

Samuel Proctor Oral History Program
College of Liberal Arts and Sciences

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The Samuel Proctor Oral History Program (SPOHP) was founded by Dr. Samuel Proctor at the University of Florida in 1967. Its original projects were collections centered around Florida history with the purpose of preserving eyewitness accounts of economic, social, political, religious and intellectual life in Florida and the South. In the 45 years since its inception, SPOHP has collected over 5,000 interviews in its archives.

Transcribed interviews are available through SPOHP for use by research scholars, students, journalists, and other interested groups. Material is frequently used for theses, dissertations, articles, books, documentaries, museum displays, and a variety of other public uses. As standard oral history practice dictates, SPOHP recommends that researchers refer to both the transcript and audio of an interview when conducting their work. A selection of interviews are available online here through the UF Digital Collections and the UF Smathers Library system.

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PCM-040

Interviewee: Janice Scott

Interviewer: Sarah Blanc

Date: July 8, 2011

B: Hello, this is Sarah Blanc and I'm here with Janice Scott in Orlando, Florida, for the Panama Canal Zone reunion. It's July 8, 2011. So Ms. Scott, would you like to begin with some family background information?

S: Well, I would really like to begin by saying that it was a distinct honor and privilege to have my grandfather, Tom Grimison, he was a Roosevelt Medal holder, number 3619 with two bars, and his wife, Jessie Shaver, who came from Easton, Pennsylvania, in 19[0]7 with their seven-month-old daughter. I mean, it's a real honor and a privilege to have been associated with the Panama Canal for almost a hundred years. My grandparents, I can imagine, what their families were thinking when they waved goodbye to them as the ship faded into the blue from New York City, thinking that they would never see them again because if they read the newspapers of the day they probably thought that they would just never be coming back to Pennsylvania. All the Canal workers, despite their nationalities, had one thing in common, and when many predecessors working on construction of the Canal would return to the United States, the buzz of the day was, don't go, don't go. It's a terrible place. The common enemy for everyone was malaria, yellow fever, dengue, but also, I think, the bittersweet feeling of loneliness for home, food, and familiar faces affected all the workers. It just didn't matter where they were from, the Caribbean, Europe, China, Asia; the tropical climate took no hostages. Our grandfather, Tom, worked on the railroad.

He worked on a dump train and retired in 1939 from the Canal. During various periods of time, he was unemployed and went back to the United States looking for work, but somehow the love of Panama, they ended up back in Panama.

During World War II my grandfather was re-employed because so many of the young men who lived and worked on the Canal, high school boys, et cetera, were drafted—

B: [Laughter] Papparazzi!

S: – to serve in World War II, and many of the old retirees who were still in the area were re-employed. And I like to tell the story about my grandmother because they were in their early twenties when they went to Panama, and in spite of all the stories, whenever I ask her, what was it really like? How could you possibly go to such a foreign place where you heard a lot of negative stories? And she said it was the time of her life. She never would have done anything differently, she loved it. Of course they arrived at the time when the US government was making a lot of efforts to make sure that the Canal employees stayed at the job and didn't continuously leave after being there a year. So my grandmother was one of the early liberated women I would say because she worked on the Atlantic side, and their family lived on the Pacific side. She would take the train to Cristóbal every Monday morning and come back on Friday afternoon. And she worked in the commissary and, even as a child I remember going into the commissary in Balboa and one of the West Indian clerks would look at me and

say, oh I know you. You must be Ms. Grimison grandchild I see you in here the other day with your grandmother, And they would tell me that, oh yes, your grandmother, she always could balance her inventory to the needle, because she apparently ran the notions section. But they retired to a community, a little town 'bout fifty miles north of Panama City called Nueva Gorgona. The town was started by people from Gatun Lake area being relocated to Gorgona when they flooded to create Gatun Lake. So they bought a property there around 1930 and continuously worked on it. Everybody loved to visit them at this beach house and my grandfather died there in 1957, in his hammock, on the porch overlooking the Pacific Ocean that he loved, and he just never wanted to go back to Pennsylvania and shovel snow.

[Laughter]

S: One of the things that I was very proud of my grandparents, even though they never became very fluent in Spanish, and particularly my grandfather, was very interested in the community and helping people. His family in the United States were in the notions business, candy and selling decorations for the holidays, which they shipped to him, so he always provided fourth of July fireworks. And there were some funny stories people have told me over the years of breaking into the crates under his house and swiping fireworks, sending him anonymous checks when they got their first job because they felt so like ah,

[laughter]

S: Perhaps it wasn't something they should have been doing but I never heard that from him. In Gorgona, he liked to go there, specifically be there on Christmas day, and all the people in the surrounding villages would come and line up outside his gate and whoever was there got candy and nuts in a wrapped plastic. And, even later in the day, after he had started doing that, people would come by horseback and arrive in the early afternoon with children who were very excited, but very shy people, very unusual-looking people who came from the mountains and had their teeth filed to a point. So, somehow I think they were related to the Guaymi tribes that occupy the areas of the mountains further north, but it was very exciting to live there. He had to generate his own electricity, and had a well, and he pumped his own water, and made himself completely self-sufficient. And everyone knew where the Grimison house was in Gorgona and they loved to go there and visit or drive by. And, sadly, when I was in Panama last year for the Cayuco Race the house had been torn down and a four-story condo is now on the beach,

B: ohh.

S: But, you know, that's how it goes. So, that's the story of my grandparents' background, and their three children, this is a interesting thing to me, they had three children. **Helene** was the daughter who was born in the United States, graduated from Balboa High School in 1925. She was my mother's oldest sister. My mother graduated in 1927, and her brother in 1928. So my brother, Ed,

graduated in 1956, my brother, Richard, in 1960, and I graduated in 1962. My two oldest children also graduated from that high school: **Katrina** in 1981 and **Ian** in 1985. And my two youngest children, my two youngest boys, graduated from other high schools in the U.S., but imagine how many years, for children to imagine today even that people would even attend for one year the high school that their parents had attended and here we span from 1925 to 1985, so that's quite unusual. In the same building.

B: Wow.

S: So, in my mother's senior year which, well my mother loved growing up in the Canal Zone, and if you worked as a teenager in the Canal Zone in those days and then subsequently worked for the US government and retired, they always talked about how you got credit for your mango-picking years. So, my mother had a few mango-picking years, working as a teenager during summer vacations, but she had a job her senior year in high school working for the Panama American Newspaper as a sportswriter. And, apparently, from what I understood, that's how she met my dad, Edward W. Scott, who was well-known in Panama and around the world in the news business as Ted Scott. My dad, Ted, came from New Zealand as a boxer. He was a featherweight champion boxer of New Zealand,

B: [laughter]

S: And was on his way to Paris to fight in Europe and trained under a man named Leon C in Paris, who was a well-known boxing trainer. And after a year or so of that he was on his way back to New Zealand when he ran into my mother, who was covering a boxing match that he was doing there, and they eloped, much to my grandmother's chagrin. But my dad was a very gregarious guy. He loved everybody, he loved Panama, he was an outdoors guy, he was a man's man, and probably also macho man, but he just loved Panama.

[laughter]

S: And many New Zealanders would come to visit because I think they thought he was living the life fandango, and they heard all these stories and they wanted to be part of that, just like people were drawn to the construction of the Canal. So his first job was working as a banana plantation manager in Bocas del Toro in the northern part of Panama, the northern border, which kind of amused me because if you came from a place like New Zealand, way, way too far in the south Pacific to really be called tropical, what would you know about bananas? But he really loved it there. And he spoke French, so he quickly became fluent in Spanish. He had worked for the Wellington Star newspaper before he left New Zealand in his early twenties, so it wasn't quite a surprise or a big career change that he gave up boxing and dedicated himself full-time to his journalism business. He went to work for Nelson Rounswell, who was the founder of a newspaper called the Panama American that was founded specifically to provide news to the people

living in the Canal Zone. And the headline of the newspaper, under where it said the Panama American in English, it said let the people know the truth and the country is safe, signed, Abraham Lincoln. So I'll take So I'll pause here for a minute.

B: Okay.

S: Okay?

B: For questions?

S: Sure If you wanna have me –

B: Okay.

S: – Sorry, I didn't.

B: Sure No, that's great family history. So, your mom continued on as a sportswriter?

S: No, she went from being a sportswriter to working for the United Fruit Company in Colón on the Atlantic side. And, in that day, it was quite surprising to me how they got along in their early marriage because the Transisthmian Highway was not built until World War II, so it was some twenty-plus years before you could drive a car across the isthmus. And there are probably a million stories about how people used to pay to walk the railroad tracks so that they could, you know,

get from one side to the other without buying what they probably considered at the time an expensive train ticket.

B: So if you had at least three generations of family at this high school, Balboa High School, did any teachers there have multiple generations of students from your family?

S: I would imagine so because many of them worked there for many, many years and, some of the coaches, especially Coach **Nicolage**, that I remember his name his name in particular, mentored my brother in high school. My oldest brother was very athletic in his class. In 1956 he was voted most athletic. He was very involved in all different kinds of sports activities as was my next brother, Richard, so they were very involved in the school and were all very fond of the coaches. And I had one favorite English teacher. Her name was Mary **Brigham**. All the kids called her Bloody Mary because she tried to act very mean and that she was a no-nonsense kind of a person, but she really did have a great sense of humor. That was the year in high school, probably my sophomore year, where I had to study Shakespeare, and that's one of my favorite quotes now, that the evil that men do live after them, and the good is oft interred with the bones, and so it was with Caesar's. Yes, and I loved going to school in the Canal Zone. It was a great place to grow up. It was safe. Everyone knew everyone else, so it was difficult to get into too much serious trouble.

B: Do any of these teachers from the Canal Zone schools ever come to this reunion?

S: Yes, they do. And in fact I passed my senior history teacher along the way; can't remember his name right off-hand. Yes, I've seen them and as a matter of fact this past April when I went I was in Panama, I saw my gym teacher from high school, who is still living in Santa Clara.

B: Very cool.

S: Which is really fun.

B: Did you have Panamanian students in any of your classes, too?

S: Yes, we did. As a matter of fact, that was one of the things that I really loved about Panama. I think, in spite of things, the anti-American sentiment that people talk about a lot, in the day when my parents first started their marriage there and everything, they had a lot of Panamanian friends. I think the Canal Zone in Panama, until the 1950s, was very, very integrated; socially integrated. And my father was a founding member of the Union Club in Panama, for example. He belonged to the Marlin Sports Fishing Club and things like that. And everyone knew everyone. And, I guess historically as more people moved to Panama and there just became a big struggle between people that lived in the Canal Zone and people that lived in Panama. Otherwise, I always thought it was a great melting pot. I still think it is. Now when my youngest son went to high school in Florida,

the first day he came home from school and he said, do you realize that that school's lily-white? There's nobody there but white people He could not –
[Laughter]

B: Where in Florida was that?

S: Cocoa Beach.

B: Okay, okay. I went to school in South Florida, and it sounds about the same.

S: Oh, really? So, he was quite, it was quite funny for him to say that because if you lived in the Canal Zone, where it was so culturally and racially integrated, you know, you can see it when you visit today, it's just sort of a shock, I guess, when you hear that, oh, integration was such a big thing. I remember being on a street corner in New Orleans in 1961, and they were having a demonstration and taking young people off in a police wagon, and asking my mother, what in the world is that all about? And she goes, oh that's about the integration problem they're having. And I'm like, how could you be having an integration problem? I just thought everyone was integrated, but –

B: Yeah, that's actually my chapter of study in history, is the U.S. Civil Rights Movement. What do you think happened around the [19]50s that made the Canal Zone a little more isolated and a little less integrated?

S: Well, one of the things that, you know, all these things – let me digress.

B: Sure.

S: I don't believe, in my heart of hearts, that Roosevelt ever intended to colonialize an American community in the Canal. I think he liked the challenge. He you know of course—the US had done surveys to build a canal before the French began construction, so I do believe he wanted to just be the champion of that, and provide actually what became a service to world commerce. It really has provided something wonderful for the world. And I think as they tried to downsize the population in the Canal Zone, as the late 19, say around 1919, World War I came along. Then there was the issue of defending the Canal from the Germans and the US had to have another military presence there at the time. Then there was the Great Depression. People leaving the Canal could not find work in the US, and people were terribly afraid. And there as a certain benevolent dictatorship about the Canal Zone where they took people under their wings and always tried to be nice and do the right, socially correct thing. I always—and then World War II came along, and it was the same issue. In fact, during World War II my father worked with MI6. He was a British undercover. He was too old to go to war and too young to carry a gun or something, so he was in his late forties and he was undercover for the British in Costa Rica. And his cover was being President of TACA Airline, was founded by a New Zealand friend of his, Lowell Yerex. And my mother worked for the Canal Zone government, and because so many young men had been taken from the Canal were drafted into the military for

the war, she was recruiting labor among the Costa Ricans to go and work on the Canal in Panama. And I remember one time I was working at the printing plant in the Canal Zone, and one of the press operators stopped me and he said, I have to ask you a question. He said, aren't you Janice Scott's daughter? And I said, yes, and he said, your mother brought me here from Costa Rica in World War II. And so there was a little cadre of them working in the printing plant that had been given jobs and had never returned to Costa Rica. But basically life in the Canal Zone was dictated by treaty with Panama. And if you examine the history of the Canal construction, I've tried to read many books about it, the way the whole commissary system evolved; first of all, it was a very young country, **it** was kind of lawless, and when the Canal needed this orderly place they could control, Goethals was that sort of benevolent dictator, if you will. They had to evolve a system to provide services to take care of their employees, and they did that. And one of the stories, I believe it's in Path between the Seas, is about the usury that the Panamanian businesses foisted on Canal workers. They overcharged them for food and different things and, apparently, in the early days of 1905, 1907, the US government repeatedly warned the Panamanian businesspeople that if they did not conduct themselves in a more fair and business-like manner that they would have to take other measures to provide for their employees, which they did. So I believe Ms. **Green's** talk that I listened to yesterday. She expressed a sentiment where Panamanian politicians and businesspeople felt a little left out of the profits that could be made from the Canal endeavor, but in

many respects they brought certain negative things upon themselves, and, as it were, they did not, for example, even recognize that the West Indians, they weren't US citizens, they were citizens of Jamaica, citizens of Barbados. Now they had children who were in their second and third generation that they wanted to go to schools. Well they could not go to the US schools because the US schools were for US citizens, and that's how the silver and gold thing, the divide was more than just that basic discrimination and it was dictated by treaty. And, in fact in the Remon-Eisenhower Treaty of 1951 there was a big effort to close all the commissaries, and so they started trying to disassemble that, what they considered a privileged system, one by one. Well, in my lifetime, after I graduated from high school, I married and I went to Michigan State for a while with my husband, and it was so cold. I never could get used to that cold, so I went back to Panama in December of 1963 for a visit

Unidentified Male: I'll see you later.

S: Okay. And the riots, the political riots occurred, which people could read a lot about that, but I stayed and worked for the Army, and then subsequently was divorced and remarried, moved to Miami. My husband was in graduate school in Miami. After three years he got a job as an engineer with the Panama Canal Company again, so we moved back to the Canal Zone. After three years he decided to go to work for a company in the Republic of Panama, and we lost our little yellow ID card. Well, that was quite a shock. I mean, if you just moved to

Panama, it would be so easy, because you would pick up where you arrived. After two generations of living in the Canal Zone and being able to go to the swimming pool and buy groceries or go to the movies in Balboa, now you were almost not supposed to be there if you didn't have that yellow ID card and we sort of felt like a pariah. But I went to work, so I got the ID card back. So mainly so my kids could go to school, because otherwise they would have been in two different school systems and my husband travelled a lot and I would have been overwhelmed with – children had different holidays in different schools and being a working mom, and so because of my employment I was allowed to keep my yellow ID card or get a new one, so that I could go there. The funny thing also about buying things in the Canal Zone, I think it was more the quality and availability of familiar merchandise because my father, for example, was never allowed. He was not a US citizen, and in fact my parents had divorced on paper so that my mother could get a house in the Canal Zone because there was a thing about, oh, my mother said well, we're always moving in to this house and that, what we called no-taker housing, it was always a house that was about to be torn down, and we'd live there for three or four months. She finally went to the executive secretary, who's Joe Wood's predecessor of his predecessor, and said, listen, I have so much service, I need to have a house. And they were like, well, you're married to a foreigner, and they're his children, and she said, well, they're my children and I can prove it. He can't prove they're his children. Anyway, they divorced on paper, and my mother put in, like in the system you

had to apply for a house that was vacant, and got a cottage. It was like you needed a lot of service to get that house, but apparently nobody else had put in for it that week. Every week they had this list and she got this house and then there was a big hoopde loop about how in the world did she get this house when—

B: Right. Was that really upsetting for them that they had to divorce on paper or was it more of like a running joke?

S: Well, they divorced because at the time also, my father, now they had come back from Costa Rica after the war was over, my mother had stayed in the Canal Zone, had worked in the Canal Zone, and my father, because of his job being a journalist and knowing everyone, that time it was a very thin line drawn between who was in and who was out. You had to always try and stay on the line of who was in so my father was very closely connected with the Arias family, who owned the Panama American by then. He had been deported during the war because he was writing too many anti-Nazi articles and the people believed that the Nazis were gonna win the war. Well, he was deported, then when the Nazis didn't win the war he was allowed back, but there were some political something going on, and my dad had moved to Havana, Cuba, where he worked until 1959 when he was sentenced to go before a firing squad by Fidel Castro. As far as that, living in the Canal Zone, my father would come to visit because he came from Cuba every year, but he had never been in the Canal Zone commissary. It was like

forbidden territory. So somehow in the late [19]60s or mid-[19]50s I remember somehow somebody had taken him as a guest into the commissary. It was divided into sections like groceries, dry goods, sort of like a spread out, but kind of like a Super Walmart would be today. He reported to me, he said, you know, I went in the commissary today for the first time. He said, oh my God, he said, the merchandise in there is so old and dusty. He said, I thought it was gonna be like King Solomon's mines and that the tables would be lined with jewels and everything would be so wonderful, he said, the way people talk about it. But here again, who could and who couldn't was dictated by treaty, and, as an adult, the funniest thing for me was working and having that privilege card and having my Panamanian friends always asking me, oh, could you buy me tomato paste and stuffed olives and oil or chicken. Now, the joke about the chicken, if you can imagine, there was a lot of chicken available in Panama City, but there was a time when one of the chicken producers had decided that he would use fish meal to augment the feed he was giving them and the chicken tasted kind of fishy, so I could understand why they didn't think that was such a great thing at the time. For many generations now, in fact, you met my friend **Sandy**, well her grandparents and my grandparents knew each other, and our parents knew each other and were good friends, and I think that's really the binding history of the Canal Zone, and of coming to this Panama Canal reunion, is that, for four generations, even though we don't necessarily live near each other anymore,

we're still friends that have that common tie to that history, that's often a stronger bond than being related by blood.

B: Absolutely. Did you and Sandy go to school together, too?

S: We did.

B: And what did you do outside of school when you were in school age?

S: Well, I took ballet lessons like most girls, and my girlfriend, Sandy, and her sister, she had a sister, who's been deceased, but her sister, **Cathy**, and I were in the same class, Sandy was a year older, was in my brother's class, but my next older brother, Richard. But I liked going horseback riding, and it was really the passion of my life. There's nothing that I've ever felt as passionate about as I recall those days when I would take a little, one of those dinky chiva buses that's all painted and noisy and rickety and get dropped off after school at the entrance of the Chiva Chiva Trail, which was a gravel road that went basically into the jungle. And I would walk a half a mile to the stables there, maybe a car would come along that's somebody I knew, whatever, but I just loved it. We would go on trail rides through the jungle and it was rainy and wet and slippery and hot and it was just really wonderful and I learned how to ride English equestrian riding there. It was a big challenge because the thoroughbred horses that we had at the stables were sort of horses that were not successful racehorses on the Remón racetrack in Panama City, and some of them had been drugged and mistreated and it was

always a challenge to see how things would evolve after they had been treated differently. And we would go fishing. Fishing was a very big thing and my father was very big into fishing.

B: Did you ever have your own horse or did you just use the stable's horses?

S: I did. I had several over time and my children also, as they grew up there, we had at one time, I think, five horses, and my advice to anybody who's going to buy a horse is put a dime away for every dollar you spend. [Laughter]

B: Okay, so you graduated from high school and you moved to Michigan, right?

S: Yes.

B: And then, when did you come back?

S: I was only in Michigan two years, maybe a little less than two years.

B: And then you came back two years later, so what year was that?

S: December of 1963.

B: Okay, so you were there when all of the riots were going on about the treaty and everything?

S: Yes.

B: You have Panamanian friends, so what were your feelings and how did you navigate that with your neighbors?

S: Well, actually it was quite a challenge. My brother, Ed, was working there at the time also, he had just returned from Oxford University and worked for the Panama Canal. For me, it was...ridiculous.

[laughter]

S: When the US military showed up in the backyard, our backyard faced a part of Panama City, with concertina wire and strung concertina wire all along the back bank of my house, and all the newsmen were congregating in our kitchen, broadcasting their stories, reporting the stories to the various networks in the United States, it was an education because the only way they could keep the line open on the telephone to the United States was to not stop talking. So they were reading the Bible. They took turns reading the Bible, having scotch and sodas, when one got tired they'd read articles out of Life magazine, whatever they could do. It was quite something. It was very unfortunate, and I have to say that also, in the regard of the treaty that ultimately transpired, the treaty of 1979, that, first of all, or I want to reiterate, Roosevelt, I don't think, ever intended to colonize the Canal Zone or create an American colony or extend American imperialism. It was American ingenuity that built the Canal, and there's just no ifs, ands or buts about that. It's a matter of fact, and a matter of history. I did not particularly like the way the treaty ended up because I think it could've been done in a much more benevolent way; much more discussion among the employees rather than to— It's kind of pitted people who'd known each other for years and worked together

for years who were friends, maybe, intermarried, because there are many families in the Canal Zone that were intermarried with Panamanians and we were much more homogenous than we were ever, ever given credit for. Now, unfortunately, I'll digress also to the point of 1950s where, as I graduated from high school, I felt that people in the Canal Zone somehow feared going into Panama. They became, I don't know if they were from the south originally or what sort of mentality really evolved there, I could never quite put my finger on it, people who didn't speak Spanish, who had no interest, really, in learning more about the Panamanian culture and becoming more involved in Panama. Yet, the other side of that coin is that the Masons, the Shriners, the Elks Club, many military, medical teams, people who were stationed in Panama, Gorgas Hospital medical teams went into the remote parts of Panama and provided roads and helped the people. In 1972, when I was working for the US Army, I know that the Army Corps of Engineers did a lot of work in the Republic of Panama, but the Panamanians did not like them ever getting any publicity about that because they seemed to feel that it was a put-down for them, instead of being more embracing. And also, at the time, the population of Panama was changing dramatically. Merchants were moving to the Republic of Panama from all over the world, and many of the people that were joining the bandwagon of Yankee-go-home were people who had only been there for five years. It's really hard to say, and I do think that it was the right thing to have the treaty. I left in 1985. We lived in Las Cumbres, outside of Panama City because my husband did not work for the

Canal Zone government, and because of my job I was so lowly on the scale, I wasn't entitled, quote, to apply for housing in the Canal Zone, so we bought a house outside of Panama City. There were some hardships and differences about that and in many ways it was a bit difficult for my children, not really being Panamanian, and children going by on school buses, I can recall kids spitting at them out the window of the school bus saying, Yankee go home, and things like that. Kids didn't know what they were doing, but my children did resent that because they didn't have really hard feelings towards Panamanians, they weren't brought up that way. People in the Canal Zone, I think, suffered. Maybe they clung harder onto a system that they had become accustomed to, instead of seeing how we could work this out. Actually, officials came from the United States, in my view, who only had a formal view of what was going on, and the feelings of the people who lived there, I think, towards each other were ignored to a great extent. And, as a matter of fact, I should tell a story about General **Watkin**, who was on the board of directors at the time, who told me that he was President Reagan's appointment to be the administrator of the Canal. He had suffered a heart attack, and we met on an airplane going to Miami, one time when I was going to Miami, and his assistant tried everything he could do to keep me from talking to General **Watkin**. Well, we had a very animated conversation about the whole thing, so when General **Watkin** came back to Panama on his next trip, I told him to please give me a call and I would take him and show him some things that wouldn't be on the official tour. He called me and we got

together for dinner. We went out to my house in Panama City, which was about fifteen miles from where I worked in Balboa Heights. He could see that area.

There were certain things they were discussing about what would happen to the Americans and whether they would be compensated monetarily, what would happen to their housing and so forth, where would they buy groceries, and I told him that I felt the people who worked in the Canal Zone and lived in the Republic of Panama were not even part of the equation of whether we were gonna get free electricity or whatever. But that was sort of always the plight, even, I think, where I could identify with the West Indians that lived in Paraiso and what they called local-rate communities because their situation always seemed to be, oh, one more thing, maybe. Anyway, when we went out to dinner that evening, I had said, well, everybody liked to go to a particular restaurant, it was called the Palmar because it was on the ocean front, it was dry season, it was beautiful to sit out-of-doors. We walked into that restaurant and there were all the other board of directors sitting at the table.

B: [laughter]

S: It was quite startling and embarrassing; here's this older general with this young, very feisty Canal worker who wanted to say, look, you need to whatever, think of these things. But it did have an effect on how the benefits situation turned out for people who lived in the Republic of Panama. However, having said that, I got to a point where I lived in Las Cumbres, was surrounded by Noriegas, generals and

colonels in the Guardia, and for me it became very, very risky for my children because some teenage boys were being arrested capriciously, and I did not have a lot of political influence to find out if they'd throw my boys into a paddywagon one afternoon and took them off somewhere where they would take them or if they would be safe, so I resigned my job. I did not retire from the Panama Canal government. I had worked in internal security for many years. I came back to the States and went back to school at the University of Central Florida.

B: Okay, so how old were you when you went back to school?

S: I was forty.

B: And what did you study?

S: I got a degree in business administration.

B: Okay.

S: And then after that, my daughter went to the University of Central Florida, graduated with a degree in business, and my oldest son went to the University of South Florida, transferred to Texas A&M, and ultimately ended up at Virginia Tech, in Blacksburg, Virginia, where he is now in the faculty and teaches veterinarian ophthalmology.

B: Wow. So—

S: My younger two boys, my next son, **Jeff**, has a manufacturing business in Melbourne, where he has those CNC machines, they're computer-operated machines, that make hardware, and my youngest son has an Internet business in Thailand.

B: Oh, cool. So how did your family adjust when you moved?

S: Well, my older children adjusted very well, over time. They still missed, sort of the lack of having to have a license to do everything, for example. I mean, my oldest son was, oh, my goodness, you have to have a license to go fishing and a license to this and you have to check with somebody to be able to do that, you can't just go and do it. We really missed the jungle a lot. I mean, the tropical, whatever, the savoir faire, I think. We really loved it. My daughter, who's the oldest, has paddled in the Cayuco Race the last two dry seasons, and my oldest son, Ian, had done that in high school and went back this past year, also in April, to paddle in the Cayuco Race, and they did very well. It was a great place to be from, but I'm not sure that I would want to live there again. But I'd like to visit frequently. [Laughter]

B: How old were your children when you moved?

S: My daughter was twenty, and my son was seventeen, and then my next two boys were fifteen and thirteen.

B: So, especially for the younger kids, how was the transition from Panamanian or Zone schools to U.S. schools?

S: Very difficult. And, like I said, my youngest son, well, after I graduated from the University of Central Florida in 1985, I had a friend who lived in Belgium, worked for NATO, and I thought, well, this is the chance of my life. I've always wanted to go, because, actually, to tell the truth, when my husband went back to work for the Canal Zone for the Panama Canal Company in 1968, I was very disappointed because I was always, for me, the Canal Zone was too confined and too boring and too bland. I just really wanted to get out in the world. I had travelled to Europe with my grandmother on an extended trip when I was thirteen, and we covered twelve countries in six weeks, and, boy, that was the life for me. It was very difficult for me to settle down in high school the last few years, and that stayed with me, so after I graduated from college as an older student, I had the opportunity to go and stay with a friend in Brussels. For about three years, I stayed there and travelled. It was a great place to travel all over Europe. My son had become a reincarnated World War II pilot, and every weekend it was so easy to travel, he went to the international school in Brussels, and we went to every World War II anything that he could possibly drag me to. So, when he finished high school I came and my father passed away suddenly in 1989, and I came back and stayed in Cocoa Beach and my mother passed away four months later. And it was like, oh, I was so, I mean it was the place I knew because we came

and spent every summer there, as much time as possible, and that, subsequently, led me to being, I always say, recruited, not that I wasn't a politically motivated person in a way, but I was elected to the council and later became mayor of Cocoa Beach.

B: Wow. Nobody told me that, very cool.

S: So, that was a wonderful experience.

B: How do you think you worked your way up? What do you think your secret was?

S: Well, actually, I had heard some very ugly things about my community. I would get some political little letters in the mail about this and that, so I started going to the council meetings, and then I realized, wow, this is great. Public comment. You were never allowed to have public comment in the Canal Zone. You could tell your friends, but, digressing for a second about the Canal Zone also....In 1979, 1981, in that period, the Canal had to allow, the federal government had mandated that there be collective bargaining units, that federal employees could collectively bargain, and I was recruited by, it was called the International Organization of Masters, Mates, and Pilots, the AFLCIO Metal Trades Coalition, were all the trades and crafts that formed a conglomerate union. I was recruited to work on the first negotiated contract for the federal workers, for the non-professional employees, and it was a very interested experience. I learned that it was okay to express your point of view, so when the political people in Cocoa

Beach, people who had a political group, asked me to run for office in 1997, I was like, they must be kidding. I mean, this is, really? Well, also a friend of mine, whose grandfather was the chief engineer on the **Olawila** Dam, on the Canal, I learned after he retired that his grandchildren would always joke about how he was always writing letters to Congress, always writing letters to his congressman, and I thought, wow, that's really great, because really was the only way a Canal worker could express their political point of view. I think Ms. Green mentions in her book that the way the Canal workers, because we couldn't vote, we didn't have a state that we were a resident of, and unless you were a state resident where you could register to vote, you just didn't vote in a presidential election. Well, that was a big thing for Canal Zone people when they moved to the state was to be able to register to vote for their local elected officials, and for Congress and the Senate, and the President, so when I was elected, after two years there was so much fighting and bickering in that experience. The mayor was a two-time incumbent. I had one more year left in my term, and I resigned my seat to run for the mayor's position because they were alternate years, and that's the only way you could run for mayor if you were already in office, and my supporters were very, very upset, because on the governments in Florida in the various communities, money talks. I mean, that just seems to be the theme of every you know how people get elected these days. It all depends on the money, and also on who the lobbyists are, and so forth. Well, they were very upset because I represented the residents that lived in Cocoa Beach, and it wasn't that I was

against developers or the hoteliers or the businesspeople, but there were certain issues that always seemed to be helping get people elected who didn't care how high the condominium went, how tightly together they were built, or anything like that, so I have to say that my legacy to Cocoa Beach was lowering the building height from eighty-five feet to forty-five feet –

B: Wow

S: And lowering the density in the hotels from forty units per acre to twenty-eight, and the residential condominiums from eighteen to ten or twelve units per acre. Well, I was threatened, and so many lawsuits were filed that—and I was threatened with lawsuits like the Bert Harris lawsuit. Oh, we're gonna file a Bert Harris, and I'm like, well, bring it on, because I learned that nobody had ever litigated a Bert Harris lawsuit, so I was like, okay, well do it now, and just make this some sort of a milestone here for how people can direct how they want their communities to be. Actually, there was a community that had lowered their building height that I kind of picked their brain a bit about how that went, and they were very fortunate because the contractors and builders in their community had decided that they didn't want to fight with the community. They wanted to get along, and it wasn't quite so easy in Cocoa Beach, but I think that after I had expressed time and again how in foreign countries the buildings are on the far side of the road, and the ocean view and along the ocean is like a big boardwalk or promenade that everybody gets to enjoy, it's not just – Because when the

condos are built like that and the hotels, they want to take ownership of the public beach as well, and block the public access. Well, Cocoa Beach was very fortunate as well, because we do have many, many beachside access points, and I was never, it was never passed overwhelmingly. It's, you know, the law of the land in Cocoa Beach. And one of the other things was that there was always a faction that wanted to give away public land, vacate public land for condominiums because they wanted to put a garage on and they didn't have enough land and things like that. So we have the 5 – 0 vote in Cocoa Beach. If you wanna increase the building height, or you wanna vacate public property, or change, increase the density, all the five members of the council have to deem that it's important enough that you will get the vote; that they will all agree. And now, the same city attorney, who – [Cell phone ringing]

B: No, that's fine.

S: – who wrote that legal language now kind of views it as a – He said to me one day, oh, now it's become the tyranny of one. And I go, well you know the things is that the residents have a very, very difficult time because, also when people live in condominiums, they get very worn out with the political activity that takes place in a condominium with their bylaws and their state statutes and things, so somehow, unless it's really, really glaring, they do not participate in their government as much as people that live in single-family residential areas. And I was sued, personally, at the last meeting I chaired. It was a First Amendment

lawsuit complaint, and that lawsuit lasted almost four years and involved about eight attorneys. The city was sued, and so was the city attorney sued. And I prevailed in federal court. I prevailed in the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals, in Atlanta, and the final decision in the Eleventh Circuit Court of Appeals was based on a lawsuit for the city of Cocoa, which is on the mainland near us, that had bypassed us in the travel through the legal system, and had gone to the US Supreme Court, and now it's case law that when someone wants to chair a public meeting, that there is a time and place for political rhetoric. You need to pretty much stick to the agenda, and that, as President Roosevelt said, he liked to have the bully pulpit. Well, if you're on a council, then you wanna have the bully pulpit.
[Laughter]

S: That was really, I've had quite an interesting life.

[Laughter]

B: That's about right. I do have some people during interviews, that are like, oh no, my life was really boring. I'm just like, that can't be true.

S: I really felt that, you know, my parents especially were very interesting people. My mother tended to be a little more reticent than my dad, but they were very well-read. My mother was an excellent editor. I miss her editing ability today, because she would edit papers for me when I was attending the University of Central Florida. They had wonderful vocabularies and, even my dad at times,

they had a little thing where they would work on the, you probably hear this 'bout people in Florida, that when they retire they're doing the crossword puzzle every morning. Well, my dad was an early riser, and he would do the crossword puzzle and put it on the kitchen table and my mom would get up later in the morning and have coffee and see what he hadn't completed in the crossword puzzle and then they would discuss it in the afternoon. My dad finished his career covering the Six Days War. He went to Cairo for the Six Days War and stayed five years because they booted all the American newsmen out and so he stayed in Cairo for five years. He became fairly fluent in Arabic, and it was just really exciting. I mean, there were people in our house as I was growing up from all over the world. People came by to visit, and we talked about politics. I think that I was probably privileged to have had a broader exposure than many of my friends maybe?

B: I mean, unless there's something in the water in Panama, your parents must have done something right, because they have some phenomenal children. Adults now, but always their children.

S: It's wonderful.

B: So, how did you cope after you weren't the mayor anymore?

S: Well actually—

B: Did you run for re-election?

S: I had run for re-election the year that we lowered the building height and actually, I was defeated in that election by a doctor who was an in a... There was another issue taking place about filling thirteen acres of the Banana River to make a hospital expansion that I opposed, and he was for it because he was a doctor that worked at that hospital. And, it was frankly, I think, a relief, although I stay involved politically and I try not to waste the knowledge that I acquired, so I like to mentor people about how to get something done, and I envy the U.S. representatives who are away from their constituents.

B: [laughter]

S: It's very, very difficult you know kind of don't—you really, really learn a lot, you meet a lot of people, and you should stay involved in the community, not to put that information and that knowledge to waste, but on the other hand, I didn't miss people calling me on Sunday night to complain about why their garbage can wasn't brought in from the road on Wednesday or something. Everything has its points, but, I feel that, it's important for people to vote; an informed vote. I don't know if you should have to get a license to vote, but sometimes people don't really understand the full issue before they vote and the ballot questions are worded in a very confusing manner, where yes is no, and no is yes –

B: Yeah, especially on the local level, they get really tricky.

S: Yes, in particular on the local level, and I know that was one of my mother's complaints about the ballot in Cocoa Beach, so I always remembered that when they were talking about building height long before I got involved in politics. She would say, oh yes, we didn't mean for that to happen, but yes meant no and no meant yes so.

B: So the river in Cocoa Beach, they did fill the thirteen acres?

S: Well actually they, whether people tell me it may have been a political ruse, but it had been a tax district hospital, then a health corporation moved in, because tax district hospitals or community hospitals started having a lot of difficulty in Florida, and some were sold, and others, like our Cape Canaveral Hospital, is the name of it, was taken over by a health corporation, where it wasn't quite exposed to the light of day how that happened, that they took over the hospital assets, and ended up working out with the state legislature that they would become a special tax district, which is the first time in Florida that a private corporation now has taxing authority over people who live in the district. It's unheard of. But I going to Tallahassee on that issue, I learned a lot about local bills in Florida and what makes the legislature tick. They did not, St. John's Water Management District, would even though they worked for maybe ten years on trying to get that approved because they always were banking on vertical evacuation, and the hospital had to be evacuated eighteen hours before, in a mandatory evacuation, before the rest of the population, and they were going to use vertical evacuation.

Well, when Hurricane Katrina hit New Orleans, and the public found out in a big way that vertical evacuation does not work in a hurricane, they withdrew their request for a permit to fill the river, which, I think, today, it just wouldn't stand public scrutiny at this point in time, here, because now the Internet's a much bigger thing than it was in even in 2000, the year 2000. 2002 was my last year in office.

B: Okay, let's see. Now I'm kind of going off on a chronological tangent, but during the treaty signing, I understand your brother worked for the Carter Administration, correct?

S: Yes.

B: And people in Panama, mostly people, not okay, this does sound judgmental, but willfully ignorant people, really took it out on Carter. We were talking to a woman earlier who said her graduating class had t-shirts that were insulting Carter. Was that irritating for you? Did you ever argue with your neighbors or did you mostly stay out of that?

S: Well, it was difficult for me because I worked in the Balboa Heights, in the administration building, and every day we would listen to the testimony. And when my brother, who was very well known, many of his peers and colleagues from high school, his classmates, were still working in the Canal Zone, and they were very upset that my brother testified that he thought it was a great thing; that

the Canal was becoming obsolete as far as the national security. Not obsolete as transportation, and as world commerce was concerned necessarily, but as far as being of strategic military importance to the United States. So, even though I lived there and worked there, and my friends and relatives were going to be affected, I felt that there needed to be a treaty because the feelings were so bad in Panama, but as an employee, we didn't feel we had that much of a voice about how any of that was worked out. It didn't probably make my brother very popular, although he was otherwise very popular in high school and had worked for the Canal as an adult, but only for maybe three years before he transferred to the US in the civil service system and ultimately ended up in Washington, D.C. Yeah, I probably felt some negative feelings toward Carter for his not paying more attention to the government that he was dealing with, the Torrijos government. Although, I had met Torrijos at one time, and I have to say that Torrijos was, in many, many ways for the Republic of Panama, a very benevolent dictator. In my lifetime, to that point, and I traveled a lot in the interior of Panama, nothing ever changed. No new roads had been built until Torrijos came into power.

Everything—I was not familiar with, nor, I admittedly am not as familiar as I should be about how the Panamanian government operates and functions in the legislature, but you could see changes being made and roads being built that would help the people in the rural areas of Panama get their produce to town and so forth. Noriega, on the other hand, some people feel he was our guy, or worked for the CIA and all of that, he became, I don't know if he had drug and alcohol

addictions or what his problem was, but he became very, very nefarious and ruthless, and it was very scary. Living in the Republic of Panama, living where I lived, I didn't live in the Canal Zone, where I could call the Canal Zone police or I could be surrounded by the US military at the drop of a pin. So, did I think that Carter did the right thing? I think Carter; I've read a lot about him, his biographies and things, and he's a nice man. He came from very humble beginnings. He's worked very, very hard in Habitat for Humanity and trying to bring peace in the Middle East, which I really thought, sincerely, he would succeed at that, and unfortunately, you know, he has been misaligned, and today it's difficult to be a leader, and as many of the leaders in the Middle East today are finding, to stay alive, and be a leader. In Syria, for example, that guy, Abbas was a – is that it name? I believe that's his name. He was an ophthalmologist practicing in London, England, when his father had him go back to Syria to be president, and now he's probably desperately in fear of his life. It's very, very dangerous, and I think, truly, that Carter had his heart in the right place with the Panama Canal treaty, but whether or not people felt that the terms were what they should have been is another story.

B: Well, how often do you go back now?

S: Well, I was there in April. I try and go back every few years and, of course, as I get older I know fewer and fewer people there. I don't have, personally, any family members who live in Panama at the time. I think it's a very interesting

place, and I'm very proud to have been born there and having grown up with that history in my family, and I hope that my grandchildren, although they hear the stories now, that for the main have been born in the United States, they hear about it, they hear about Zonians and what's a Zonian.

[Laughter]

B: Do you go to this reunion every year?

S: I come very frequently because I only live fifty miles from Orlando, so as long as the reunion, it's here, I do come and it's really wonderful to see people who live far away or that I haven't seen in years that I don't correspond with.

B: Is there anything else you'd like to have on record today?

S: Well, just I believe everybody should try and read Path between the Seas, if nothing else, and I think that the Canal workers from 1904 to 1999 should be judged as people who were very hard-working and proud; and proud of their work, and proud of the Canal, and really loved the country and loved the people of Panama. And I hope that Panamanians in the future will always find some way to feel that way about us. Thank you very much for the opportunity to be interviewed, and good luck with the other people you interview, and I'm really looking forward to hearing their stories.

B: Thank you! And once again, this was Sarah Blanc, here with Janice Scott, and it's July 8, 2011.

[End of interview]

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