of teach yourself

Helen: Mm-hmm (affirmative). My dad never could learn. He would try to, but he couldn't.

Nancy: You would drive your father around.

Helen: Mm-hmm (affirmative). It was ...

Nancy: Well the roads were pretty narrow.

Helen: Yes, and I learned young how to get a car unstuck, because when they run off the side of the road, they would be in soft sand, so I learned that. Then when I went over to Cape Canaveral, and I would stand, sit by where the ramp was, and people would ride on the beach. When they would try to get back up on, they would get stuck, so I was one to get them unstuck.

Nancy: Do you remember the trick to getting unstuck?

Helen: Yeah.

Nancy: What is it?

Helen: You sort of rock it back and forth. You don't spin your wheels, and make sure you don't do that.

Nancy: Yeah. What happens if you spin your wheels?

Helen: You go deeper.

Nancy: That's what all the Yankees would do.

Helen: Yeah. The Yankees were doing that.

Nancy: I understand that it was possible to cut off a community just by closing one road.

[00:16:00]

Helen: My brother got lockjaw, tetanus, and he went to a hospital up close to Saint Augustine, and they said they couldn't do anything for him, so they brought him home to die. At the time, another brother was driving for Dr. [Hughlett 00:16:22], and Dr. Hughlett would come every day, and they would stay parked out at the road, and walk in. He said that he had to keep all tension away from my brother. Any noises. They blocked off the road, and there wasn't anybody that could travel on that road until he got better.

Nancy: He did get better?

Helen: He did get better. Dr. [Hughlett 00:16:59] came every day.

[00:17:00]

Nancy: That must have been quite a trip for Dr. [Hughlett 00:17:02].

Helen: From Cocoa.

Nancy: He was about the only doctor around I bet.

Helen: He was the only doctor. Then Dr. Counts came.

Nancy: Tell us a little bit about Dr. [Hughlett 00:17:16]. What was he like?

Helen: He was a marvelous person. A goatee and a little mustache. Once we all had diphtheria, and scarlet fever, my sister had it, and so we had to all move downstairs, and she was

[00:18:00] upstairs, and they got a private duty nurse for her. I used to go for walks with Ms. Cherry, and I think that's where I got the idea that maybe I wanted to be a nurse.

Nancy: You did study nursing. Where did you go?

Helen: Orange Memorial Hospital.

Nancy: Which is ...

Helen: In Orlando. We didn't have any hospitals around here.

Nancy: Do you remember when you got your nursing degree? When that was?

Helen: 1930. It was Orange Memorial, but now it's Orlando ... Big complex down there with hospitals all over the place.

Nancy: Did you come back home after you had your nursing degree?

Helen: No. I got married, and I lived in Orlando a while. Then I came back with two children,  
[00:19:00] and we lived here with my father and mother. That's all.

Nancy: Did you work as a nurse in this area?

Helen: Oh yes. I was one of the first nurses at the Wuesthoff hospital. There were only three nurses, and we did our shifts like that. It was a seven bed hospital.

Nancy: Must have just been a small building.

Helen: It was. Seven beds.

Nancy: How many doctors worked out of that hospital? Just a couple?

Helen: Two. Two doctors.

Nancy: If you needed to go to the hospital, I guess Wuesthoff was the only place to go.

[00:20:00]

Helen: That's right, and that was pretty late because everybody had to go to Orlando. When Roger was born in 1930, we had to go to Orlando.

Nancy: What was the seven bed hospital like? Was it just a couple of rooms, or was there sort of a examining room?

Helen: No, no. There was an emergency room. It was a nice hospital. Emergency room. Seven rooms, and some of them were double rooms. A couple of private rooms, and the  
[00:21:00] basement where we put patients sometimes. There was a nursing home that the supervisor lived in. I was always on night duty.

Nancy: Did you like night duty?

Helen: I liked night duty. I liked the delivery room.

Nancy: That was where you first got involved with helping to bring babies into the world.

Helen: I had already done that with a private doctor before the hospital was ever built.

Nancy: Was the Wuesthoff Hospital pretty much in the same place where it is now?

Helen: Yes. That hospital was the only hospital between Daytona and Melbourne. There was  
[00:22:00] a little hospital on the river at Melbourne. US 1 was just about the only way to get down here, so we had got accident patients all the time.

Nancy: I guess so.

Helen: Very busy hospital.

Nancy: Even at night.

Helen: Always at night.

Nancy: We might just continue on with the nursing, I guess during the war. The World War II, what were you up to then?

Helen: They were building the Banana River Naval Airbase at that time, and I went over with a  
[00:23:00] first aid ... Three room first aid office. There were about a thousand men working there, and I was the only nurse, and my doctor was in Cocoa.

Nancy: You were there all the time. All the days. You saw a lot of guys coming through.

Helen: That's right. I took care of everything I could, and then Dr. Kenaston would come if it needed more done.

Nancy: I bet you took care of things that were pretty serious. You did suturing and ...

Helen: I did some suturing.

Nancy: Well they were mostly healthy young men coming through, but I bet for them they could hardly believe the place they'd come to.

Helen: It was an outpost all right.

[00:24:00]  
Nancy: I heard some fellas who had come here first as part of the contingent that came through that station say that the mosquitoes were so bad.

Helen: Well the mosquitoes never bothered us. What we used to do as children was put our hands up on the screen, and leave it about two minutes, and jerk it away, and the mosquitoes would have outlined our hands. But we had mosquito brushes and we had insect powder, and truly it did not ... The mosquitoes didn't bother us all that much, but we lived on the river. Learned to swim before we learned to walk, and my mother didn't swim. My brother fell in way out, and she jumped in after him, and they like to both drown, when a neighbor came along and waded out and brought them back. Same person that had lockjaw. He was always getting into stuff.

[00:25:00]

Nancy: You must've done some fishing.

Helen: Always. Bent pins, and when we'd run out of fish hooks, and when we would go to town before we got the bridge we would have to go out on the boat and spend the day.

Nancy: When you went fishing, did you just fish from the shore, or did you go out?

Helen: Out on the docks. We had two docks. One for the bigger boats to come in, and then we had a little dock. My father had a store with everything in it. He had a icebox that would hold 200 pounds of ice, and we would get ice from Cocoa, and the people would come and get their cold drinks and buy their groceries.

[00:26:00]

Nancy: Would they come by car or by boat?

Helen: Walk.

Nancy: They would walk.

Helen: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Nancy: The store was right her in Lotus?

Helen: Right here. Right in front of the house.

Nancy: Wow. Well now as well as having a store, did he also plant citrus trees, like ...

Helen: He had an enormous orange grove and citrus grove. Everything. He could grow anything. He would have the Easter cactus, and the Christmas cactus growing out of the same plant. He did all the budding of the trees for all the people. The Stewarts stayed about two miles north of us, he did all the budding for Ms. Stewart. He could grow anything. He gave me a half an acre of land, of his choice land, once, and I was to ... I planted tomatoes, and I was going to school at the same time. I have thought since then, I did not have to weed the tomatoes. The minute I'd come home from school I'd be out in that tomato patch, but somehow the weeds didn't grow, and they got watered, and I just sort of took care of them. I know now that while I was in school my dad took care of them. I made \$30 on my little crop.

[00:27:00]

[00:28:00]

Nancy: That's pretty good money in those days.

Helen: Yes it was.

Nancy: I guess we're at the end of this tape. Let's take us a break and put another one in.

Helen: Yes.

Nancy: You're ready to take a break.

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Nancy: Tell me some more about your dad and his growing things.

Helen: Dad could grow anything. One thing in particular, when I was living in Cape Canaveral, and I was trying to have sweet peas. I got some, and I came here, and I said to him, "I got some sweet peas to grow." He says, "Come around back. I want you to see something." There they were. About six feet high with all, and mine were about like this. He crossbred a lot of his fruits. A lot of the mangoes. The packing house was, I thought, enormous. Again, he used the artesian water to wash the fruit, and grade it, and then the different sizes went into the different bins. He would buy fruit from small growers, and pack it, and send it. He had a marvelous private order trade. People would come from all over the country to, all over the United States, to come down and see where they had gotten this good fruit and order fruit. His private trade was fantastic.

[00:29:00]

[00:30:00]

Nancy: Where was his packing house?

Helen: Right where we are sitting now.

Nancy: Here on the island.

Helen: Right here. Yes.

Nancy: The little growers would truck their fruit in?

Helen: Or we would go get it. Go pick it.

Nancy: As kids did you ever help out at the ...

Helen: Sure. We always did ... I was into everything that he did. As I said to, his private order trade just grew so much that ... He would get the nicest letters from people receiving the fruit, because then their Christmas orders would go to different people, and then they'd start ordering fruit from him.

[00:31:00]

Nancy: Well yeah. They would just get bigger and bigger.

Helen: He loved every bit of it.

Nancy: How would he ship it out?

Helen: By boat. It would go to Cocoa and get on the train and go.

Nancy: That's amazing. I know that the island fruit is just special. Even among the Indian River fruit.

Helen: Right. He developed, if that is the word for it, the mango, Osteen mango, which was a huge mango. The [Inisis? 00:31:51] were using it. They finally got some cuttings, or whatever, and they reported it in the paper, about the Osteen mango, and they had the Osteen with a small letter, with a small o. I resented it somewhat, so I called the newspaper, and I said, "I thought when you used a person's name that you used a capital O." There was quite a piece in the paper about it being a capital OST double EN mango.

[00:32:00]

Nancy: You ate pretty well out here.

Helen: Pardon me?

Nancy: The food was pretty good out here. You ate well.

Helen: Yes. Very well. Vegetable gardens, and of course with the store ... When Mr. Provo had a store in Georgiana, and we used to go up there every Christmas to see. Maybe he had something we didn't, so we could do some of our Christmas shopping. When he quit having the store, dad bought his stock. He said that I could get 10% of anything that I sold of that stock. I just had my little list of the things that I stole ... Sold, not stole. I made some money that way. I made sure the people bought things when they came in.

[00:33:00]

Nancy: Would you guide them to the things that came from the Provo store.

Helen: Sure. In fact my father accused me of guiding them away from the stuff he had in his store to the Provo stuff.

Nancy: He was right.

Helen: That's right.

[00:34:00]

Nancy: Did all the kids work in the store? Just you?

Helen: No. Just me.

Nancy: Were you the oldest?

Helen: No. I was the seventh child. As I said, my oldest brother was running the mail boat. My next brother was a carpenter. My sister, who was 9 years older, was a school teacher.

Then the next two helped on the place here. By that time, the children ... I was here, and then the others were children. Just children.

Nancy: Sound like you had a marvelous childhood.

[00:35:00]

Helen: I did. I did. Really and truly. We did. There's only two of us left now. My sister and me.

Nancy: Well, I can imagine between the garden, and the fruit trees, and the store, and fishing ...

Helen: And the post office.

Nancy: And the post office.

Helen: My mother was post mistress.

Nancy: You stayed pretty busy out here. There wasn't much idle time.

Helen: No. No. I don't remember ever getting lonely. My father was, as I said, county commissioner for five terms, so he stayed busy. He could take our algebra problems and work them. Not so they could be accepted. They weren't done in the way they had to be done. The way we did them, but he could come up with the answer.

[00:36:00]

Nancy: He didn't have formal schooling then.

Helen: Formal schooling, no, but he was a brilliant person.

Nancy: Let's talk just a little bit about the sort of wildlife around here. You must've seen all kinds of things.

Helen: Sure. Snakes, and wildcats, and gophers, and turtles. My brother and I, when we go to the Banana River, we had wire, a wire pan, out in Banana River, and we would go and get diamond back turtles, and bring them, and put them here. People would come and buy those. Northern people.

[00:37:00]

Nancy: Must have become part of the store I guess.

Helen: That was our project. Yes.

Nancy: Would your mother cook some of the things that you found? The turtle?

Helen: She would just ... No. She wouldn't cook turtle. She'd just get up in the morning, and she'd start cooking, and she would fix a whole bunch of stuff. Then we just sort of ate

the rest of the day. She cooked early in the morning. What she had cooked we ate the rest of the day.

Nancy: She didn't spend all day in the kitchen.

Helen: No she did not. She had other things that she wanted to do. She was a ... Someone said  
[00:38:00] that she held dances up over at the packing house. I don't remember that she did that, but I do remember that they had boxed suppers up there, and that each girl would fix a pretty box with fried chicken. Good food in it. They'd fix bows and things like that, and then the boys, the young men, would bid on those, and they would find out which girl had fixed it, so they'd be sure and get her box, so they could have supper together.  
[00:39:00] I didn't know how to do my box, so I just copied my sister's. I didn't know that she had told some boy what hers was going to look like, but anyways, he bid on mine, and bid highly, and he bought mine. I didn't hear the last of that for quite a while.

Nancy: I don't guess so. Well that's an interesting way to have girls and boys meet.

Helen: Mm-hmm (affirmative). The proceeds from that would go to benefit someone who needed things that they couldn't afford.

Nancy: What other things did you do for fun on Saturdays and Sundays?

Helen: I don't know. There were always so many of us, there was always something to do. Now  
[00:40:00] we did not have a church, but once in a while traveling minister would come by, and they always stayed with us when they would come. I guess we had the biggest house. Then we would, at the school, we would have ... He would preach, and all the people would come. That was only just occasionally. That was when we were stilling going to the school.

Nancy: Before the bridge had been built.

Helen: Before we went to Cocoa school.

Nancy: Did the little school have any programs. Did you put on ...

Helen: Always. Always.

Nancy: Tell us about those.

Helen: They had little graduation programs, and they had Christmas parties there. Fourth of  
[00:41:00] July we'd always go to Melbourne, and they usually had a parade, and for May Day we went to Cocoa, and I was always in the Maypole dance, and we went Eau Gallie for some holiday, I've forgotten. Anyway, we didn't miss much really.

Nancy: It sounded like people knew how to have fun together.

Helen: Yes. We did. I don't think any of us were bored ever.

Nancy: Did you all play musical instruments?

[00:42:00]

Helen: I started taking piano lessons before I started school. From Ms. Biller. Then when I started to Cocoa school, I went to another music teacher. I used to go on Saturdays to take my music lesson.

Nancy: Did you have a piano at home?

Helen: Yes. Always.

Nancy: You were practicing.

Helen: Never could play. For about 18 years I took music lessons.

Nancy: Your brothers and sisters take music lessons too?

Helen: My sister did. She played some.

Nancy: Well this was before there was even radio, when you were little.

Helen: When radio came out, we got one, and my brother and I sat up all night just hearing a word here and there. We were just ecstatic over just hearing stuff like that. When new things would come along we would get them.  
[00:43:00]

Nancy: Do you remember any radio shows that came out around ... I guess Melbourne had the first radio station.

Helen: I don't know where it came from.

Nancy: You would listen when you had a chance.

Helen: Yes.

Nancy: There would be some talk shows with a local thing, but they'd also have some programs that came from other places.

Helen: Yes. One of my brothers and I would get up at twelve o'clock to hear Guy Lombardo. That was our favorite.

Nancy: Would that be a New Year's program?

Helen: Yeah.

Nancy: New Year's Eve?

Helen: Yes. Then he would come on just about every night at 12.

Nancy: Kind of late to get up.

[00:44:00]

Helen: Yeah, but we would get up and listen to it.

Nancy: There were some tourists that came down this way. I know they had some hotels over in Cocoa. Did you ever visit the hotels over there? There was ...

Helen: The Indian River Hotel. That's where we had our junior prom and our senior prom. Now that has been torn down, and now it's the Indian River Club Condo, and I live ... That is where I live.

Nancy: You have the same view you would've had there on prom night.

Helen: Right.

[00:45:00]

Nancy: It was some kind of an attraction, I guess, brought in the tourist. Why do you think they came here?

Helen: The weather is so great. The people are so great. I just think it's ideal.

Nancy: I think you're right. There wasn't much else to draw them, except maybe some fishing.

Helen: That's right. The beaches.

Nancy: The beaches. Did you all ever go to the beach?

Helen: Yes. Captain Cone had a stern wheel boat, and at least twice a year he would take us, everybody on the island, he would take us over to Cocoa Beach, and we would walk across the peninsula. They had nasty sand spurs that we would have to walk through.

[00:46:00] Then we would stay all day and get burnt up. Come home, and have had a wonderful day.

Nancy: Took your food with you.

Helen: Yes.

Nancy: Would you ever cook over there on the beach? Would you ...

Helen: No.

Nancy: Just brought cold food. There were a few settlers over on the beach side. Down at the Cape.

Helen: Yes.

Nancy: Not too many. Did you visit with them when you'd go over?

Helen: My sister married a Chandler over there. Then we did visit over there. By time we had bridges. She lived at Cape Canaveral, and she taught at the lighthouse. The school. Where my children went to school.

Nancy: Your children went to school over at the lighthouse school? Were you living over there?

Helen: When I moved over there.

Nancy: When did you move there?

Helen: 1938 I guess it was.

[00:47:00]

Nancy: That was wilderness there, even compared to here I guess. No stores. Was there a lighthouse keeper still at that time?

Helen: Yes. The Quartermans are the ones who came to keep the lighthouse. That was the uncles of my husband.

Nancy: You had a chance to go up in the lighthouse?

Helen: Yes. We took the children up there. When we got up there, and I turned around to say to my husband, "Don't let them get close to the edge." I looked back and they were plastered against the building. They were just as afraid of falling over the rail as I was. It was fun, and we were way up.

[00:48:00]

Nancy: There was no way to get that high anywhere else around here.

Helen: No. It was nice.

Nancy: You could see.

Helen: Yes. Everything.

Nancy: Could you see back over to Merritt Island from over there?

Helen: Yes, Yes. You could see all over. As far as your eye could see really.

Nancy: Yeah. There were a lot of ships that went up and down the coast off there off the Atlantic.

Helen: Yes. During the war we used to have watch. As the ships would come around ...

Nancy: I know they were worried about the Germans.

[00:49:00]

Helen: Yes. There was a casino at Cocoa beach, and the watch took place on top of the casino. As the ships would come around the cape, which is way out in the ocean, it's where they would torpedo the boats. A lot of times there was stuff all over the beach that had washed in from when the Germans were trying to get over here.

Nancy: Well they would hit freighters and just anything I guess. Did you ever see any of the ship wreck survivors come in?

Helen: Yes.

Nancy: Tell me about that.

[00:50:00]

Helen: Just that they came to the hospital some of them.

Nancy: Down at the Banana River Naval Air Station ...

Helen: No, no.

Nancy: At Wuesthoff.

Helen: By this time Wuesthoff had ...

Nancy: They would wash up on shore and somebody would take them to the hospital. That must have been kind of a frightening time.

Helen: It was. It really was.

Nancy: Did you have to blackout your windows.

Helen: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Nancy: Your car headlights.

Helen: Yes. Yes you did.

Nancy: Did that stop people from travelling around?

Helen: No. Not really. We rationed everything. I want a break.

Nancy: Okay. Let's cut.

[00:51:00]

Nancy: You were going to tell us a little about your sister going off to school.

Helen: She went to the one room school, and they only taught through the ninth grade, and she didn't have any other place to go, so she went through the ... She was smart. She went through the ninth grade twice. Then Gainesville, the University of Florida, was an all men's school, and there was no place for to go, but in the summer, they had summer school there, and she could go to Gainesville. She went and got her teacher's certificate at the University of Florida.

[00:52:00] My dad and I went to see her one time, and we went on the trains, and it was a coal burning train, and I had my head ... My hair was whiter than it is now, and I had my head stuck out of the window, and I guess the coal dust got on me or something, but anyway, I was just as happy as could be. In two minutes time, she had me in the tub and was scrubbing my head, but everybody was pleased to see us when we got there. She said I looked like a coon with my black eyes all full of coal dust.

[00:53:00] As I said, she taught me when I was in the seventh grade. She was good teacher, but sure used me as an example. We had ... The exemption if you got grade, certain grades, you would be exempt from taking your tests. I didn't like taking tests, so I worked real hard, and I would be exempt from that, but not when she was my teacher. I took the test anyway, because she didn't want them to think that she was partial. Which of course made me mad. She was an excellent teacher. Then she taught over at, as I said, the Cape Canaveral school at the lighthouse.

Nancy: How many children were there going to school over there do you think?

Helen: About 15. I hate to look away but ... How many Roger?

[00:54:00]

Roger: About that many.

Nancy: Yeah. How many families do you suppose lived within that school area?

Helen: About 10.

Nancy: I guess there would be little programs and things like that at that school. Would that be a way for everybody to get together or ...

Helen: They would have their exercise program. Now my daughter went to Cocoa School when I lived here, at Lotus, and then we moved to Cape Canaveral. By that time it's time for Roger to go to school also.

Nancy: How long did you live in Cape Canaveral.

Helen: About 40 years.

[00:55:00]

Nancy:

Oh my. You were there until the time when the government decided that they wanted that property.

Helen: They did. I didn't know whether anybody would be interested, but when I went over I found out that my husband had sold some property during the boom, and people had quit paying for it. I foreclosed on it and got it. Cost about \$500 to clear it up, and maybe a little bit more. I got the deed back, and one day, someone knocked on my door. It was a federal man. He said he'd come to take our property. To give us \$500 for it. I said, "No." I'd worked too hard. They couldn't have it. The next thing I knew, he came back with a \$500 check, and he said, "Here is 20 acres up in Cape Canaveral, where they are going to put the missile base." I said, "Well I won't give you a deed." Well he said, "We don't need the deed. We have your property." That is what happened to our land.

[00:56:00]

I was working at Wuesthoff the day the first missile was going to go, and so they kept everybody from ... They would stop them at the foot of the bridge at the road. I was on night duty, and I waited, and I waited, and I waited, and finally I just got tired of waiting. I thought what if it blows up and blows the sky up there. Just take me right out of my bed then. I'm going anyways. I went up, and of course they had postponed it. One missile had exploded right over ... I was writing. Doing some book work. The explosion was loud it knocked the pen right out of my hand and went down in the river just shortly south of us.

[00:57:00]

Nancy: Okay. We better cut. I think we're at the end of this tape.

Nancy: Brevard County Historical Commission, 1995. Tell me a little bit more about what it was like living out there in the cape in the 30s and the 40s.

[00:58:00]

Helen: My husband was a commercial fisherman, and he mainly fished at night. I was working at Wuesthoff Hospital.

Nancy: Tell me what your husband fished for. Would he net?

Helen: Net. Gill net I guess they call it. I didn't know too much about that. For mullet and trout. Anything that they could catch. Then he would take the fish to Angel City, and ...

Nancy: He was fishing in the Banana River.

Helen: In the Banana River.

Nancy: Maybe sometimes over in the Indian River, or would he stay ...

Helen: No, no. He'd stay in Banana River.

[00:59:00]

Nancy: He stayed in Banana River. Well he brought home fish to eat at home too I bet.

Helen: Yes. Yes. Very good. You get very used to fresh fish, and then you don't like the other kind very much. While we were living at Cape Canaveral we would build a cabana type thing every summer. Well we had to build it every summer because people would come and burn it down sometime during the year. We would go out and have picnics on the beach and then we would [Seine 00:59:34]. Now that was just great fun. I would want to be at the end that was furthest out in the ocean, and we would get fish and fry the fish. We would meet at one of the lady's houses for a prayer meeting type thing, because it was so far to go to ... At first we had to go all the over the Cocoa Beach and go across. Then they built the bridge that was closer.

[01:00:00]

Nancy: Did you have a garden there at your place?

Helen: Yes. My father-in-law was a great gardener. He kept all the ... Us in the fresh fruits. He also had an orange grove. My father would come over and buy his fruit. We would pick it, and take it for his private order.

Nancy: Did you have livestock there?

[01:01:00]

Helen: We had a cow. We went to up to Cape Canaveral. We were living in what was Artesia then. We went up to the cape and got a cow. Bought a cow, and walked it home. Except it ended up dragging us, trying to keep up. Anyway, that was quite an experience, but we had a cow. We had fresh milk and butter. It was during that time that the depression hit. The banks went broke. Nobody had any money. Everybody was in the same boat.

Nancy: People traded for things. Didn't use cash so much.

[01:02:00]

Helen: That's right. When the banks went broke, my father had owned stock in the bank. It was guaranteed that any stockholder would put that much again. Money that they in the stock, back into the bank, to help it survive. That went broke. Then the fruit fly came along and stripped the groves, and they burned the trees, and they ... There was a time there that it was a terrible depression.

Nancy: A lot of people gave up their property at that time. They couldn't pay the taxes.

Helen: That's right. It was bad.

[01:03:00]

Nancy: Rough, but if you had a garden and you had a cow ...

Helen: Yes. We got along fine. I guess we did better than the average person did.

Nancy: I think people in the cities suffered worst. They didn't have as many things to fall back on. They couldn't go fishing.

Helen: Yes, and fish.

Nancy: Did you ever get shrimp? Did you go shrimping?

Helen: No. I never did.

Nancy: Yeah. The hunting must have been pretty good over there on the Cape side. Did you husband like to hunt?

[01:04:00]

Helen: No. I went to Melbourne Hospital. This is when I lived in Lotus, during the depression. I had to go to Cocoa and get a bus and go to Melbourne. I was on 12 hour duty, and I got paid two dollars, and my bus fare was 40 cents. We felt extremely fortunate that we ...

Nancy: Had that coming in. Yeah. Jobs were hard to come by. Paying jobs. The weather was another factor. Did you have some big storms come through?

Helen: Yes. We never knew when a storm was coming, was the only thing, because before radio, it would just be here and then it would sort of tear the place up. My dad said that he couldn't stay and see his place ruined again, so he went to Deland, and it took him three days to come home, because it hit in Deland instead of hitting right by us. We didn't, of course, know where it was going like we do now. It took him about three days to come home, and so he never ran from a storm again. My mother was sure that Florida was going to break off from the main land, and she lived in horror of that. When we'd have storm, she'd gather us all up in downstairs in her arms full of children just knowing that Florida was going to break off.

Nancy: Wow. That must've been scary. The wind would be howling ...

[01:06:00]

Helen: Yes. We didn't know how long it'd last, or where it was going, or anything.

Nancy: There was a pretty big storm that came through here in the 20s. I think there was one in 26, and one in ...

Helen: Yes. There was a lot of them.

Nancy: You remember a number of these.

Helen: Yes. Yes I do.

Nancy: There haven't been too many lately that have come close.

Helen: No.

Nancy: We had some flooding this last summer, but I guess it used to flood back in the 60s and in the 40s there were a lot of wet summers.

Helen: Yes. The water would go all the way half way out to the road.

Nancy: Yep. We can cut for a second. Well now, Cocoa was always going to town. Can you tell me a little bit about what downtown Cocoa was like?

[01:07:00]

Helen: On the Delannoy, I worked for Dr. Page, he was on the second story, and down below was Rubins clothing store, and across the street was Travis hardware, at the place where my father bought me three dresses for a dollar.

Nancy: At Travis Hardware you got clothing?

Helen: Yeah. At the foot of the bridge was a fish house, and the library was on Delannoy. I worked in a doctor's office, upstairs over [Liggett's 01:07:52] drug store. I could survey the area pretty well. I worked there, and then the post office was different, because we finally built a office where the old post office was, and then Dr. Page moved to that office.

[01:08:00]

Nancy: When you were working in public health you were in Cocoa too.

Helen: I was in Cocoa. In the arcade. Where Margauxs is now. I had lunch there with my granddaughter and looked at where the health department was, and while I was in the public health service, the Salk vaccine came out. That was one of the biggest gathering of parents and teachers and public health, because we gave 600 injections in one day to school children, and we had to get the parent's permission. We had to get the child's name, age, everything, because this was something entirely new, and they wanted records for ... It was all done at the school house. I involved all the parents, and all the teachers, and all the public health that I could get, and all the nurses, and all the doctors. We were all involved in it, and we gave 600 shots in one day.

[01:09:00]

Nancy: Would you go to different schools or ... The high school?

[01:10:00]

Helen: We would ... No. We had it set up at the elementary school where everybody was to come and get it. The same happened in Melbourne, and Eau Gallie, and Titusville. It was a big production.

Nancy: Did the black children come over to the school?

Helen: Yes. They got their injections too.

Nancy: It must've been hard to explain to a lot of people what this was for. Although ...

Helen: It was. In fact, it was ... I gave talks to parents for at least ... It was publicized in the paper. Then there were talks given on it for at least a month before we started doing this. Everybody was well aware of it, and it was a good thing. Very good.

[01:11:00]

Nancy: For people who don't know what the Salk vaccine was for. Tell us about that.

Helen: Polio.

Nancy: Were a lot of kids getting polio?

Helen: Yes, and it was so devastating when they did get it that ... At the health department, also, we would have clinics for people to get diphtheria and whooping cough ... Shots. Scarlet fever.

Nancy: So there were vaccines that had become available.

Helen: Yes. Yes, but they were already available.

Nancy: But not for the polio.

Helen: No. That was something brand new. That's the reason such records had to be kept on it.

Nancy: And it worked.

[01:12:00]

Helen: A lot of the parents were afraid to have it done. I think it was compulsory.

Nancy: They had to do it to keep the kids in school. I know that they do that now. You have to have the shots to go to school.

Helen: Yep.

Nancy: Also downtown there was a movie theater. Do you remember what that theater opened?

Helen: I remember when the ... There was already a theater there, but when the ... Aladdin opened, I went to it. Sort of dressed up. When they were going to do ... Put it on the historical society. They asked me about the theater opening, and I was trying to tell them when it was, and who was there, and what show was on, and I said, "What're the other people saying?" They said, "We haven't found anybody else who knows anything about it."

[01:13:00]

Nancy: So you were there for the grand opening. The official opening.

Helen: Yes. Yes. Very dressed up. Feeling out of place. Bashful.

Nancy: There must have been a lot of people there at the opening. Do you remember what the movie was?

Helen: [Monsieur Beaucaire 01:13:33] I think.

Nancy: That was a big change for town, to have a big theater. Was there music? Did they have an organ or a piano?

[01:14:00]

Helen: They had a piano. I think that there was a theater there before that.

Nancy: Kind of a smaller place where they would have shows.

Helen: Yes. Yes, because of the silent movies. I remember when my children were little that they went to the theater.

Nancy: What was the state theater later I guess. Do you remember if there were any vaudeville shows that came through or any travelling performers?

Helen: Yes. Yes there were some, and we had circuses come into town. Yeah. We were pretty up to do date with everything.

Nancy: You remember any famous performers that came?

Helen: No. I really don't remember.

Nancy: There were a couple of newspapers around.

[01:15:00]

Helen: The Star Advocate, and The Cocoa Tribune.

Nancy: I've heard The Cocoa Tribune referred to as the mullet wrapper.

Helen: Oh.

Nancy: You all didn't call it that back then, did you?

Helen: No, no. We were proud of The Cocoa Tribune.

Nancy: What kind of news would it report?

Helen: Anything anybody would write in about that they could ... My sister wrote for her area. She would send in news.

Nancy: Would the news be, I guess, people getting married, and ...

Helen: Yes. Having tea parties, and birthday parties, and ...

[01:16:00]

Nancy: I imagine that the paper also covered some politics.

Helen: Yes. We had politicians.

Nancy: Your dad was a politician for a while.

Helen: Yes. Yes he was. Five terms. County commissioner.

Nancy: Do you remember him running for office?

Helen: Yeah.

Nancy: What would be involved in a campaign in those days?

Helen: Not much really. I don't remember that he went around and talked to people. That it was just word of mouth. That's just about all.

Nancy: People would hear that he was running, and that was enough information.

[01:17:00]

Helen: Yes. They knew him, and I guess he would go to Titusville around.

Nancy: Everybody knew everybody.

Helen: Yes. Practically.

Nancy: There weren't too many strangers in the early days.

Helen: That's right. Just winter visitors that would come, and they would go to the Indian River Hotel, and the Brevard Hotel.

Nancy: Let's see what else would be good to talk about. You have a note here about an Easter egg hunt. Where would you do that?

Helen: Ms. Munson lived in Georgiana, and every year the school bus would stop and have a Easter egg hunt.

Nancy: Tell me about that. How would that go?

[01:18:00]

Helen: It'd just be great. The parents would send Easter eggs up to her place also. It was just great fun. The bus would come. We'd get out of school early, and it's real close to where the Georgiana church is, right down from there. It was just something we looked forward to.

Nancy: The eggs were colored, and who would hide them?

Helen: Ms. Munson I guess.

Nancy: Were they hard to find?

Helen: Yes, because she lived on a great big place, and all sorts of things were on there.

Nancy: She'd hide them high and low ...

Helen: There'd be a first prize, and a second prize, and the booby prize, and all this business.

[01:19:00]

Nancy: Well it sounds like you all knew how to have fun when you had time.

Helen: We did. I don't that we missed anything.

Nancy: Cut. Five, four ... Tell us what we're looking at here.

Helen: That's my father, and that's the packing house. The front entrance to it. It goes way back, and he has a fish in his hand.

Nancy: Looks like the corners of the porch are held up with coquina. Can that be?

Helen: Rocks. Yes.

Nancy: Okay.

Helen: The dock would be right out from here.

Nancy: Yes. We can see a little bit of the dock.

Helen: We had two docks. One little dock. Then the long one where the big boats would come in. The little one is where just where little boats could come.

[01:20:00]

Nancy: Get closer.

Helen: To the store that he had.

Nancy: Five, four, three. Okay. Tell us what we're looking at now.

Helen: The United States Department of Agriculture asked my father to try growing tobacco here, so that when the North Carolina was no longer frozen, they had always had to plant so late that they would already have the plants started, and the seeds ready to plant as soon as the land thawed. He did this, and it was a very successful enterprise.

Nancy: What was your father's name again?

[01:21:00]

Helen: Samuel A Osteen.

Nancy: What're we seeing on this one?

Helen: This is my father with his banana plants. He could grow just about anything.

Nancy: He was trim man.

Helen: Yes.

Nancy: Probably worked pretty hard.

Helen: He never over ate. Never.

Nancy: Cut.

Cameraman: Get a closer shot.

Nancy: Okay.

Helen: This is Diane [Everson 01:21:48], my sister's daughter and my father.

Nancy: Must've been Easter. I see an Easter basket.

[01:22:00]

Helen: With an Easter basket. We used have Easter egg hunts here. He was great at hiding eggs.

Nancy: Where would he put them?

Helen: Everywhere, and we never could find all of them.

Nancy: Cut. Who do we have here.

Helen: This is my son and daughter, and it's taken in Cape Canaveral.

Nancy: They're all dressed up.

Helen: Yes. Getting ready to go to Sunday school, or go to school.

Nancy: Look at that.

Helen: Beverly and Roger.

Nancy: Tell us what you can about this picture.

Helen: This is a meeting of the first port authority, and they're getting ready to dig the port.

[01:23:00]

Nancy: Can you identify any of those fellas?

Helen: No.

Nancy: Okay. I can just read for the back. Abe Fortenberry, Bob Geiger, Noah Butt, Sam Knutson, and Ben Lewis. Good. That's a great picture of those guys. Who have we got here.

Helen: This is my father-in-law, Wyatt Chandler, and he's standing by one of his big fruit trees.

Nancy: When did he come to this area?

Helen: In the early 1900s.

[01:24:00]

Female: He was the lighthouse.

Helen: Yeah.

Nancy: Was he involved with the lighthouse?

Helen: No.

Nancy: They moved it ...

Helen: He came down here to help move it back. They have moved it out, and then he came because they were going to move it back. This is what brought him down here, and he met his wife here.

Nancy: Decided he liked it. He looks like a fella who would enjoy some frontier living.

Helen: He was.

Nancy: Cut. What are we looking at here?

Helen: This is my father-in-law Wyatt Chandler, and he has just come in from fishing.

Nancy: What's he got there?

Helen: A net. A gill net.

Nancy: They used that to ...

Helen: Mullet fishing.

[01:25:00]

Nancy: Cut. Okay. What we got here?

Helen: This is George Mills Quarterman, lighthouse keeper, and Floyd Quarterman, the last lighthouse keeper.

Nancy: Looks like they're out there near the lighthouse somewhere with all that sand and ...

Helen: They were my husband's relatives.

Nancy: Five ... What's this?

Helen: This is a picture of my office in the arcade in Cocoa. I'm a public health nurse, and this is my daughter, who is also a registered nurse.

Nancy: You mean your sister don't you. This is your sister or your daughter?

Helen: My daughter.

[01:26:00]

Nancy: Oh. Excuse me.

Helen: My daughter. She graduated from Southern Baptist in New Orleans.

Nancy: I didn't realize you wore a uniform.

Helen: Definitely.

Nancy: With a hat?

Helen: Yes.

Nancy: Now was there a doctor that worked in this office, or just a nurse?

Helen: There was one doctor for the county, but there was nurse in each city. Titusville and Melbourne.