

**Transcript of an Oral History Interview in the collection of the  
BREVARD COUNTY HISTORICAL COMMISSION  
308 Forrest Ave., Cocoa, FL 32922**

Nancy Yasecko: This is Brevard County Historical Commission Oral History Video Project, an interview with Marian Grant in Merritt Island, Florida, February the 6th, 1994. Interviewer: Nancy Yasecko. Cameraman: Robert Gilbert. Camera: Sony DXC M7. Recorder: Sony BVW-35. Copyright: Brevard County Historical Commission, 1994.

Robert Gilbert: And rolling.

Nancy Yasecko: Tell us [00:00:30] your name, and where you were born and when.

Marian Grant: Marian Hatton Hallonquist LaRoche, after I got married, of course. I was born in Charleston, South Carolina in Roper Hospital at noon, 12 o'clock. And that's odd because I'm a night person.

Nancy Yasecko: Well, your family came to Florida before that, though, didn't they? When did they come?

Marian Grant: They came to Florida in 18, I mean 19. What do I mean? I mean 1876 or something [00:01:00] like that. Way back yonder. And then they went back home, and then they-- some of them, and then they got lonesome for the ones who stayed, and they came back.

Nancy Yasecko: They were from South Carolina, which had suffered greatly during the Civil War.

Marian Grant: That's right.

Nancy Yasecko: That must have been ...

Marian Grant: They lost everything.

Nancy Yasecko: ... Part of the reason they came south, I guess.

Marian Grant: I don't know exactly why they came to Florida, really. Except [00:01:30] that John Sams, my mother's brother, had come, and they came out to see him and liked it.

Nancy Yasecko: It's just a wilderness then.

Marian Grant: Mm-hmm (affirmative). One house on this whole island.

Nancy Yasecko: Do you know why they picked Merritt Island, of all places?

Marian Grant: Have no idea.

Nancy Yasecko: And what was the town that they decided to settle in, in Merritt Island?

Marian Grant: Well now, they settled up [00:02:00] in Courtenay, but the house that they ... The only house that was on that island was way down beyond ... I can't remember. I was where the Osteens lived and the Stewarts. And then, of course, you know Indianola was here, but I don't know why we didn't settle there.

Nancy Yasecko: There weren't too many children around.

Marian Grant: Well back yonder, all of them had children, of course, [00:02:30] which played together. I'm the only one that came along and had nobody to play with, because we lived a mile and a half north-- south of everybody else. Which is north and south, here?

Nancy Yasecko: That was is going to be south.

Marian Grant: Well, we lived south of Courtenay, and the rest of them lived either in Courtenay or north of Courtenay.

Nancy Yasecko: There was a little school there.

Marian Grant: One little school, one little room. My mother was the [00:03:00] teacher, and taught eight grades. And one day, she looked out the window and this little boy ... That's the second story about a snake ... He'd run a few feet, and then he'd stoop down and try to pick something up. So she went out to investigate, and it was Brady Sams, and there was a little ground rattler. And he was trying to pick it up, and if he had of ... Of course, it could only bite you. They are so tiny, and their mouth is so small, that if you have shoes, you're safe. [00:03:30] But of course, if they'd have bitten him on his finger, it would have been curtains because we were so many miles from a doctor or any place.

Nancy Yasecko: I guess you ran into a rattler once too, when you were [crosstalk 00:03:42]

Marian Grant: Oh, yeah. I used to practice croquet and papa saw me going under this tree, so he went to investigate, and this snake was coiled and the ball had rolled right up into the coil, and I was just stooping down to pick it up. [00:04:00] And he killed the snake.

Nancy Yasecko: What kind of snake was that?

Marian Grant: Rattle snake. And I have the rattles.

Nancy Yasecko: I guess there were a lot of snakes.

Marian Grant: Yes, and I've had a lot of things right on this place. I was walking one day when my sister-in-law grabbed me. And I stepped--Sam stepped over the snake, and I don't know why Sam didn't see it, but then I was [00:04:30] about to step over it when she grabbed me back, which that was a six foot snake.

Nancy Yasecko: There was other wildlife here.

Marian Grant: Bears. Wild cats. Mama used to be scared to death because, have you ever heard a wild cat cry out? Well, it sounds like a woman in agony. It really does. And papa, when he would be off at night [00:05:00] and this cat would scream ... You know, papa's first home didn't have any doors and windows, you know. Just had cloth hanging up in the doors and windows, until they could get them shipped in.

Nancy Yasecko: Kind of worry about some of the wildlife coming in, wouldn't you?

Marian Grant: My mother was a city girl, and now that wouldn't have bothered me so much, but Mama was very scary about country things, wildlife and [00:05:30] all. Papa stumbled one day and fell, and knocked himself out, and when he came to, this bear was straddling him, nuzzled his neck and sniffed around his ears and eyes and his hair, and finally the bear went that way. Papa said he got up and ran that way just as fast he could go. But they had lots of wild tales to tell.

Nancy Yasecko: Did he ever go hunting?

Marian Grant: No, he didn't like [00:06:00] hunting. He didn't like killing. They only killed when they had to have food to eat. He use to like --he used to fish some. Papa spent most of his time planting vegetables, and he had a beautiful garden, and Mama had the most beautiful roses you've ever seen in your life.

Nancy Yasecko: Where would she get the starts for those?

Marian Grant: I have no idea. I was just a little girl. [00:06:30] But she'd send off and get them. Of course, they didn't have mail or anything. They had old Hiawatha, which I have a picture of, and it would go once a week to Cocoa.

Nancy Yasecko: When you say Hiawatha, what do you mean?

Marian Grant: A boat. Uncle Dick's boat. Uncle Bob had the Red Wing, and one day, Aunt Lee stepped ... Aunt Lee was very dignified, and she stepped onto the Red Wing, when all of a sudden it began to drift like this, [00:07:00] and her feet went further and further and further apart, and in the water she went. If it had happened to Aunt Mattie, it wouldn't have been so funny, because she was a dare devil, but Aunt Lee, was so dignified and so proper.

Nancy Yasecko: What kind of boats were these?

Marian Grant: I can't tell you. Just a boat.

Nancy Yasecko: Were they powered or sail?

Marian Grant: The Red Wing had a cabin. Well, they both had cabins, [00:07:30] but the Hiawatha really was to carry groceries and fruit. See, there was no packing house when they first came here. But you know, I've gone for a full circle. Mama and Papa and Uncle Dick and all built a big packing house, which they all worked in. Now my daughter and son-in-law have built

a small packing house, which they work in, and they're packing a lot [00:08:00] of their own fruit.

Nancy Yasecko: Some of the same trees, I guess.

Marian Grant: No, all of these are new trees. I gave Joe the grove, and he asked me if I would mind if he took out the old trees and planted new ones, and I told him no, I turned over the grove to him, he could do anything. And so he planted these trees.

Nancy Yasecko: Joe is your son?

Marian Grant: Son-in-law.

Nancy Yasecko: Son-in-law. Well, your father started a lot of citrus trees.

Marian Grant: Yes, and he got ... I guess it came [00:08:30] from the Dummit Grove. I don't know where else it would come from, but he'd cut the trees and you know, squeeze out the fruit, and he'd plant ... While he was waiting for the grove to come along, is when he had the vegetables and all. It's all told in much better in the book than I'm telling it now.

Nancy Yasecko: It's hard to remember exactly, but he would ship his fruit out by boat?

Marian Grant: [00:09:00] Yeah.

Nancy Yasecko: And I guess, pretty much everything happened by boat.

Marian Grant: Everything. There was no roads.

Nancy Yasecko: None at all?

Marian Grant: And the first roads were very crooked, and the reason for that was people would just turn the horses, you know, let the reins dangle, kind of, and the horses would have to go around roots or around puddles and around trees, so the first roads were very crooked. You'd thought it was a drunk man making.

Nancy Yasecko: Do [00:09:30] you remember when the first automobiles started showing up around here?

Marian Grant: I was 12 years old when we had our first car, an Essex, and the second car was an Essex.

Nancy Yasecko: Where would you go in your car?

Marian Grant: Well, we'd go on these country roads, and then the bridge came. Well, Papa didn't get a car until the bridge came in, and we'd go [00:10:00] ... It was only a very narrow bridge. A car going this way, and sometimes they'd have a time passing each other if they happened to be a little bit wide.

Nancy Yasecko: Would you go over to Cocoa or ...

Marian Grant: Go to Cocoa.

Nancy Yasecko: Did you ever go all the way to Orlando?

Marian Grant: Well, not then. The roads were horrible. I guess I was in my teens before we began going to Orlando. [00:10:30] That was a big city, although I was from Charleston, South Carolina. I visited, every summer we went back to see Dr. John, my brother.

Nancy Yasecko: How would you get up to South Carolina?

Marian Grant: On a train.

Nancy Yasecko: Take you out of Cocoa?

Marian Grant: Yeah. Catch the train.

Nancy Yasecko: Take the boat to Cocoa and then the train to ...

Marian Grant: So that was when we had a car, then. Well, first [00:11:00] we went by boat, and I broke out with measles on the train one time, and so they shut us up in one poor corner. The conductor was furious. My mother said, "Well, she didn't have measles when I put her in the car, you saw that." So I was taken to the Knox Hotel in Cocoa and we were quarantined until Papa could come over for us, and take me home. I was a very inconsiderate [00:11:30] child.

Nancy Yasecko: What hotels do you remember?

Marian Grant: Well, the Knox, and then they had a beautiful hotel on the river, but I can't remember the name of it. Cocoa House, I believe.

Nancy Yasecko: There was a Cocoa House.

Marian Grant: Yeah. And they had this little thing built over the river. When they'd feed the ducks, people would go out. It was a dock with this little room, you know, with shed [00:12:00] over it.

Nancy Yasecko: What other businesses do you remember going to? Was there a little store in Cocoa? Hardware?

Marian Grant: There was a ... I wish I had a better memory than I've got. There was a clothes store, and Travis was there, and it had everything except clothes, and a fish store that you could smell for miles. [00:12:30] And Dr. Hughlett was there. You know how Cocoa is built now with trees out in ... He had one tree that he loved in front of his office, and you know they made him cut that tree down? And it only went, say here's a road, say a place like that was built out, but he had to cut that tree down. Cocoa was absolutely ... It was beautiful

when it was first started, then they got in [00:13:00] mayors and all that believed in absolutely straight trees and no obstruction, so they cut all the trees down. Now look at it again.

Nancy Yasecko: Put some trees back.

Marian Grant: And right in the middle of the streets, almost.

Nancy Yasecko: Do you remember going to Dr. Hughlett?

Marian Grant: Yes, he was our only doctor.

Nancy Yasecko: What was he like?

Marian Grant: Well, there was Dr. Counts, too. Well, he was ... Lots of people liked him. I wasn't particularly [00:13:30] fond of him, but I was just a kid.

Nancy Yasecko: Was there a dentist in town too?

Marian Grant: No, thank goodness I didn't need one, but we had to go to Orlando for a dentist. Well, they did have one in Titusville, Dr. Lichtenberg. I was sent to Atlanta when I was 12, because my teeth protruded, and I had to [00:14:00] wear gold bands and there was no dentist except Orlando, and we couldn't get to Orlando every week.

Nancy Yasecko: It was easier to get to Atlanta?

Marian Grant: My brother lived in Atlanta, so I went up to live with them for two years.

Nancy Yasecko: And you went to school up there.

Marian Grant: Mm-hmm (affirmative). Girls High. Then I went to a boarding school for three months, which I loved.

Nancy Yasecko: Where was that?

Marian Grant: Well, it's destroyed now. It was a big school on Presbyterian [00:14:30] Avenue. I say a big school, it was a big house, and they had the back porch and the front porch. And the people believed in children being exposed to the weather, so we slept on these huge porches, these two huge porches. One time, we decided we were going to have a picnic at night. So all of a sudden, they said, "Here comes the house mother." So we had to get rid of the cakes and the [00:15:00] pies, and I put mine -- I don't know why I put it there - - but the next time I went at 12 o'clock, I was washing my hair and I put my head in a lemon pie. And I had long hair then.

Nancy Yasecko: That was up in Atlanta?

Marian Grant: In Atlanta.

Nancy Yasecko: There were some little schoolhouses around here, but there wasn't much ...

Marian Grant: Well, Courtenay School had one school that I went to until I graduated from the eighth grade, and luckily, [00:15:30] we had a good teacher. My mother was an excellent teacher, and I'm just saying what other people said. But I, being the daughter, people, Aunt Lee, for instance, said, "Mami, why are you so hard on Marian?" Even they noticed it, but Mama didn't want people to say that she was showing partiality. So she was very strict with me, which probably didn't hurt. I hear I was very [00:16:00] mischievous.

Nancy Yasecko: You caused trouble?

Marian Grant: Well not any bad trouble, but I never could keep quiet.

Nancy Yasecko: At school?

Marian Grant: Any time.

Nancy Yasecko: I guess that was in a time when children were supposed to be quiet.

Marian Grant: Seen and not heard.

Nancy Yasecko: What about special occasions, like Christmas and things like that? What did you all do here?

Marian Grant: [00:16:30] They always had ... We had to make our ornaments for the tree because there was no electricity. And we had candles, but we had to put them out if we left the room, on account of fire, you know. But the trees, as I remember it, we had beautiful pine trees, and we'd make most of our presents. It was fun.

Nancy Yasecko: What kind of presents would you make?

Marian Grant: Well, children. I'd make these -- I don't know how [00:17:00] to do it now -- but, it would be loops with ... We'd fold the paper a certain way, and then we'd loop it in. That's how the tree was decorated. And Mama sewed beautifully and embroidered beautifully, and so we had embroidered scarves. Unfortunately, though, Mama had made my own clothes because there was no place to buy them, and she believed in making everything. If you were eight years old, she bought an eight [00:17:30] year old pattern, and if I was a small child ... So my clothes didn't always fit.

Nancy Yasecko: Had to grow into them [00:17:41]

Marian Grant: I had to grow into them.

Nancy Yasecko: Were there times when everybody in the community would get together?

Marian Grant: Oh, yeah. We'd have--once a week, you'd go out and spend the day. Then once a week somebody always came and spent the day with you. [00:18:00] So, we worked hard in the

week, but we had fun on Saturdays and Sundays. And we had that little Courtenay church. Have you ever seen that?

Nancy Yasecko: I guess I have.

Marian Grant: Well, they've got a big church now built up there, much larger, but it's copied from the Courtenay church. Of course, we went to church every ... And Mama and Papa both had beautiful voices. They had an old [00:18:30] organ. It was fun.

Nancy Yasecko: How big was the congregation, as you recall?

Marian Grant: Well, sometimes it'd only be two or three people. Sometimes it'd be 20, 30.

Nancy Yasecko: Was there a pastor that lived here, or did he come through?

Marian Grant: No, he had to ... Cressen was the name of one of them, and he kind of looked like Santa Claus. He had white [00:19:00] hair, round, and my idea of Santa Claus, anyhow.

Nancy Yasecko: He serviced a number of parishes, or?

Marian Grant: Yes, he did Indianola, Courtenay, and all of the Georgiana, and Lotus. That's the name of the place. He'd just go up and down the [00:19:30] river. And we had a doctor, that's how the doctor, you know ... There was no doctor. Dr. Holmes, was our first doctor, and if we needed him ... I don't know. There were no telephones. I don't really know how, there'd be word of mouth, you know. And he'd go up and down the river in a boat, and every month you'd get a visit from the doctor, whether you needed it or not.

Nancy Yasecko: [00:20:00] Well, it might have been a pretty good way to go.

Marian Grant: Well, luckily we were all healthy. I was hardly ever sick. Well, look at there. We had absolutely fresh air to breathe, no gasoline fumes or anything in the air. Our land was not depleted. We had fresh vegetables. Chickens and ducks and everything were eating good food. You know, the land [00:20:30] is kind of depleted now. If you didn't fertilize, for instance, you wouldn't raise anything. But back then, you really didn't have to fertilize.

Nancy Yasecko: And that makes sense.

Marian Grant: The land was good.

Nancy Yasecko: But it looked like sand, didn't it?

Marian Grant: Well, we lived ... We happened to have a place that looked like sand. Katherine Jenkins, my cousin, their place ... She's written a book where [00:21:00] the land in Florida is dark sod. Mine would be white sand. But she lived down by the creeks and all. But the land was just black and hard. Uncle Harry used to raise vege- ... I mean ... Well, he raised vegetables, too, but he'd steal the eggs from the alligators. He'd go down. He nearly got killed one time. He poked [00:21:30] his hand down into the alligator cave or whatever

you call it, and there was a rattle snake. He saw it just as he did, and he grabbed its head, and the rattle snake was big and wrapped itself around his arm. He had to walk four miles, and if he'd gotten ... He almost had to let loose. His hand was becoming paralyzed, and they cut the snake's head off before, you know, or he would have been killed. [00:22:00] All kinds of things happened to him.

Nancy Yasecko: He went to find the nearest neighbor, I guess.

Marian Grant: No, he went home where his family lived. Then he had a weird sense of humor. He had two little girls, and he liked to play jokes on the mother. So she went to Sunday school, the two little girls were too little to go, so he painted them red, white and blue, and sat them out to meet the mother, [00:22:30] naked as the day they were born, painted red, white and blue. She was furious. She wouldn't speak to him for weeks. Don't mention his name. The family might get mad. But it really happened.

Nancy Yasecko: You had to make your own entertainment.

Marian Grant: Oh, yes. We went up to Uncle Harry's one day, and I was sitting in the swing, and there was a cat bathing, you know how they lick their hands and, [00:23:00] sitting here and there was a cat here. And I don't know why we were watching the cat, and I don't know why the cat did what it did, but all of a sudden, this cat jumped down just as this cat jumped up, and their heads went together in mid air like that. You could hear it, and one cat went that way, and one cat went the other way, and we never saw the cats the rest of the day.

Nancy Yasecko: Bet you all laughed.

Marian Grant: It was funny.

Nancy Yasecko: Well, [00:23:30] there was a time, I guess, they used to have regattas on the Indian rivers. Sail boat races and ...

Marian Grant: My father was a great sailboat racer. Of course, I came along way too late for that. I wasn't born until my father was 56. I don't even remember him until he was 60.

Nancy Yasecko: Let's see. Other things, there were May Day picnics. Do you remember any of those?

Marian Grant: I [00:24:00] had one. My teacher was Mama, except for the first two years, I had a Miss Dewey, and she had those kind of things, but the school was much smaller when she had it, and she had time. My mother had--my mother never went to bed until one or two o'clock at night. She had to grade all those papers, and she was a good teacher. When we had an exam, [00:24:30] I'm telling you, it was an exam on the whole year, what we'd done in school.

Nancy Yasecko: You used ink wells and fountain pens?

Marian Grant: Yeah. I've got one of the old desks down in the garage. The seat was--the desk was here, and it'd have a seat in front. You know the desk and the seat in front.

Nancy Yasecko: Did the little boys really put the girls' hair in the ink [00:25:00] wells?

Marian Grant: They did everything. Most all of them--we were all kin, though, double first cousins and first cousins and second cousins. Now, you know what a double first cousin is?

Nancy Yasecko: I think so.

Marian Grant: Three sisters married three brother, for instance, which actually made the children first cousins on each side. And the LaRoches, when they found a family they liked, they stuck to it. For instance, the Stewarts, four or five LaRoche brothers married four or five [00:25:30] Stewart girls. My father, of course, married the Hallonquist girls. That's a name to have a child have to spell, isn't it?

Nancy Yasecko: No.

Marian Grant: We'd have spelling bees, all kinds of things. We had to carry our own lunch to school, of course, because there was no way of buying anything.

Nancy Yasecko: What about when you got [00:26:00] cold?

Marian Grant: Well, it wasn't too cold then. We still walked to school in rain.

Nancy Yasecko: What about mosquitoes?

Marian Grant: We had them too. Plenty of them. We kept a smudge in front of the two doors. I don't know how you make them now, I've forgotten, but the cloth would just smolder. It never would light up, you know. I mean flare [00:26:30] up. But just a smoke, and you didn't dare open a door without that smudge. But just look, when Mama and Papa first came, they had to hang netting up in the window. Have you ever slept behind netting? And sleep under netting too. I'm telling you, it was hot. We didn't have any fans. And we'd have to sleep that way. But then I can remember when we got the first wire in the window. Oh, it [00:27:00] was so much cooler.

Nancy Yasecko: Wire screens.

Marian Grant: Mm-hmm (affirmative)

Nancy Yasecko: Because they let a little air through.

Marian Grant: Let much more air through, than the netting did.

Nancy Yasecko: Wonder why that was? The holes were about the same size.

Marian Grant: Well, I don't know. But of course, you weren't sleeping under the cotton netting either, then. We'd have these huge things hung up like that with frames out this way that the netting would be, and then it would come down. Well, now, you know, that kept a lot of air out.

Nancy Yasecko: [00:27:30] There'd probably be a few mosquitoes in there when you got in.

Marian Grant: Still.

Nancy Yasecko: Would you try and get rid of those?

Marian Grant: We'd have to.

Nancy Yasecko: Before we went to sleep.

Marian Grant: We'd all sit up and ... I slept upstairs. Mama and Papa had a bedroom downstairs. Of course, when I came along, all the rest of the children were gone. I was raised alone. But Papa and Mama, as I told you, had beautiful voices, and they'd sing to me, and Mama and Papa [00:28:00] would tell me stories, and they'd read to me. I never can remember being ... Well, I do remember praying for some little kid to come see me that day, so I could have somebody to play with. Occasionally, God even answered my prayers.

But you see, I lived so much further out that the children couldn't come by themselves. They had to come with--their parents [00:28:30] had to bring them. Now the children that lived in Courtenay could run from house to house, but Uncle Ben's family was like that. Sally didn't have many people to play with, and I didn't because she lived a mile and half that way from Courtenay, and I lived a mile and half this way from Courtenay.

Nancy Yasecko: That's a long mile and a half when there are no roads.

Marian Grant: Well, when you're six and seven years old too.

Nancy Yasecko: Is there anything left of where Courtenay was?

Marian Grant: Well, Aunt Mattie's house is [00:29:00] gone. The two churches, the one church is there and then another one that's built. Aunt Lee's house is still there. And I'm trying to think. The Walter LaRoche's house is there. Franklin LaRoche's house is there. And Sally Dingman's house is there. She's Patsy Weltz now. You ought to see her. Now [00:29:30] she can give you a history. Her house, as I understand it, now if you see her, you may get a different story, part of it was floated down the river from some place, and dragged up to where it is now. I don't think they use that part, but it's still there.

Nancy Yasecko: That's just south of the space center area.

Marian Grant: This is south and that's north, isn't it?

Nancy Yasecko: That's north, yeah.

Marian Grant: [00:30:00] Yes, it's south. My directions ... My daughter and I, we get us together, and we are lost. Marian said, "Where do you turn here?" And I told her, and of course, we were lost. I said, "Well, Marian, why did you ask me? I told you I always got lost in that town." As many times as I went through it, I always made the same mistake. Looks like I would have learned.

Nancy Yasecko: Which town was that?

Marian Grant: Some town in Alabama.

Nancy Yasecko: [00:30:30] Going to town meant going to Cocoa, or it might have meant going to Orlando.

Marian Grant: Going to town meant going to Orlando. Well, not at first. Going to town meant going to Cocoa. But then after we got accustomed to going to Cocoa, going to town meant to Orlando. And Orlando wasn't much bigger than Cocoa is now.

Nancy Yasecko: What was that like going to Orlando?

Marian Grant: Oh, it was fun. We'd plan for it a week ahead of time. [00:31:00] You'd get up early in the morning, and it was an all day excursion. You'd be so tired. When Marian was a little girl, when Sam and I, we'd tell her that we'd walk around ... What is that lake, Lake ...

Nancy Yasecko: Eola?

Marian Grant: Something like that. It's a beautiful lake. And we'd tell her, if she'd just hang around and do whatever, because of course, she'd be bored, we'd walk around Lake Eola with her. And so every trip, we'd [00:31:30] have to walk around Lake Eola.

Nancy Yasecko: Well, there were things in Orlando you couldn't get around here.

Marian Grant: Well, yeah, plenty of things. But that was a highlight. And of course, we didn't have good roads then like we do now.

Nancy Yasecko: You might have a flat tire getting there?

Marian Grant: One day going to the beach, which of course, was quite a treat too, to us, there must have been 60 flat tires. This man [00:32:00] who was selling tacks, the back door came open and these tacks were falling out. And they wanted to arrest him, but he didn't know it. I mean, they really wanted to punish him for it, but he didn't know it. Look at all the tacks he lost. As someone pointed out, you put him in jail, and he'll sue you for stealing his tacks. But I have never seen such a bunch of mad people in my life. Luckily, we didn't manage [00:32:30] to get ... Sam had a--we went in the truck that day instead of the car, and you know, the truck tires are much thicker, so if we picked up the tacks, it didn't make it go flat, but that was really funny.

Nancy Yasecko: Oh, so you passed all these cars.

Marian Grant: We passed all these cars.

Nancy Yasecko: And I guess once you get two flat tires, there's not much you can do.

Marian Grant: Some of them had four. Because even when they patched one, they still had to get off the road, you know. And they'd go two or three more feet [00:33:00] and have another one. That was over 50 years ago, because I don't think Marian was born then.

Nancy Yasecko: That was the road to the beach?

Marian Grant: Mm-hmm (affirmative). It's funny, I feel the same as I did. Of course, I don't look the same, but I haven't aged. I mean, the same things that interested me then, still interest me. Of course, my health [00:33:30] is good. I mean, knock on wood, I'll die tonight of some unknown disease.

Nancy Yasecko: I heard a story once that they used to have cattle out here on Merritt Island.

Marian Grant: That was going out just as I moved here. I think it was two years we still had of that, because the people let their cattle run wild. And of course, you had [00:34:00] to fence in your groves to protect your groves from the cattle. Then they changed that. But I was scared to death of cows, but that was on account of an experience I had when I was just a little girl. I was--my life was saved by a young black boy eating a watermelon. My father took me down to the store, and this happened in Rockville, South Carolina, and [00:34:30] he went in the store to talk and left me outside. When this fella--I was mesmerized. I simply didn't move. This huge bull had gotten loose and was bearing down on me, you know, mad, snorting. And this black boy said, "Lord, have mercy, that's Mister Johnny's child," and grabbed me just ... The bull tore my clothes. And Mama, of course they didn't have much money then, but Mama made him clothes and shirts [00:35:00] and things like that. I think they even gave him five dollars, which was thousand dollars now.

Nancy Yasecko: I guess so.

Marian Grant: I think that's why I always liked black people. I mean, you know, after all, I owe my life to one. Then another time, Mama looked up and I was told not to step off of the sidewalk. This was in Charleston. Well, I wasn't a particularly obedient child, so [00:35:30] I stepped off the sidewalk, right in the middle of the two rails, and this trolley car was coming down. It was an incline like this, and he was trying to stop and his bell was clanging, but I was mesmerized. I just couldn't take my eyes off of this huge thing, and a white man, that time, saved my life. So I've had my life saved twice. I like white men, too. [00:36:00] In fact, there are very few people I don't like.

Nancy Yasecko: Well, and speaking of the black community, was there a black community here on the island, or do you recall?

Marian Grant: Well, just like it is now, they've got their homes. You've been up and down the river, the road. Well, they always liked to congregate together. But when we first came here, all the

black people went to the white churches, because [00:36:30] there wasn't but the one church. We all went to the same church.

Nancy Yasecko: So you got to know each other?

Marian Grant: Oh, yeah. I've always liked black people. I don't find them any different.

Nancy Yasecko: Let's see what else I've got on the list, here. What about hurricanes and other natural disasters?

Marian Grant: Oh. I almost lost my life in a hurricane one time. You know how a lull comes? I had better sense than to do this, [00:37:00] but I just had this little tiny flashlight, so I went outside. I knew that the rest would strike me soon, but with this little flashlight, you couldn't see very much. And the next day, you could see my footprints. The line had gone down. You see, I had no lights in the house, and my footprints weren't but about this far from a live wire, the one that came into the stove. It would have killed me. My footprints were just ... I just managed to walk [00:37:30] all around that line without touching it. But if I would have died then, it would have served me right because I knew better.

Nancy Yasecko: So when was that?

Marian Grant: That was one of the hurricanes.

Nancy Yasecko: Yeah. We've had some pretty big storms here.

Marian Grant: It was after Marian and Joe were married because I was living here. I was by myself. Marian would have never let me do anything like that. She's much more sensible than me.

Nancy Yasecko: Well, there was ...

Marian Grant: But [00:38:00] you know, people think I'm scary here, but I've always figured God can look after me here, whether I'm alone or not, just as well as he could if I lived in a bunch of people. I'm not a bit scary.

Nancy Yasecko: There was a time here after the banks all crashed.

Marian Grant: Oh, boy. Mama--Papa [00:38:30] lost everything he had. Everything.

Nancy Yasecko: Must have been ...

Marian Grant: All of us did.

Nancy Yasecko: Yeah.

Marian Grant: And the worst part of it is, this old black woman had saved her money by putting it under a mattress, and people kept telling her, trying to explain to her, that if she put her money

in the bank, she could draw interest. So finally, she decided to do it, and they were closing the doors [00:39:00] to this bank as she walked up, and she told them she wanted to deposit some money. Now this white man, the president of the bank, let that woman go in and deposit her money. I think he ought to be horse whipped. I really do, because they were closing the bank. It had already failed when they took that woman's money. She lost every cent. I think that--of all the crooks, I think that man [00:39:30] was the crookedest.

Robert Gilbert: Who was that?

Marian Grant: I don't know. Whomever happened to be the president of the Barnett Bank at that time. That was a long time ago.

Nancy Yasecko: That was right over here in Cocoa.

Marian Grant: Yeah, but he wasn't in that big building now. It was just a small bank. And I don't remember his name.

Nancy Yasecko: Well you had to get by with just what you could grow?

Marian Grant: Then you got by. Of course, we were right back where we started. [00:40:00] Papa, he had his grove. It was already in bearing, and vegetables and the things that we'd raise, and the fish.

Now when I met ... My life was divided. When I was a little girl, I hardly ever went on the river. Then I got married to Sam, and of course, he lived on the river. He just loved it. We'd own boats and go up and down the river, and he liked to fish, and my job was when he was fishing with a net, which [00:40:30] I made him, by the way. He said it was the best net he'd ever had. It opened up, would have touched that side and this side, and I crocheted it or knitted. What do you call it? Well, anyway, that's the net he used, and he could open it in an absolute perfect circle.

But then my job was to push the boat, the row boat, while he was gathering up the net and the fish. And my trip to him, instead [00:41:00] of being a straight line, the boat would go this way and that way. I never could do anything with boats. They have minds of their own. That way and that way. Sam said, "If you'd push it straight, Marian, you wouldn't have so far to go." But I couldn't push it straight. I'm with a boat like I am with a electric light. If I punch a button, things are supposed to happen. If they don't happen, I'm lost.

Nancy Yasecko: [00:41:30] Your husband was a fisherman?

Marian Grant: Oh, he loved to fish. No, he grew oranges just like everybody else. He did fish two years, though. He'd catch so many, we didn't like to waste anything, and we'd take them over and sell them.

Nancy Yasecko: Over to Cocoa?

Marian Grant: Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Nancy Yasecko: Was his family from around here?

Marian Grant: The Fields were. The Fields came from Georgia. And his father [00:42:00] came directly from Scotland. He was raised in Edinburgh and went to the Edinburgh University. He came down here and fell in love with a little 15 year old girl, and married her. Annie Grant. Ola and Eliza, she was a tiny little woman. She [00:42:30] married one of the Fields. There was John Fields and Sam Fields and another Fields that I didn't know. She married John Fields. Papa bought his place, but they used to come out and what do you call it?

Nancy Yasecko: Homestead?

Marian Grant: Homestead it. This was a homestead. You see, John Fields had three children, a son and two daughters. So he gave half the place to the son, and then he divided [00:43:00] the other half up between the two girls, and Dad married one of the girls, so this is that place, and then that place over there that Joe owns now, was the other girl's, except that he didn't buy the houses. He only owns the grove.

Nancy Yasecko: Quite a change from Scotland.

Marian Grant: What was that? Samuel [inaudible 00:43:23]. Dad would get up on ... His name was S-I-M-S-O-N, [00:43:30] not S-I-M-P, but S-I-M, Simson. But they called him Sam [inaudible 00:43:36], because he'd get up on the desk and recite this long thing, you know. He was a wonderful man.

They sent Sam off to school when he wasn't but eight years old. He lost his mother when he was very young. She died. And they sent him off to boarding school, and I think it's cruel to send a child that young off, but of course, he wasn't married, [00:44:00] but somebody could have taken care of him.

It's funny, I lived right up there, only six miles from Sam, and we didn't meet until he was 15 and I was 16. But the rest of my family knew him. But you see, they had younger parents than I did. I was born to old parents, and they didn't go around like the younger parents did, so I missed out on all of that. But I made up for it. I'm the one that married him.

Nancy Yasecko: You [00:44:30] got married around here?

Marian Grant: In the Courtenay church.

Nancy Yasecko: And what was your wedding like?

Marian Grant: Well, it was small, but it was beautiful, really. I had--a cousin of mine owned a florist shop, and their present to me was they decorated the church, and it was absolutely beautiful. And then they decorated my daughter's church, too, when she came along. [00:45:00] Marian was married in the same church that I was, and Laurie and Chris were married in the same church. They didn't want to be married in the new church. They wanted to be married in the old church.

Nancy Yasecko: In the little church.

Marian Grant: Yeah. One day, I went up there. I'd worked all day, and he was having these, I guess you'd call it studies, you know Bible studies. And I got in late, and I saw this little frog. Well, I didn't pay any attention [00:45:30] at first. He was in the aisle, and then I got to thinking, "Several people haven't come yet. I'd better move that little frog, because they'll step on him accidentally." So I reach for him and hopped, so I reached a little further and he hopped. Well, then of course, I forgot where I was, so I got down on one knee, and the next thing I know, this voice says, "And where do you think you're doing, Mrs. Grant?" And the priest, I was crawling up the aisles trying to catch a frog. "And where do you think you're [00:46:00] going? What do you think you're doing, Mrs. Grant?" I could have killed him. But I caught the frog.

Nancy Yasecko: Well, things were a little less formal. That still sounds like ...

Marian Grant: Well, I would have never done it if I hadn't have forgotten where I was. You don't usually crawl up an aisle in a church.

Nancy Yasecko: How'd your husband feel about that?

Marian Grant: Well, he was dead then.

Nancy Yasecko: Oh.

Marian Grant: That happened not too long ago.

Nancy Yasecko: Oh, dear. [00:46:30] But going back, do you remember anything about what it was like here during World War I, and what was going on? You would have been just a little girl.

Marian Grant: A little girl. Well, I remember I had a brother in the war, and my mother could hardly wait. Of course, we didn't get the mail, but about once a month, once every two months, and we would just be sitting on the edge of our seats, so to speak, wondering about Laurent. And you know, Laurent was the brother [00:47:00] ... John tried to get into the war, but he couldn't. He was a very slight man, and he did everything he could, but they wouldn't take him.

And Sam tried to get into the other war, but they wouldn't take him, because at that time, he was doing work for the government. He had two grove tractors and two drivers, and he had two huge tractors with these huge harrows, [00:47:30] and he was harrowing the palmetto scrub [00:47:32] and all and raising grass, and they asked him one day, "How do you, what do you do?" because he had all of his grass grew. Nobody else's was growing. And Sam, all of a sudden, he didn't know what he was doing that was different. His work was machinery, not growing grass. So he had to say something, so he said, "Well," he says, "I think it is because I don't level off the ground [00:48:00] when I get through and the pockets of water gather, you know, in the harrow marks, and the other people's grass is ... They level the ground and the water runs off and the seeds can't sprout." Well, that happened to be the truth, but Sam said he was stunned when he was asked to tell them

why his grass was growing. So after that, they began doing that and their grass grew, too, so he knew that that was the right answer.

Nancy Yasecko: [00:48:30] Well, it was a good thought [crosstalk 00:48:32]

Marian Grant: Well.

Nancy Yasecko: During World War II, there was some rationing.

Marian Grant: Oh, yeah. My Lord. Even if you had your own cow, you weren't supposed to drink but so much of the milk, and Sam said, "What are you going to do, throw away the rest of it?" We didn't. What was the sense? We ate it. We didn't throw it away. They did have some of the stupidest laws, [00:49:00] really. If you didn't have anybody to give it to, you were supposed to have only so much butter. What were you going to do with the rest of it? Of course, we could have been put in jail, but we weren't.

Nancy Yasecko: I imagine around here you weren't the only ones in that situation.

Marian Grant: They got up on tops of houses and watch for these [00:49:30] planes, you know. Well Sam paid somebody to do it for him, he didn't do it himself. You could hear the planes, why did you have to watch for them? And out here, we had to shutter every window, I mean put cloth over it, or not turn on our lights. Look at Cocoa Beach. They didn't have to. I mean, they didn't. The whole line of lights. I mean, people [00:50:00] were just ... People are stupid sometimes. Now let's face it, I said I had common sense. That's the only kind I've got. But I just don't fall for those kind of things.

Nancy Yasecko: Over on the beach some people talk about there were German submarines that were [crosstalk 00:50:18]

Marian Grant: They were supposed to be. There weren't any German submarines.

Nancy Yasecko: No?

Marian Grant: They'd have shot at us if they had been. The only people they couldn't have seen was us. They could see the people over there.

Nancy Yasecko: [00:50:30] Yeah.

Marian Grant: Now who's going to come up in this river, for instance? A submarine couldn't even submerge. It's not deep enough.

Nancy Yasecko: Pretty far from the action, huh?

Marian Grant: I mean, really, some of the laws in this land are ridiculous.

Nancy Yasecko: There's plenty of them now. Plenty of [00:50:57] laws. But [00:51:00] the land values went up and down, what with the big bust in the 20s and 30s and then [crosstalk 00:51:12]

Marian Grant: Sometimes, well I can't explain it exactly. One day you were worth absolutely nothing. The next day, you were a billionaire, and then all of a sudden, you were worth nothing again. That's just the way it was. [00:51:30] But we didn't sell our land. We kept it. As Sam said, "What would we do?" We'd only buy it back.

Nancy Yasecko: Well there's getting to be a lot more people around here.

Marian Grant: As Joe was telling me the other day, he said, "You don't have to worry. As long as I'm alive, this place will still be in the family." Of course, eventually, I guess, it'll be all the city. It's getting that way [00:52:00] now.

There was a threat one time. They were going to bring in a railroad from Orlando. Well now, first they were going to put it over here, take half of the Field's place. Now that would have been a ridiculous thing. But then they decided if it comes in, it's going to go by the barge canal, which is a sensible thing for it to do. So I'm safe.

Nancy Yasecko: You can't [00:52:30] count on people being sensible though.

Marian Grant: No, you certainly can't. Absolutely not.

Nancy Yasecko: Did the space program coming in have much effect on this area for you?

Marian Grant: Well, of course I worked over at RCA, and you couldn't have ... We had to park our cars, it was very unsettling, it was away from the building. [00:53:00] Then we were allowed to go out. I worked from 3 to 12 at night. Then about seven o'clock when the first thing got off, the people, they were still there when I got there. But then they'd leave, and I was allowed to go out then and we could move our cars up close then.

Nancy Yasecko: Where was that building? Was that [crosstalk 00:53:21]

Marian Grant: You know that great big building down almost to Titusville? The big building, right on the island. [00:53:30] I mean right on the ocean.

Nancy Yasecko: Okay.

Marian Grant: I've forgotten the name of it.

Nancy Yasecko: Is it part of the space center out there?

Marian Grant: It was, yeah.

Nancy Yasecko: Go through the gate and everything.

Marian Grant: Yeah. The first time I was there, I had parked and before I had a chance to get out, this black man was walking up the steps when all of a sudden he fell. Well, I thought he'd stumbled, but he hadn't. He'd had a heart attack and died, going up the steps.

We worked in a building [00:54:00] that had no windows, no anything.

Nancy Yasecko: I bet you mean down near Patrick Air Force Base.

Marian Grant: Yeah.

Nancy Yasecko: At the tech lab or ...

Marian Grant: The tech lab. That's where I worked first. And my job was to, every time they spotted a plane or anything, I had to phone in, you know, to the different mathematicians. I don't mean spotted a plane, [00:54:26]

Nancy Yasecko: Launched a rocket?

Marian Grant: Yeah, I had to phone in. [00:54:30] I never was so sick of phones in my life. There were nine mathematicians that I had to phone this information. I'd phone it in, and then they'd change, holding three minutes. So I'd have to phone them in and tell them it was being held for three min-. Then they were going to shoot, so I'd have to phone it in and te-. I was sick to death of phones.

Nancy Yasecko: Well, where were you calling? Local numbers or [00:54:53]

Marian Grant: No, they were right in the same building, but they were the mathematicians and they didn't get the information. We had to feed it to [00:55:00] them. I don't know what they were doing, plotting something.

Nancy Yasecko: Part of the data analysis.

Marian Grant: Yeah. And I worked with this one black boy. He was really a genius. He was young, but for some reason, he liked me so we'd eat our lunch together, so to speak. I said that I had hired this black woman to sit with my mother [00:55:30] who was very old then, to take care of my daughter. But I couldn't leave her with my daughter, because she couldn't pick her up. She had heart trouble. So the that girl used to come and sit with both of them.

And we were talking, and he said, "I didn't know that you all thought like that about your children." I said, "Well, why?" He says, "Well, the own-," said, "My ... We moved to a place in a Georgia," and said, "We hadn't been there a week when this white [00:56:00] woman approached my wife and wanted to know if she'd sit with her baby." He says, "As far as we could see, how was she to know that we weren't, wouldn't kill the child? She'd never laid eyes on us." Said, "We didn't think that ya'll thought like that about your children." I said, "Well, that was a very peculiar white woman, because I'd have never done that." I was very particular who sat with my child. But we do give off that idea to people, I guess.

Nancy Yasecko: Must have.

Marian Grant: [00:56:30] Yeah, we did with him.

Nancy Yasecko: Well, you worked down there for a long time?

Marian Grant: Ten years.

Nancy Yasecko: On the phone all the time?

Marian Grant: No. Part of the time, I worked in the day time at first. Then the last three years, I worked at night. I was a ... Whatever they didn't want to do, I did. For instance, I had to usher in the guests. So Mr. Thomassen, who was my boss and his boss was Mr. Cole, he said [00:57:00] I had to put my desk here with my back to the door, facing the wall. At first, he said I had to face the wall. I said I wouldn't do it. He said, "You have to because you're being ordered to." I said, "I'll quit, then, because I won't face the wall." My job was to greet the guests when they came in. How can I greet the guests when my back was the door? Well, I won that. We went to Mr. [00:57:30] Cole about it, and Mr. Cole said that he agreed with me. So, Mr. Thomassen had to give face. But wasn't that a stupid thing? To have the person greeting you with their back to the door? I wouldn't have seen them when they came in.

Then I had to fix the coffee. So they had this huge pot like this, and I told them yes, I wouldn't mind making it, if the men would wash the pot and lift the pot with the water. No, I had to do it. I said, "Mr. Thomassen, I will not do it. [00:58:00] It's heavy." So, I won that one. And you know I was one of his favorite people? It's funny. He had everybody in tears but me. He had me in tears once, but I would have died before he knew it. I always stood up to him. But that was so stupid.

Nancy Yasecko: Well, let's cut.