

**Carolyn W. Rankin**  
by Lissette Rodriguez  
March 4, 2003

[START TAPE 1, SIDE A]

*This is an interview with Mrs. Carolyn Rankin (CR) of Tampa, FL. Mrs. Rankin has been the librarian at West Gate Regional Library for many years. This interview is being conducted on March 4, 2003.*

*The interviewer is Lissette Rodriguez (LR) representing the Tampa Hillsborough County Public Library system's oral history collection project.*

**LR:** *Give a brief overview about yourself, where you were born, and who your parents are.*

**CR:** OK. I was born in Winter Haven, Florida, one of the few Floridians my age--. Most people came from out of state. And my parents came from out of state; they were both from Georgia- southern Georgia. And I didn't live in Winter Haven very long. In fact, I never lived in Winter Haven. We lived out on a farm outside of town. And the first thing that I can remember, we lived in Fort Pierce, Florida, which is over on the east coast.

And we moved to Tampa when I was about five years old. Lived in the Seminole Heights area near the Seminole Library where I grew up with. I went to Hillsborough High School, University of Tampa, and got my masters at University of South Florida. I have one son, a stepson; two grandchildren; and a great granddaughter. Anything else you want to know?

**LR:** *An immediate family living or still living in Town n' Country?*

**CR:** Yes, my son does.

**LR:** *Did you attend the first schools that opened in Town n' Country? What was a typical day like?*

**CR:** No, never did. I moved to Town n' Country when I was in my thirties. I've been here about thirty years.

**LR:** *How has education changed? Oh, well.*

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

**CR:** Well, I'm still in the same house. I live south of Hillsborough Avenue off of George Road on Alta Monte Drive. And like I said, I've been there about thirty years. Town n' Country has grown a lot since then.

At that time, there was about two grocery stores and a drug store. That was about it. I believe there was something called a burger shop and another place to eat. At that time, seems like, was Kentucky Fried Chicken; it's still in the same place. Got a new building, but it's still in the same place.

It's grown a lot; there's a lot more people. I remember where I used to live was a cow pasture. And then just seeing it--, the horrible little built houses on there. So that kind of grows with you ( ).

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

**CR:** Back then, we were in a storefront when I first started working in the library in Town n' Country- which was real small, very crowded. And it seemed like a lot of people came in, simply because it was so small and crowded. We used to do children's programs in there, which disrupted everybody's ( ) because there was no other places to ( ) in. We couldn't go anywhere away to give them a story hour or puppet show or something like that. We did up ( ).

**LR:** *How has the traffic and roads changed?*

**CR:** The roads have gotten wider. The traffic has gotten heavier, and there're a lot more roads. I remember Paula Drive used to have a tree growing right out the middle of it. You had to go around it to get on the street. And that's where the library--, just a couple blocks from the library. They finally took the tree down.

**LR:** *Tell me about the swimming club formed by the LaMonte-Shimberg. What was it like?*

**CR:** I never went there, so I can't tell you.

**LR:** *Tell me about your neighborhood and how it has changed over the last couple of years.*

**CR:** Well, when I first moved there, there were a lot of young people. And they were houses that were put up by the government for people with low incomes. But as they sold, they got a different class of people in there. They're mostly blue collar workers- not all of them, but most of them. Now they are mostly Hispanic. All my neighbors speak Spanish, and I don't. Sometimes it's real hard to talk to them. But I still enjoy them and see them out in the yard and things.

**LR:** Did you own, or your parents own a home in one of the new subdivisions (Morgan Woods, Woodbridge, Woodmere, or Spanish Oaks) developed by LaMonte-Shimberg? What was it like?

**CR:** No, they didn't, and neither did I. [Laughter]

**LR:** Who were your neighbors?

**CR:** Who were the neighbors? You want their names? Most ( ) all the neighbors that were there when I moved in- they're no longer there. So I have all new neighbors. ( ). They've all added onto their houses, it seemed like. They were usually basic two-bedroom houses, and they've either added a bedroom or a pool or closed-in patio or something, you know.

**LR:** Can you tell me about any changes you have witnessed in Town n' Country over the couple of years?

**CR:** I think that the neighborhood is coming together to to do several things. One thing is they used to have some gangs in there that were pretty bad, and they damaged a lot of property around the neighborhood. But they're not--. I think they're basically gone. I think they've gone, because I haven't seen any of that name-writing on the walls and things like that that we used to see a lot of.

And they fight for what they want. They fought, they fought for new building system, which they got. And they fought for new libraries, which they're going to have in the next few years. And they are now fighting over the town center- the Town n' Country Town Center. And I don't know how that's going to turn up. They asked for a new senior center, and that's going to be built. So it's come together as a group to include, to include the community and that.

**LR:** What local businesses do you remember, and who owned them?

**CR:** Local business- I remember some, but I don't--, I can't tell you who owned them. [Laughter] There was that--. I guess it's that ( ) place on Hillsborough Avenue, just east of Memorial. But ( ).

**LR:** It's been here for that long?

**CR:** It's been here for that long, yes. I've been living ( ), which used to be in the--, across the street from Albertson's. They've moved, but they're still here in Town n' Country. They've got new offices now on Memorial Highway. Who else that have been here ( )? Not many more, tell you. ( ) for a long time. I'll tell you what we called it. [Laughter]

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

**CR:** The worst times? I remember a hurricane came through here- hovered right off the coast right even with us. And I don't remember the name of it. But I stayed awake one night watching TV, wondering what was going to happen. And it finally moved off after about two or three days. And it flooded everything, and then it went down. I live off George Road. So I went down George Road, and there was the, the golf course. And all I could see was this little hill. Everything else had covered with water. It was pretty bad, yeah.

**LR:** *Do you remember what year that was?*

**CR:** About 1980, '81.

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

**CR:** The best time? I thought--. I always felt like it was a safe place to be for my children. And I enjoyed that a lot, and did it because I lived real close to where I worked. I didn't have to make a big trip downtown or to North Tampa or whatever. That was the best part of it. I liked it because everything you need is here: the schools are here, the groceries are here. ( ) the movie theatres for a while when it was here. And you didn't have to go very far.

**LR:** *Which do you like more: this time period, or when you first moved here?*

**CR:** Well, there are good things to say about both ways- both, because my family's changed so much in the time--. My husband died, you know. I liked it better then, because he was alive. But yet I like it better now, because it's more alive.

**LR:** *How do you feel about the ( ) in Town n' Country ( )?*

**CR:** Well, before we ( ), it was called the ( ) of Sheldon Road. Now look at it. You all probably live west of Sheldon Road, right? Yeah! So there was nothing here but cow pastures and palmettos and swamp. And I remember coming to this area and going to the rifle range, which is what I think the school was built on. Practicing with the guns- [Chuckle] you can't do that these days.

**LR:** *How has the cultural diversity changed in your community?*

**CR:** Well, basically, at first, it was all white. But now, Town n' Country is ( ). How should I say this? Of the whole United States, Town n' Country is one of the ten--, top most cultural areas in the whole United States of America. Most people don't know that. But we have people living here from all over the world. And the other languages that people coming around here speaking that you don't know or never heard before--. And they moved here and ( ) in touch with their family back home, or you probably get reading material for them or whatever. I think that changes ( ).

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

**CR:** Long, long ago; that was before my time.

**LR:** *Did you use the Sweetwater Utilities, the sewage treatment plan formed by LaMonte-Shimberg? How effective was it?*

**CR:** I don't know if that's the one that's over there off of Sheldon or not. Then no, I can't answer that question, because I really don't know.

**LR:** *What do you remember about the boom in the ( )?*

**CR:** I was just going to say that I remember before they approved it, it was not bad. ( ).

**LR:** *What do you remember about the boom in the 1970s, with Joe Lackey Construction Corporation and his River Oaks development, or HE Smith Associates and the Rocky Creek Mobile Homes?*

**CR:** Well, that's about the time I moved here. So to me, whatever was going on, I wasn't really concerned with it at the time, because I had too many other things on my mind, I guess. But I know that they ( ).

**LR:** *Tell me what you remember about the old West Gate Library, which was located at the shopping plaza, when it opened in 1969.*

**CR:** It was up on ( ) Road. It was one room. It had a little office in the back, and that was about it. We'd be all crowded in to kind of do the work away from the public. Very limited collection, and it was well used, though. And people really, really wanted a new library. We weren't open but I think two nights a week. Libraries now are open seven days a week.

**LR:** *When the library moved to its present location in 1975, how was it different from the old library?*

**CR:** Well, we quadrupled the space, and maybe even more than that. We moved- you said '75. Well, we started moving stuff in '74. And there was a steel strike, and we couldn't get shelving. They just opened the year before. We couldn't get the shelving to get the books done, so they just held it until the shelving came through. And I think we opened in '74. We had about 13 people on staff. And there were 8 of the school staff, 18 people when we first opened the building, and now there are 20 people working there.

Staff-wise, it's grown; collection-wise, it's grown. And they keep putting things in, and they're at the point where they can't expand anymore. They're either going to have to build an addition on, or knock it down and put a new one on the same property. I don't know which they're going to do. I think they're leaning towards knocking it down and building a new one.

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

**CR:** [Pause] ( ). I had a neighbor that got real close to me. She made an impact on my life. She was in an automobile accident; her name was Jewel. She was in an automobile accident just one block from her house and turned her into a vegetable. And I read about it. Probably she made the biggest difference in my life. But the main thing that I needed done that she couldn't--, wouldn't help me do, she was able. She lives in Kentucky now with her family.

**LR:** *What about someone from Town N' Country who made a difference in the world, like a celebrity, artist, physician, or researcher?*

**CR:** [Laughter] Hmm. There is an artist that lives in Town n' Country that's world renowned-- he's from China; I can't remember his name-- that has done painting at the West Gate Library. But he's known for them. One of them we own- the library owns. I'll have to look it up and tell you his name. I can't remember. [Laughter] Sorry.

**LR:** *Is there anything you would like to add that I didn't ask about Town n' Country? You know, the library or--*

**CR:** Well, the library flooded one time, right after we first opened- maybe a year later. We've always had a drainage problem here. Well, they put a drain line from the patio out into near the street. Well, the street flooded, went into the draining, and flushed it back into the library and flooded all the way to the back wall. That was too bad. None of the books got wet, thank God, but the carpet was never the same- [Laughter] never, ever. They had to replace it, but they usually replaced it again.

So that was about in '76 that it flooded. And it flooded a little bit for many years from the patio area, but they put them drains in, and they keep them open. ( ) if it gets stuck, what with leaves or something, it starts coming in the library then. I believe we've had seven librarians there since we started it ( ) things out here in Town n' Country. I worked with pride. I'm retired now ( ).

Anything else you want to know? That's it? OK.

[END OF TAPE 1, SIDE A]

[END OF INTERVIEW]