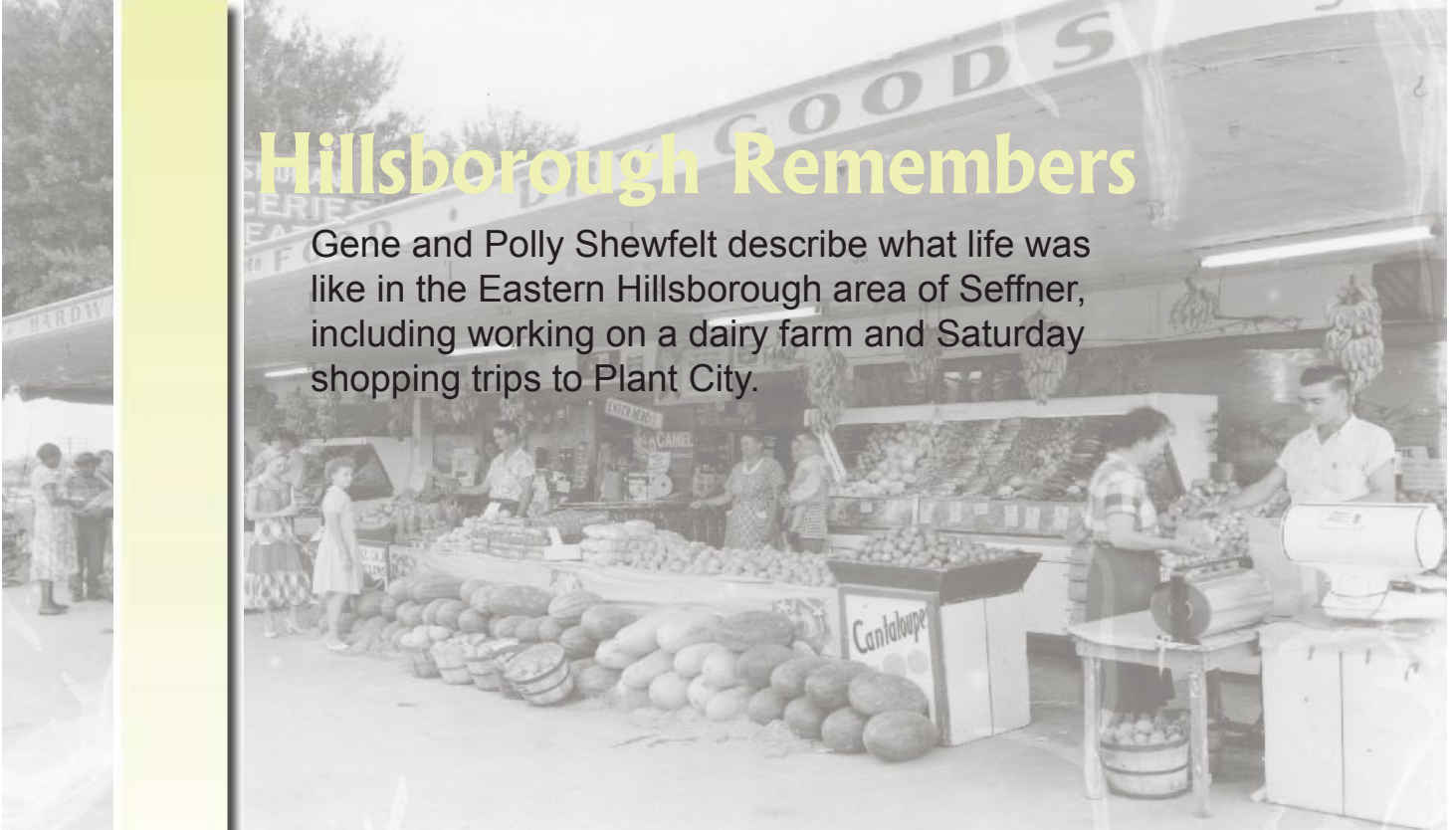


Gene & Polly Shewfelt

Hillsborough Remembers

Gene and Polly Shewfelt describe what life was like in the Eastern Hillsborough area of Seffner, including working on a dairy farm and Saturday shopping trips to Plant City.



[START TAPE 1, SIDE A]

This is an interview with Gene and Polly Shewfelt of Seffner. We're going to be talking about the early days of their youth here in the Tampa area. The interview is being conducted on August 21, 2001 at the Shewfelts' home in Seffner. My name is Steve Szekely (SS), representing the Tampa Hillsborough County Public Library system's oral history collection project.

SS: Mr. Shewfelt, can you tell us about your schooling?

GS: Well, when I first came to Florida, I had a distinct Yankee accent. And so () we lived out near Odessa in Hillsborough County, Florida, and we had a one-room schoolhouse in Lake Fern. We had one teacher, who was from deep Alabama. We had 18 rebels and 1 quote "Damn Yankee." [Laughter] That was me.

SS: And you were how old at the time; how old when you started there?

GS: Eight, and I went--. My teacher couldn't understand me, and I couldn't understand her, so she put me back a grade. And so I was--, [Laughter] I was there. We had 19 students, and eight grades, and one teacher. And so I went there from the third grade to the eighth--, to the seventh grade. And we had--. That teacher left a year or so afterwards. And a young lady, who later became my sister-in-law, became our teacher at the school, and she boarded at our home. And she--. Later, I became the little brat that used to get in the way of my brother and her romance. [Laughter]

We--. They--. My brother had made a kayak, and they'd go out to the--, down to the lake and get in the kayak. Well, I had to go with them. So one of our neighbors had a little paddlewheel boat. So I'd get in the paddlewheel boat, and they'd take off in the kayak. Well, you can't hear a kayak going through the water, but you sure can hear a paddlewheel. And I'd be at one end of the lake, and I'd () holler. And a while later, I'd hear them way down on the other end of the lake. And I'd go paddling down there, and I'd () holler, and they were back (). But

those were the days that they had a lot of fun and enjoyed it.

I--. It was hard for me to get accepted by these Southern boys. And it wasn't until a few years later that through an incident that happened that I had fight with one of them, and I was successful in beating him. And so after that, I became accepted in the community. [Chuckle]

SS: What, what was your family's livelihood at the, at the time?

GS: Well, when we first came down here, my dad worked in the citrus groves for \$1.75 a day. He had a 10 percent veteran's disability pension, and the four of us lived on that during the--, from '34 through about '36 or '7. I obtained a job when I was going to school at Lake Fern there with Mr. Jackson, who lived across the road from us. He had a dairy. And so I had asked-- I was ten years old then-- and I asked him for a job. And so he said, "All right," he said, "You come in and you--. Each cow we that have gets a certain amount of dairy feed and a certain amount of wheat (). One'll get two cans of this and one can of that." He said, "You make up the rounds for three or four rounds of cows that come into the pen."

And so that was the first job I ever had in my life. And my pay was a quart of milk to drink at the dairy when I was working there after school, a quart of milk to take home, a pint of milk in my mailbox to go to school with. And one of our neighbors took milk from the dairy. And they paid \$1.05 a week for it, and I would go and collect that for my monetary amount. So that was the first pay job I had.

SS: You were rich then!

GS: I was rich! [Laughter]

SS: What did the other children at the school--. Do you know anything about their families- what they did for a living? Were they in farming and dairy work and the like?

GS: No, a lot of them, I guess, had groves out there in the Odessa area, as I recall. And that was mainly what they lived on. And my dad later, later on started working for civil service and--, during the war. He

worked at Drew Field, which is Tampa International Airport now, there, and then later, went to MacDill Field. And he worked there for--, up until 1957 at their general store's place there in civil service. And then he retired after that.

SS: *Where did you go to high school?*

GS: [Laughter] My wife went to Hillsborough. And I--. They didn't have an eighth grade in anywhere except Jefferson High School. So I rode the school bus from Lake Fern to Jefferson High School-- a distance of 25 miles-- to go to school. So when I got to the ninth grade, I wanted to go to Hillsborough because that was the place to go, you know. [Laughter] "No, you can't go there; you're enrolled in Jefferson- you stay there." So I went to Jefferson High School for four years.

I became very active in their ROTC. I was promoted from a private, to a sergeant, to a lieutenant, to a lieutenant colonel, in very short order. And [Chuckle] so--. But I learned one thing about ROTC and about being in the service when I went into basic training in the Army: that there is a big difference between living with them 24 hours

It was quite different - the dairies in those days. They would milk from one to five in the afternoon and one to five in the morning, seven days a week.

a day and working with them for 1 hour a day in high school. [Laughter] You don't volunteer for anything. So--. But they called me into service about four weeks before I graduated and--. But they did give us our diplomas. They weren't supposed to do that, but they did anyhow, and--. But they gave us our diploma. And that was one thing I missed about high school.

SS: *And all those other celebrations after graduation, yeah. And where were you stationed?*

GS: Well, let's see- I went to Fort McClellan in Atlanta for induction. I went to Keesler Field, Mississippi, for basic training, and then as a pre-aviation cadet, because they had so many of them enlisted that they had them stashed at different bases throughout the South, awaiting to get into pre-flight

training. So they shipped us up to Columbus, Mississippi, and then they offered us--. Well no, then they sent us down to Harlingen, Texas. And by that time, VE Day came along, and they offered us tech schools. And I went to Scott Field, Illinois, for three months. And VJ day came along, and was discharged- along with about 38,000 other cadets and pre-aviation cadets, and never did get to fly. [Laughter]

SS: *Well, at least not as a pilot, as a passenger.*

GS: Right! [Laughter]

[Recorder is turned off and then back on]

SS: *[To Polly Shewfelt] Let's talk about growing up on the dairy farm. Can you explain how your, your family got into the dairy business, and, and what it was like when you were, you were living there?*

PS: In 1926, before I was born in 1928, my father and the rest of the family-- which consisted of the five sisters and one oldest brother-- came back from New Mexico and went into the dairy business with my uncle,

who was Alvin Magnum- had the jewelry store in Tampa. And so, the jewelry store--. My uncle furnished the capital to help my dad get started with the dairy farm, and they leased some property here in the Seffner area at Valrico Road and 574. And the dairy was there, and it was quite different- the dairies in those days. They would milk from one to five in the afternoon and one to five in the morning, seven days a week. This involved three milkers that were at a constant (). And--

SS: *Of course, these were human milkers, not machines?*

PS: Yes. No, this was before the day of the machines. And they would pour the milk over a cooling coil and strain it with cheesecloth on top, and then put it in a

cooler area until early morning. And they would transport the milk in ten gallon cans to Tampa, to a place called the Poinsettia Dairy, which was located on Florida Avenue, just opposite the Children's Home on Florida Avenue at that time. And so they would go very early in morning, about five o'clock in the morning-- before the sun came up-- and transport the milk.

In addition to the dairy part of it, they would-- , my father grew vegetables and strawberries. And so this was during the depression from, you know, from 1928 on up to the late '39, '39, 1939. And so we had plenty of milk, vegetables, and fresh meat from time to time; of course, it was canned. And so that fed up to two to seven. Plus, we had-- , they had boarders that worked on the farm. And also, [Chuckle] it became quite a popular place to stop at Ms. Magnum's, because she cooked a lot. And it was right beside the railroad. And word got out that she was a pretty good cook, and so the different boys would stop.

SS: *These were the folks that were riding the rails?*

PS: Riding the rails, yes, and () happened at that time.

SS: *You mentioned something about Plant City, and being a big-- . A trip to Plant City on Saturdays.*

PS: Oh yes, going to Plant City was a real treat, because-- . And--

SS: *Why Plant City and not Tampa?*

PS: Well, Plant City was 13 miles away, and I guess it was about 8 to 10 where we were. And also, they had many of the supplies up there that my dad needed: feed or seed. He would get it up in the Plant City area- and plants to plant.

But on Saturdays, again, it was really special. And these early days back in the '30s were a little bit different than now. We had an ice box. The ice man would come and bring 25 or 50 pounds of ice. And had a wood stove that my mother cooked on. And she managed to make some () pies and

cooking, and did canning-- home canning-- that helped us a lot during this time.

SS: *It's hard to imagine that they could regulate the heat.*

PS: They managed to do that, and another thing that was a little different: we didn't have the modern washing machines and dryers. What would happen on the (), they would boil them in this pot, big black pot, and-- . Then you had the washing machine a little later on, but-- , where you would have the two tubs and the wringer ().

But getting back to our Saturdays, that was a big day, because if you got the house very clean and scrubbed the woodwork () all shiny bright, then you could go to a trip to Plant City. And this was before the days of regulations that you couldn't ride in the back of the truck- thankfully, because there were seven of us [Laughter] that would get in the back of the truck.

And we'd go up, and mother and father would be in the front of the truck. And they would go to Plant City and get groceries, get groceries (). And the grocery store that they went to was Rogers and Littlebrooks. And again, it was different than your modern-day stores, grocery store, in that they had young men in there with baskets-- like wicker baskets-- on their arms. And my mother would say, "Well, I need five pounds of flour, ten pounds of sugar, a can of this, and a can of that." And then what would happen, they would go up-- , she would go up to the counter, and they would total it up. And then they would put these baskets on the back shelf until we were ready to go home.

SS: *What- you wanted to do other shopping and see other things in Tampa or Plant City?*

PS: They have a theater there, Capitol Theater, and we would go to. It was ten cents for children and twenty-five cents for adults. And for that, you could see a serial-- where you would just know that that heroine wasn't going to make it another week, and next week she was just fine-- but also a cowboy picture and then a feature picture like, I think, there was one called *Peg o' My Heart* and (). We would do that while my

mother would visit the doctor. She had a lot of health problems during those days. But then my father would go to the feed stores and get feed and seed in the back of the truck, around seven children, [Chuckle] and then we would pick up the groceries and go home.

SS: *How long did you--, your family live in the Seffner area on the dairy farm?*

PS: From 1926 to just before World War II started.

SS: *And then they got some land in--*

PS: And then we moved over to Anderson Road--, just off of Anderson Road and Sligh. And they got a section of land out there, six hundred acres. And right after we moved there, they built a railroad spur right through the middle of the pastures. And we had to move the cows from one side to another. And—

The Coliseum over on Davis Island was built in the 1920s. And that was a real social hub when Davis Islands was first built

SS: *And that was one of your chores- to help herd the cows?*

PS: Yeah, to help move them back and forth. Actually, the Leto High School is located on the eastern, southeast end of the property there. And we've seen a lot of changes in the area.

SS: *Was the property where the--, that railroad yard is now, with the--, with the car depot?*

PS: Yes. Yes it is.

SS: *Amazing!*

PS: There, and a number of different warehouses.

SS: *And the road wasn't a big, paved, pretty highway, was it?*

PS: Actually, actually it was a washboard-type shell road that would just shake you around when you would drive over it. And this was at the beginning of World War II.

And oh, my goodness, the government had a great idea. They wanted shiny chains to hold their airplanes down. And they wanted to get the rust off of them, so they got the bright idea of dragging them along that shell road. [Chuckle] And they got the rust off just fine. But it dug deep ruts in it, in the sugar sand, that we would get stuck on quite frequently. [Laughter]

SS: *So how did you get out- hard labor?*

PS: Yeah, hard labor. My sisters lived at home during that time; their husbands were in the service during World War II. And I remember when one of my sisters, her third little one arrived, and she came home in an ambulance- they did in those days. And they decided to go around this little bridge on Anderson, because they thought it wouldn't hold the ambulance. Well, it got stuck down to its (), so she transferred into a car and came on home. So that was

(). That's how the things were back in those days.

SS: *Can you reminisce about how and where you and your husband met?*

PS: Well, [Chuckle] the Coliseum over on Davis Island was built in the 1920s. And that was a real social hub when Davis Islands was first built, and--. But later on they had a skating rink there, and that was the place for teenagers to go on Friday and Saturday nights. And I had a very accommodating sister that would take us back and forth, and he was--. My husband came down from University of Alabama, and I met him. And that's how we met.

GS: ().

SS: *On roller skates?*

GS: On roller skates. I said, "Hey, now that's somebody I want to meet!" [Laughter]

PS: That's how it happened!

SS: *So what else did you--. what else did young people, young adults, do for entertainment in the late '40s?*

PS: Well, that was mainly in church; we belonged to West Hillsborough Baptist Church. And we had parties, we had wiener roasts, had a best friend that lived over on Benjamin Road. She and her twin brother were very good friends, and we would do a lot of things like that together.

SS: *Were there any movie houses or such in the west side of the county?*

PS: In downtown Tampa.

SS: *Only in downtown?*

PS: Yeah. We use to go to Tampa Theatre; that was a beautiful, big-time theater.

SS: Still is.

PS: And it still is. And they had several others- the State, I believe it was.

SS: *But there was, there was nothing in the western part, nothing on Anderson Road, () Road?*

PS: Actually, actually, that was pretty much boondocks. That was even before Town 'N Country developed. And again, right after we moved there, Drew Park () And they used to--. The soldiers used to camp out in the swamp there. There was 17 swamps on that property.

SS: *On your father's property?*

PS: Just south of there, there were a number of swamps also, and they used to bivouac.

SS: *Because they wanted to, or because they were told to?*

PS: They were told to. [Laughter]

SS: *That, that was their housing- uh-huh?*

PS: Right. Well, it was part of their training for going overseas. The park was called West Park (); it used to be a campground.

SS: *And your first home was very close to your families?*

PS: Right, it was on Anderson, Anderson Road there.

GS: When we first got married, we, we rented the downstairs part of a garage--

PS: In Tampa. [Laughter]

GS: --in Tampa, right near Jefferson High School.

SS: *The downstairs part of a garage is usually where the cars are kept.*

PS: Yeah, well, they had converted--. It was converted into an apartment, but it was affordable. I think we paid \$30 a month, [Laughter] which is a little different ().

GS: When we were married in West Hillsborough Baptist Church, and shortly thereafter, we went to Drew Park, then Seffner. We were there for about twenty years until we moved over to ().

PS: We lived in kind of a no-man's land between Seffner and Dover. The post office that one would claim us for a while, and then back and forth.

SS: *And when was this?*

PS: This was back in 1934, when I started--. And we had a school teacher that drove right by our place there on 574. Her name was Lillie Waldon. And she picked up three of my sisters and myself, and we went to Brandon School. That--. There was just the one school there at that time.

SS: *All grades?*

PS: All grades, 1 through 12 and () McLane--, is it McLane Junior High, now? No.

SS: *Yes, I think it is.*

PS: Anyhow, we--. They had six hundred students in all 12 grades, [Laughter] which can tell you a little bit about (). There was a general store, Morgan's General Store, where you could get groceries; Hampton's

Garage, where you could get gas. And that's about where Highway 60 pretty much ended. The improved road was there.

SS: *No Home Depot, no, no seafood shops!*

PS: [Laughter] No, they had an ice house where the teachers (). We would stop and get 25 pounds of ice or 50 pounds to take home to put in their ice box. And so I was the youngest of seven children, and so--, three other sisters and myself who rode back and forth to school. And also ().

And then May Waldon was my first grade teacher. The appraiser-- I think it was county appraiser [Pause] or the tax collector-- the first one was named Waldon. And this was his wife that was my first grade teacher over at Brandon, and--.

SS: *Did, did people ever venture south of State Road 60?*

PS: I spent a night with a girlfriend from the school there at Buckhorn Springs, I think. It was just a little tiny spring. And it was an old-fashioned house with a walk-through breezeway in it. I remember that very well. [Laughter]

GS: I never knew this part of the world existed. All of our time was spent up in the northwest part of the county or in Tampa, but never heard of Brandon before. [Laughter]

PS: We took--

GS: (). We had a lot of social activities in Odessa; went to church there. When we were teenagers, we would go to Tarpon Springs. That's where the movies were. [Tape skips]

SS: *You had to go all the way to Tarpon Springs to--, for entertainment?*

GS: () about ten miles from where lived.

SS: *And you were a good twenty miles from anywhere in Hillsborough County. Yeah.*

GS: () from Tampa, but--. So that was--. I had talked about having to have a fight in order to get accepted. One, one of the

boys, the younger brother, and I double dated. I had my dad's car, and we dated a couple of girls. One of them--, then another fellow who didn't like me, and [Tape skips]. He and a couple of the other guys () were there, and they knew [Tape skips] this girl and started back.

Right at the north end of Tarpon Lake on Tarpon Springs Road, they come zipping by me and cut me off, and stopped. So here we were, in the middle of the road at 10:30 or 11 o'clock at night. And this guy gets out of the car, and he comes over and says, "Get out; I want to fight you." So [Chuckle] I got out, and we traded a couple of punches. And then I stopped, and I said "Hey man, this is dangerous. You want to fight me, let's make a date and I'll be there, but let's not do that here." So we got in our cars and went home.

Well, come to find out, he decided--, he had told his father that these people wanted to fight me. My father says "No, you can't do it." So the brother of this guy that was with me- he didn't like me either, so he said, "I'll take Lamar Hargrove's place." So the arrangements were made, and we were to assemble down at the north end of Calm Lake in Lake Fern at 3 o'clock, Sunday afternoon and have out! Well, we had a visitor come down from Chicago, and-- I don't know-- my dad's got a couple of boxing gloves, and we did a little training, you might say. Not--.

And so about 2:30, () car down our road, turn around, and went on back. So my dad, my brother, this friend of ours, and I got in our car and we went over to Calm Lake. And so Carl Wallhooter was his name; Willard was the one who enlisted him. Willard was all right; he liked me, but Carl didn't. So anyhow, we got to trading punches, and after about five, ten minutes, he decided he had enough. And so after that, why, I didn't have any trouble at all.

SS: *What was, what was his name again? It was a very Odessa-sounding name.*

GS: Carl Wallhooter.

SS: *Wallhooter?*

GS: Wallhooter. [Laughter] That's a good German name. So is mine for that matter. But--

SS: *Did you ever find out why they, they just didn't like you; was it because you didn't talk right?*

GS: I was a damn Yankee. That's why.

SS: *You just didn't talk right!* [Laughter]

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[START TAPE 1, SIDE B]

GS: () little old Yankee just didn't sit with us. [Laughter] And we--, one time we had a (). So we were, we were in Carl's car () and Carl's dad's car, going down West Hillsborough Avenue around where the Hillsborough Avenue bridge is, and we got stopped by the police for speeding. And [Chuckle] I don't know--, I don't remember whether Carl got a ticket or whether he just got a warning, but anyhow, the word was that he didn't tell his parents that he had gotten stopped by the police. [Tape Skips] One in our group is a blabbermouth; he took after his mother. [Laughter] And so unfortunately, he told his mother about it, and it got back to his father, or got back to Carl's father. And so we found, we found out who had told.

So we decided we'd teach him a lesson. We--. One Saturday night, we all got together, and we had our guns out. I had a .14 single-shot shotgun, and the rest of them had .22 rifles (). We went out and got on the south end of Crescent Lake, right near my home. There is an old abandoned house, so we decided to go in there and check it out. The house () this fellow inside and lock the door, [Laughter] so we all opened up with our guns up at the top of the house, not anywhere in the lower part. And we--. I don't know whether he had peed his pants (), [Laughter] but he didn't tell things after that! [Laughter]

SS: *A little object lesson.* [Laughter]

GS: ().

PS: You were asking about a recreation, from the time I was little. Actually, I was accepted when I was five to go on camping trips with our family, and that was--

SS: *Where did you go?*

PS: We went to nearly all the Florida state parks. Now, we went to Crystal Springs, where they have that beautiful water now. [Laughter] But we would go there, and we'd do the primitive camping: spread the blankets on the ground, and cook over an open fire. And we would gather a group of 15 or 20 because--, besides our family, and in fact, family from (), cousins and friends. And so we'd end with about 20 people wanting to go, and that was some of the best memories.

SS: *A good thing to do when the money is tight too; it's very easy.*

PS: Yeah, uh-huh, and--

GS: That reminds me () before, but our social lives was built around church, the American Legion, the American Legion Auxiliary, and Boy Scouts--

PS: ().

GS: --and the Masonic Lodge over in Lutz. And Lutz was about seven or eight miles east of where we lived. And those were our social gatherings; we'd go.

PS: (). We had an aunt that lived out on a lake called Lake Stemper, in Lutz, and-- just off of Sunset Lane out there-- and we'd go out there and have picnics (). That was good family fun.

GS: We didn't have the modern ping pong table system there nowadays, because that table there was our ping pong table.

SS: *It's a family heirloom, eh?*

GS: Oh yeah, that came down here in 1934, and I don't know how long they had that before then, but it has () three () in it, so we had a real good ping pong table. Then I became an addict ping--, Monopoly player; had a girl that lived up the street from us that I would go to then. And I'd go--, we'd go--,

I'd go up there and play Monopoly with her a lot.

SS: *So where did your family do most of the shopping, got everything you needed?*

GS: Had gas pump with the glass globe in it; you'd pump it up, and ().

PS: () 25th birthday. [Laughter]

GS: Right.

SS: *Is--, are there stores in that spot now, or is it a totally different--?*

GS: () in Odessa, they got a big flea market there now. And they've got all kinds of industrial buildings in that area now ().

SS: *Well, some of the people in Odessa are not crazy about having those buildings put in, resisting the development.*

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE B]

[END OF INTERVIEW]