

# Joe Potts

## Hillsborough Remembers



Town 'N Country

**Joseph S. Potts Jr.**

February 13, 2003

by Nicholl Sanchez

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*This is an interview with Joseph S. Potts, Jr. (JP) retired casket maker of Odessa, Florida. Mr. Potts is one of the original small business owners in Town n' Country, and has also lived in Town n' Country since 1950. This interview is being conducted on February 13, 2003 at 3:15 PM [Pause, with Background Noise] at Alonzo High School.*

*The interviewer is Nicholl Sanchez, (NS) representing the Tampa Hillsborough County Public, Public Library system's oral history collection project.*

**Nicholl Sanchez (NS):** *OK. All right, Mr. Potts, could you give--, could you give us a brief overview about yourself- where you were born, who your parents are?*

**Joseph Potts (JP):** *Sure, [Chuckle] they're Mom and Dad. I was born in Tampa, and I went to junior high here, and high school here, and attended the University of Tampa.*

**NS:** *Any immediate family living or still living in Town n' Country?*

**JP:** *No.*

**NS:** *No? Did you attend the first school that opened in Town n' Country? What was a typical day like?*

**JP:** *No, I didn't attend any schools in Town n' Country. Our children did. They went to Incarnation and Leto.*

**NS:** *How has education changed in Town n' Country?*

**JP:** *I don't have the foggiest idea. [Laughter] I don't know.*

**NS:** *OK. What was your first job in Town n' Country? Where were you living at the time?*

**JP:** *I was living on Civic Road in Town n' Country, and it was in the casket factory. You get to do everything. So probably mowing the yard.*

**NS:** *Tell me about a typical day at work and what it was like to commute back then.*

**JP:** Fortunately, we did not have to commute; we could walk from the house to work. [Chuckle] That was easy. Hillsborough Avenue was a two-lane road. There were no stores. There were no--. There was nothing out here- no Town n' Country. But we were very fortunate we didn't have to walk--, I mean, didn't have to ride to work; we could walk to work, so--, without having to commute.

**NS:** *And how would a typical day at your job be?*

**JP:** Oh, you'd go to work at about 7:00 in the morning and work until 5:30 or 6:00, sometimes seven days a week, including holidays.

**NS:** ( ).

**JP:** ( ) it was manufacturing caskets.

**NS:** *What church did you attend as a child?*

**JP:** It was the First Presbyterian Church in downtown Tampa.

**NS:** *And do you still go there?*

**JP:** No.

**NS:** *What church do you attend now?*

**JP:** We now attend either the Incarnation church or the Catholic church on North Dale Mabry.

**NS:** *Were you involved in the swimming club owned by LaMonte Shimberg?*

**JP:** No.

**NS:** *No?*

**JP:** Lamonte.

**NS:** *Lamott.*

**JP:** Lamonte.

**NS:** *Lamonte. [Laughter] Could you tell me about your neighborhood and how it's changed in the last 25 years?*

**JP:** Yeah! [Chuckle] They've built a gazillion houses out here. The road is down to a six-lane road. Traffic is terrible. Taxes are outrageous. I pay more in taxes than we paid for the land, every year. Schools are everywhere- I never heard of Alonso until you called me. This used to be a gun club.

**NS:** *Do--, Did you or your parents own a home in one of the new subdivisions?*

**JP:** No, we didn't live in a subdivision. We live between the subdivisions.

**NS:** *OK. And who were your neighbors?*

**JP:** We didn't have neighbors. [Laughter]

**NS:** *So was it just a house ( )?*

**JP:** Yeah, on ten acres, yeah. And Baycrest was across the street from us.

**NS:** *Baycrest? So I'm guessing they're still--, they're not around anymore.*

**JP:** Oh, Baycrest is still there.

**NS:** *Oh! Yeah, I'm talking about the neighbors.*

**JP:** Oh! No.

**NS:** *Can you tell me about any changes, any changes that you have witnessed in Town n' Country in the last 25 years or more?*

**JP:** Yeah, they built a lot of houses, [Laughter] a lot of stores. K-Mart has come and gone. Home Depot is here. The, the traffic has picked up. Built more stop lights in. Sheldon Road now is a four-lane road; it used to be a single-lane road. A lot of growth. More people live in 33615 zip code-- that's here-- than do in a lot of cities in Florida.

**NS:** *What local small businesses do you remember? And do you know who owned them?*

**JP:** Well, there's a couple hardware stores that were owned locally. And I think the guy's name was Sanchez.

**NS:** *Sanchez?*

**JP:** I think. I think; that's familiar. It might have been your great-great grandfather. [Chuckle]

**NS:** *Might have been; you never know. [Chuckle] Do you--? Are they still around?*

**JP:** No.

**NS:** ( )?

**JP:** No, they're not.

**NS:** *What do you remember as the worst time living in Town n' Country?*

**JP:** The worst time? There were no worst times. Some were just a little better than others.

**NS:** *Like, like about--. Was there a worst--, like a really bad hurricane or a really bad economic--, get really bad at one point, or whatever?*

**JP:** No, not really. No. No. I like Town n' Country.

**NS:** *OK. Do you remember your best time in Town n' Country?*

**JP:** Hmm. I guess when I got married in my backyard. [Laughter]

**NS:** *That's very sweet. OK. How do you feel about the developments in Town n' Country now compared to back then- 25 years ago?*

**JP:** I don't think you want my views on that. [Laughter] They're not good. No, they're not good.

**NS:** *OK.*

**JP:** Let me tell you why. Somebody's going to want to know why.

**NS:** *Yeah!*

**JP:** Yeah! They're want to know why. Well, with growth, you, you--, somebody is going to get displaced somewhere, sometime, whether you like it or not. It happened to be us. Big business came in, and it didn't help our casket business at all.

But with rules and regulations and development really hurt our area that we were living in. The things that we did 25 or 30 years ago because of growth, which is good for the county--. But it's bad for some of the individuals that lived there and had been living there for long time. It's not good at all. Our taxes go up; our rules and regulations increase. It takes us longer to go somewhere than it did before.

The noise level goes up tremendously. You can't believe how noisy it is on that road now. The roads that, that were quiet neighborhood roads now are big six-lane roads, with cars going everywhere, traffic lights everywhere.

**NS:** *What about the first hospital in Town n' Country? Can you recall what it was like when it first opened in 1980s?*

**JP:** Yeah, that was Town n' Country Hospital, I guess. I don't know. I never had any dealings with them.

**NS:** *No?*

**JP:** No.

**NS:** *How has the cultural diversity changed in the community?*

**JP:** Well, it, it just grew up. As the, as the neighborhoods developed, you know, it, it grew up there. I don't see any change in it- just more people.

**NS:** *Do you remember Webb Dairy and it--, what it was like?*

**JP:** Webb Dairy?

**NS:** *Dairy, yes. Sorry. [Chuckle]*

**JP:** Dairy or Dairy?

**NS:** *Dairy.*

**JP:** Dairy. Yeah, that Dairy was the land where Town n' Country is today- like Plantation Dairy is--, was where Plantation development is.

**NS:** *And do you remember the Sweet Water Ranch and what it was like?*

**JP:** No. I don't remember Sweet Water Ranch.

**NS:** *No.*

**JP:** No.

**NS:** *And what do you remember about the boom in the 1970s, where Joe Lackey Construction Corporation and his River Oaks developments, or Hugh Smith Associations and the Rocky Creek mobile homes?*

**JP:** Don't know Joe Lackey. The Rocky Creek--. You talking about the mobile homes?

**NS:** Yes.

**JP:** Ah, nothing.

**NS:** *Nothing?*

**JP:** ( ). They built some nice parks- you know, a lot of people.

**NS:** *Could you tell me what you remember about the old West Gate Library, which is--, which was located in the shopping plaza when it opened in 1959?*

**JP:** Yeah, it was just a small, little old neighborhood library.

**NS:** *And when the library moved to its present location in 1975, how was it different from the old library?*

**JP:** It was bigger and better and well-equipped. Yeah, it was a full, regular library- a real library.

**NS:** *A big library.*

**JP:** Yeah.

**NS:** *When did you get--? Did you--? Have you ever gotten a library card?*

**JP:** Me? No.

**NS:** *No?*

**JP:** No.

**NS:** *Was there a Town n' Country resident who made a difference in your life- one person who inspired you or had a significant impact on you?*

**JP:** No.

**NS:** *No?*

**JP:** No. [Laughter] I can't say it is!

**NS:** *Do you remember or do you know about someone from the Town n' Country area who has made a difference in the world- like a celebrity, an artist, a physician, or a researcher?*

**JP:** No.

**NS:** No?

**JP:** Sorry, no. [Laughter]

**NS:** OK. Have you--, your activities as the community has grown changed much?

**JP:** What kind of activities?

**NS:** Like, as a family, do you go out and do the same things, even though the community has changed?

**JP:** Yeah, I'd say that they're same.

**NS:** Same thing?

**JP:** Yeah, I mean, I don't see anything--. There's, you know, a few nice restaurants that are closer by now. But--. Maybe some shopping is better. But no, it's about the same.

**NS:** Is there anything that you would like to add that I didn't ask about Town n' Country?

**JP:** I'm sure there's something I'll think of later- tomorrow sometime.

**NS:** [Laughter]

**JP:** Nothing now, though.

**NS:** Nothing now? OK, then. Well--.

**JP:** I do think you have a very, very nice school here.

**NS:** It is!

**JP:** Yes! I'm impressed.

**NS:** It's fabulous.

**JP:** The media center is fantastic.

**NS:** ( ).

**JP:** You are very lucky.

**NS:** Yes, I do, actually. I consider myself lucky.

**JP:** Today is the best day of your life. Trust me.

**NS:** *[Chuckle]*

**JP:** Trust me!

**NS:** *Thank you. But I would like to thank you for coming out here, taking the time to give us an interview.*

**JP:** ( ).

**NS:** *And we did a great job for our first time. So I thank you very much.*

**JP:** Thank you.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[END OF INTERVIEW]