

Interview of Danny and Barbara Biehl by Joe Guerzo 5-24-2018

Joe: Today is May 24th, 2018 and I am here with...

Danny: Danny Biehl.

Joe: Birth date?

Danny: 1945.

Joe: And?

Barbara: My birthday?

Joe: Just say your name.

Barbara: Barbara Biehl, April 4, 1948.

Joe: Great. Okay, Danny. Tell me long you've lived in Punta Gorda.

Danny: This is, sixty...

Barbara: Honey, you came here at 5 years old.

Danny: '52. 1952.

Joe: Okay, so you weren't born here.

Danny: No.

Joe: Tell me a little bit about how you ended up here?

Danny: My grandfather came down here in the 40's.

Joe: What was his name?

Danny: Ray Myers.

Joe: Thank you.

Danny: And he stayed at the Municipal Park when that was open. And he had built a house out on Riverside Drive and was trying to talk my parents into coming down. He had a lounge, a mobile home park and a restaurant in Illinois. So, he talked my mother and father to come down to Florida and check out some places that could do the same down here: a mobile home, park and a bar and a small restaurant. They came down here to purchase the Tower Bar, which is out on 17. But that deal fell through and their second choice was right on 41, which was the Slip-Not. It was called Joneses Seafood. That was the sign on the building and they started out there.

Joe: So, that was 1952, you said?

Danny: Right.

Joe: So, that's how you came down. So, the Slip-Not has been around as long as you've been around in Punta Gorda.

Danny: Oh, yes.

Joe: I want to ask you a little more about your grandfather. You said he had a mobile bar?

Danny: Yeah, he's got a mobile home park and a bar and a restaurant in Illinois.

Joe: Oh, okay, in Illinois.

Danny: This was his winter home. So, he came down and wanted my parents to come down.

Joe: Of course, family is like that.

Barbara: They actually opened the same kind of business. His grandfather did, they first opened up the Slip-Not Lounge and I think it had 5 acres attached to it. And his father started developing it and it was a mobile home park but a travel trailer park... initially.

Joe: Does that make him a tin can tourist?

Danny: Who, my father?

Joe: Your grandfather.

Danny: I think so, yes. Because he came down here a couple of years earlier, looking for property, and then he found it out on Riverside Drive. That was in the late 40's. I think my parents came down here, probably in '51, to look at this property. And then they went back to Illinois and packed it up.

Joe: Was it located across from where the Celtic Ray is now? Where was that other location?

Danny: You mean the mobile home park?

Joe: Yeah.

Danny: that was the Municipal Park. That was called the Trailer Bar, where the Celtic Ray is. And right across the road from there was the Municipal Park.

Joe: Oh, okay.

Barbara: It was the City Municipal Park.

Danny: It was city owned.

Barbara: Right on the water. Right on Laishley's Crab house.

Joe: That was a great location. So, what was that like when all the tourists would be out there?

Danny: I don't remember it. I was a little too young.

Joe: I just recently found a book about the Tin Can Tourists in Florida. Okay, so your parents moved down here, and they opened up the Slip-Not lounge and it's in the location that you guys told me about.

Barbara: Same location.

Danny: 1601 Tamiami Trail.

Barbara: Not Shreve. At the corner of Tamiami Trail and Henry.

Joe: What attracted them to that place?

Danny: the amount of property that was there and he could do a travel trailer park. So, he got the bar going and he had that property out there, but he couldn't afford to put a park in. And this company came in, they were called, Geodetic Survey, and they do maps through the state of Florida. And they needed a home place to put all their equipment, travel trailers and everything. And they're the ones that started the park for my father. They said they would do it, put the roads in and the water lines, if he just let them stay for free, while they do their mapping. They were all over Florida, so this was their home base.

Joe: So, how big was the park?

Danny: It was 5 acres.

Joe: So, how many people would be able to stay out there?

Danny: Well, there were 63 sites and it was full. They had tents for their equipment and just the old travel trailers.

Joe: Even during the off-season it was full?

Danny: Yes, because they were doing this work.

Joe: Okay.

Danny: So, they stayed for 2 or 3 years, doing mapping.

Joe: That's a great idea. You have a built-in clientele right there.

Danny: Yeah, they came in the bar a lot.

Joe: So, how old were you at this time in 1952?

Danny: I was 6 or 7. Yeah, 7.

Joe: So, where did you go to school?

Danny: Right here in Punta Gorda. It was an elementary school started and it burnt down back in the early 60's, late 50's.

Joe: Where was it located?

Danny: It was on Taylor and 41, across from the Catholic Church.

Joe: Okay, I know where that is.

Danny: Right on that corner.

Joe: So, what were your first impressions of Punta Gorda and being at school? Was it a different experience from where you were from?

Danny: Yeah, it was a big difference. When we first got here, I couldn't go to school for several months, so my impression was they didn't have school in Florida. So, I kind of liked it.

Joe: Yeah.

Danny: But they had to get their license and stuff in order before I could register for school.

Joe: Where there any teachers that you remember that were particularly inspiring to you?

Danny: No.

Joe: No? Even in high school?

Danny: In high school, yeah. There was a Coach Lawless and Coach Johnson. Let's see, there was...

Joe: Well, you mentioned coaches, so you must've played a sport.

Danny: Yes, I was in track and football, and some basketball.

Joe: How big were the teams back then? I know the classes weren't quite as large as they are now.

Danny: They were very small.

Joe: Did you have to play offense and defense?

Danny: I played everything. Our track team only had 9 players.

Joe: Really? Wow.

Danny: I liked track, the best.

Joe: What were your events?

Danny: I did the hurdles, the 100-yard dash and pole vaulting.

Joe: I was a sprinter. I did the 200 and 400. So, those coaches were good? What made them so special?

Danny: They were personal. They took time with you. They were just personal. They did a good job and they taught you well.

Joe: I always ask people about the neighborhood they lived in. So, obviously you lived at the Slip-Not.

Danny: It's walking distance to the school.

Joe: That's great. So, what was the neighborhood like back then? I know there's an IHOP there now, but what was it like back then?

Barbara: There was a motel.

Danny: Yeah, there was a motel.

Barbara: Where the IHOP is.

Danny: My aunt owned that motel. The one across the street was the La-Mel Motel. That is where the Econolodge is.

Barbara: Where the Econolodge is right now.

Joe: Okay.

Danny: That was the La-Mel motel and the other one was...

Barbara: I don't remember the name of your aunt. I thought that was La-Mel.

Danny: No, that was across the street.

Barbara: I only saw that for a short time.

Danny: It got torn down and the IHOP bought it right away.

Joe: Oh, okay. I guess... were there a lot of kids in the neighborhood? Did you have a lot of friends to play with?

Danny: There was a lot of kids in the neighborhood. There was a Bunk Hindman, Kenny Smith, Marshall Robinson, um, let's see, George Tipping. He was in town. Yeah, we had a... there was a lot of kids.

Barbara: And there all still here.

Joe: I guess while we're on this subject, Barbara, I'll ask you. How long have you lived in Punta Gorda?

Barbara: Since 1968.

Joe: Oh, so you weren't around in this time.

Barbara: No.

Joe: I'm sure we'll get to how you guys met at some point. Alright, so I asked you about the school and I asked you about the neighborhood. What do you think the major differences are between Punta Gorda then and now?

Danny: Awful. I don't like the big town. It's too big now.

Joe: Yeah, it was much smaller then, huh?

Danny: When they made one-way streets, it was very hard for me.

Joe: What year was that? Or time period?

Danny: It was in the 60's, I think.

Barbara: No, I think the 70's. In the late 70's, maybe, at the latest.

Danny: It was really tough to navigate through downtown.

Barbara: I honestly think it was in the 80's.

Joe: What was the reasoning behind that?

Danny: I guess we were growing. I guess for traffic. I don't know.

Joe: Well as a little boy, you were around a bar...

Danny: All my life.

Joe: A lot of people wouldn't want a child to be around that.

Barbara: All of our children were raised around a bar.

Joe: So, did that affect you in any different way? Did you drink earlier than other kids might've?

Danny: Actually, I have never drank. I drank a beer occasionally, but I don't drink.

Joe: Okay.

Danny: And I don't smoke. It was odd because my wife, she don't drink or smoke.

Barbara: I never drank in my life.

Danny: And we ran the bar for what, 44 years?

Barbara: His dad died in '98 and we took over. Well, he's been at the Slip-Not working, after he got out of the Air Force. His dad asked him to please not re-enlist, to come and help him at the Slip-Not.

Joe: Well, I guess we should try and stay chronological. So, you graduated from Charlotte High School in what year?

Danny: 1964.

Joe: 1964. How big was the class?

Danny: I think it was 124 graduates.

Joe: Okay, so that's bigger. Some of the people that I interviewed that graduated in the 40's or 50's, were talking about 30 or 40 people graduating. So, it's starting to grow at that point. Was the school de-segregated at the time or was it still segregated?

Danny: It started the year, 2 years before I got out of school. I think it started in '62, somewhere.

Joe: Okay, and I know we were the first school to de-segregate. Hugh Adams was behind that, right? That was his idea? He was the Superintendent.

Danny: I think it was. Some of the guys that were colored that come here, they're still here, like Big John. He was one of the kids.

Joe: You have a very interesting perspective, since you saw both sides. You were at a segregated school and a de-segregated school. Do you mind comparing the two? What was it like to make that transition?

Danny: Well, we only had, I think, 6, but it was no problem. We didn't have any issues. No fights. It was okay.

Joe: Did you ever wonder, as a kid, why the black kids had to go to a different school?

Danny: No, I actually I never, but in town there was like colored bathrooms and white bathrooms. Colored drinking fountains and white.

Joe: They still have them t the train station, as a reminder.

Danny: Yeah, they still have that. The colored stayed over in their town. They called it the other side of the tracks. And I don't remember ever having any problems growing up here.

Joe: I get that (response) mostly. They said that sometimes they even played football together.

Danny: Yeah.

Joe: So, you did play?

Danny: Yeah, we had one that came over to our neighborhood and would play football. I don't even remember his name, but he was... he ran like a rabbit.

Joe: Okay. So, when you saw... when they did do the de-segregation, you didn't see any conflicts at school or anything?

Danny: No, it was mostly the parents.

Joe: Oh, really?

Danny: I think it was the parents more than the kids.

Joe: did they bring their complaints up to the School Board or something?

Danny: I don't remember that, but in the lounge, in the bar that my parents had, they would talk about it, you know. 'It's ridiculous having them go to our school.' But, never no issues at all.

Joe: So, there were only 6 black children at the school?

Danny: Uh-huh.

Joe: I always hear this story about Wampus.

Barbara: Oh! I know Wampus, we know Wampus.

Joe: is it true or not? Because I keep hearing different versions. Did he hold a kid out the window by his foot?

Barbara: I don't know that story.

Joe: You don't know that story?

Barbara: I never heard that one.

Danny: I don't know if it's true or not.

Joe: Okay.

Danny: Because Wampus wasn't that big to do that.

Joe: Okay, I'm picturing a big guy, like the bully in Back to the Future.

Danny: No, he wasn't that big of a guy to do something like that, but he's...

Barbara: He's tall though.

Danny: He's tall but he's not very...

Joe: These stories seem to get blown out of proportion over time and they change. I've heard different versions of it.

Danny: I know he didn't like black people.

Joe: Right.

Danny: But, he never created a problem over it.

Joe: Did you ever see any outward racism? Were their Klan rallies? I read about them being in the area in the 1920's, but did you ever see anything like that?

Danny: No.

Joe: Alright, so after high school, what did you decide to do?

Danny: I joined the Air Force.

Joe: What made you want to go to the Air Force?

Danny: Get out of Punta Gorda and just go see something other than Punta Gorda. I never left Punta Gorda, so I just wanted to get out of town and go out of state.

Joe: I guess I meant why the Air Force over, say, the Marines or the Army.

Danny: Well, I went to join the Marines. That was my first, that's why I went there.

Joe: Okay.

Danny: And the Marine recruiter wasn't in the office. So, I was waiting for him. And the Air Force recruiter was there and the Navy recruiter. And we got talking, and he talked me into going into the Air Force.

Joe: That's funny. What was his selling point that got you?

Danny: Just everything. Just that they take care of you. You get what you want. The field you get into, you know, you can do it when you get out of the service. You know, it's a skill.

Joe: Did the navy guy try to counter with his pitch?

Danny: No, because I didn't want to go in the Navy at all. I had been around water all my life.

Joe: That's true.

Danny: I just did not want to go in the Navy.

Joe: I always ask that story of why people pick and that's not the first time I heard that story where someone said, 'the guy wasn't in the office' and somebody else scooped you up.

Danny: Yeah, that was the only reason I joined the Air Force.

Joe: How long were you in the Air Force?

Danny: Four years.

Joe: Okay. I'm thinking of the time period. Did you have to go to Vietnam?

Danny: Yes, I was in Vietnam, a little over a year.

Joe: Alright, do you mind talking about that a little bit.

Danny: It was, um... I went over there to build bases and then I volunteered to go on convoys, because they couldn't get the material through the bases And, that's what I did the last 6 months, was travel through Vietnam in trucks.

Joe: Okay.

Danny: Going from base to base.

Joe: Was that pretty dangerous?

Danny: Yeah, we had some problems, a lot of problems.

Joe: Would they try to hit you while you guys were driving? Kind of like what we saw in Iraq.

Danny: Yeah, they would destroy the trucks, keep you from taking your cargo into the base and just had an awful lot of issues. We had to call in for air support a couple times.

Joe: Really? So, you were under fire at times?

Danny: Yes, oh yes.

Joe: So, I guess you saw friends pass away?

Danny: Yes, 2 of my good friends died over there on one of the convoys that got hit.

Joe: So, what happens? The convoy is rolling and then... What did they use? Do they set mines?

Danny: Well, the reason we stopped was because of a truck. A fan belt broke. So, we repaired that and then we were getting hit on a little bit. And so, we cranked up the trucks and was leaving and the front truck got blew up because of a mortar. I was on the back end, so I couldn't see. It was a mortar that hit the truck and we had to stay there all night and wait for some help.

Joe: And you would call for air support in that situation?

Danny: Yeah.

Joe: Wow. Well, I'm sorry that had to happen. Do you have any thoughts about the whole war, at all, that you want to share?

Danny: Well, it was, um, I think it was a senseless war. A political war. We didn't know it at the time. We were just there because we were told to go there.

Joe: You were just kids, right?

Danny: Yeah. But it... the time went by fast. And I was going to go back to Vietnam when I got back home, but they wanted to send me to Korea first.

Joe: Oh.

Danny: I did not want to go to Korea. That's when I went ahead and got out.

Joe: So, you did 4 years.

Danny: I was close to re-enlisting and I did not want to go to Korea.

Joe: Right.

Danny: When I hadn't got out, my parents wanted me to get out. Take over the business and manage it for them.

Joe: So, you knew that was waiting for you.

Danny: Yeah, but I did want to re-enlist, but I never did.

Joe: So, before you went to Vietnam, where did they station you?

Danny: I was in Michigan, Oscoda, Michigan. And that's the first time I'd seen snow and I did not like it.

Barbara: He said it was the coldest place in the world.

Danny: The coldest place in the world, right.

Joe: So, we're in 1968 and you come back to the United States, right?

Danny: Mm-hmm.

Joe: You came back to Punta Gorda?

Danny: No, I was stationed in Tampa.

Joe: Okay.

Danny: I was in Tampa for about 6 or 7 months there and that's where I met Barb, was in Tampa, when I got back.

Joe: Oh, really? So, that's where you met? Tell me a little bit about that.

Barbara: He was stationed at McDill Air Force Base.

Danny: Yes.

Barbara: And I met him through a friend.

Joe: Oh, yeah?

Barbara: I lived in an apartment and a couple of his best friends lived in an apartment downstairs. My best friend liked his best friend.

Joe: Oh, one of those. So, you got set up.

Barbara: So, we kind of got...

Danny: Put together.

Barbara: Put together.

Joe: Did your friend and the other girl end up together, too?

Barbara: No.

Danny: No.

Joe: Aw...

Danny: But it was a...

Joe: What was your first date?

Barbara: (to Danny) Well, I first met you at a party.

Danny: Yes.

Barbara: That I was having. Well, that my roommate and I were having in our apartment upstairs. And then you guys came over. The ice cream shop?

Danny: Our first date was the boat.

Barbara: Yeah, the boat. But that's because, that wasn't a date. That's because they needed someone to go with him, a partner for him.

Joe: So, even back then, people had a little trouble deciding which one was the first date.
(laughs)

Barbara: I know which one, but the boat, to me, really wasn't a first date. I didn't think that was a date, honey, because...

Danny: It was a get together.

Barbara: It was a get together. Because they wanted to go skiing and they felt that you should have a girl with you. That's kind of how it was. Our first date was the ice cream shop.

Joe: I think that might be a date. I'm kind of with Danny on that one.

Danny: (laughs)

Barbara: I didn't take it as a date? Okay?

Joe: Okay. Alright, we'll set a rule: Both people have to agree that it's a date, for it to be a date. We'll set that as principle.

Danny: We didn't care for each other when we first met.

Barbara: Oh no.

Joe: Really? Why not?

Barbara: He was a country boy.

Danny: She was city and I was country.

Barbara: I didn't date no country boys. I thought he was a redneck.

Joe: (laughs) So how did you get the real date, if she didn't like you?

Barbara: Well, we went to the ice cream shop. Do you remember that? Going to the ice cream shop?

Joe: She seems to remember. You don't.

Danny: I have problems remembering things.

Barbara: He does right now. We have issues from Agent Orange.

Joe: Oh.

Danny: Vietnam. I have some metal up in there.

Joe: So, you were affected by Agent Orange?

Barbara: Oh yes.

Danny: Yes.

Joe: How did the government react to that? I remember when I was a kid in the 80's, that they weren't even giving you guys medical...

Barbara: They are now.

Joe: How long did that take?

Danny: Quite a while.

Barbara: Well, he's still fighting in one area because of certain things. He has a letter in and all kinds of stuff.

Danny: Yeah. It messes with your kidneys and your whole body.

Joe: I'm so sorry to hear that.

Barbara: But, if you ask him if he would go back and do it again...

Danny: Oh yeah, I would go back.

Barbara: He believes in everyone serving their country.

Joe: my previous job in Georgia, I interviewed a lot of veterans. I worked for Witness to War. Org and I interviewed a lot of war vets and they all say the same thing.

Barbara: Can I ask where in Georgia?

Joe: Well, I lived in Athens, but the company is out of Atlanta, so I worked in Atlanta as well.

Barbara: I lived in Columbus, Georgia. Fort Benning.

Joe: I love Columbus. Did you guys live there?

Danny: No.

Barbara: I have a sister there. That's where I originally come from.

Joe: Yes, I have a lot of friends in Columbus. I used to do a television show covering hockey. I used to interview hockey players too. I have a lot of interview experience.

Barbara: you know where it is. Athens, I have relatives in Athens also. Everybody goes there for the ball games.

Danny:

Joe: Yeah, I'll be back there in June.

Barbara: Bulldogs.

Joe: Yeah, I'm a Dogs fan.

Barbara: We are too.

Joe: Excellent. I feel like I'm surrounded by gators down here.

Barbara: We're gators, but, if the gators aren't playing and Georgia is. If the Bulldogs are playing, then I'm for them Dogs.

Joe: But there's always one weekend in October, where you have to make a decision.

Barbara: There is.

Joe: Well, I have to ask you while we have you on the record. Which way do you stand? Georgia versus Florida?

Danny: I'm more gator and I think she's for Georgia, but she won't say it.

Joe: Well, that's a good split.

Barbara: Yeah, we're split a little bit.

Danny: All her cousins and everything, they're all Georgia fans.

Barbara: They're at all the games, tailgating and all. All my nieces and nephews.

Danny: They're die-hards.

Joe: Well, we digressed from what we were talking about. With this whole Agent Orange thing, what year was it when they finally recognized that it was a problem for a lot of Vietnam vets.

Danny: Well, when I got out, we were at back in youth, and my legs were real raw, and my forearms were raw. And my brother-in-law, her brother, he says, 'you've got Agent Orange'. He said, 'I had the same thing'. So, we went to the V.A. in Tampa, and that's when they told me I had it. But there was no cure.

Joe: What year was that?

Danny: End of '68, wasn't it? Or '69?

Barbara: No, honey, no. When you and Hugh went, we already had Kevin. Didn't we?

Danny: I don't think so.

Barbara: You went to the V.A. Hospital up there.

Joe: Yeah, I had heard that they didn't even recognize that for quite some time.

Barbara: I think, honestly, it was in the 80's.

Danny: My skin doctor said it was an unknown rash.

Barbara: Right.

Joe: Right.

Danny: Because he wasn't familiar with it and it wouldn't heal.

Joe: It was on your legs and arms, you said?

Danny: Yes.

Barbara: And feet, because of being wet all the time and when they sprayed. The first time they sprayed Agent Orange, he was on the ground, when they sprayed the heaviest.

Danny: We actually thought they were spraying for mosquitoes. We didn't know they were trying to kill the foliage. It was just...

Joe: Oh god. It was the 80's, because I remember in the 80's they were still fighting for those rights.

Barbara: it was the 80's.

Danny: But now they really recognize it so...

Barbara: And they're still working on it. To date, they're still working on it. Helping the Vietnam vets.

Joe: Do you still have a lot of friends you fought with?

Danny: No, actually I lost a couple over there. When I got back to the States, my memory just went away. And the only one I remembered was a guy by the name of Chuck, and I was stationed with him in Tampa. And, well there's about 3 or 4, I can remember the name. But overseas, I couldn't remember the names, but I could speak the language very well. I could hold a conversation.

Joe: Really?

Danny: But when I got back, it just went away.

Joe: Why do you think the memory loss? Agent Orange doesn't affect memory, does it?

Danny: No, I don't think it was that. I don't know what it was. I could carry a conversation on because we worked with the Vietnamese all the time, and I don't know what happened.

Barbara: You would never speak of Vietnam. Remember? Do you remember that with me?

Danny: Mm-hm.

Barbara: You didn't tell me any stories. I know we had a clock. An old fashioned Big Ben clock. An alarm-clock. Battery in it. And it belonged to his best friend, who was blown up. But, he never spoke of Vietnam much to me. That's not a topic he talked about. I think he chose to forget.

Joe: I totally respect that. That's why I asked, 'if you don't mind talking about it.'

Danny: That's okay now.

Barbara: Right. But I mean... yeah, he talks now. When the pictures first started coming out on Vietnam, he would never watch them.

Joe: Really?

Barbara: No.

Joe: Did you happen to watch the Ken Burns thing that came out last summer? The 10-part documentary?

Barbara: Yeah. Remember the documentary? With all of those...

Joe: That was really good. Very in-depth.

Barbara: Very.

Danny: I went down when they dedicated the wall.

Joe: Oh, you were there too. I remember that day. That was when I first moved down here.

Barbara: Yeah?

Joe: Well, we can move on from that subject. Let's go back to that first date. So, we're going to go back to that first date.

Barbara: Okay, we're going to say it was on the boat.

Joe: Okay. I thought you were going to agree that it was the ice cream shop?

Barbara: Well, if he thinks... I remember the ice cream shop. That's when I really thought, 'Well, okay, I could really go out for an ice cream cone with him.' Instead of having to go with friends. We went out alone.

Joe: Well, something had to change. Did he seem cuter? Was he nice?

Barbara: It did. Do you know what it is? I don't know, he was different than anyone I ever dated.

Joe: Right.

Barbara: He, uh... I was used to dating, I hate to say this, a little bit older men, that treated you like... I worked in a bank in Tampa, so I met those type of professional people. You know, and here, I meet this redneck country boy. I didn't know. I wasn't quite sure what he was.

Danny: We've been married 50 years.

Barbara: (laughs)

Joe: You don't have to explain to me. (laughs)

Barbara: I think it was opposite attracts.

Danny: Opposites attract, yeah.

Joe: Is that how you feel too?

Danny: Yeah, because she didn't... I liked to go to the woods. I used to, when I got back from overseas, I didn't do it anymore, but before I went over there, I'd hunt all the time and I just loved the woods.

Joe: Okay.

Danny: I mean, I love the woods still, but I don't carry a gun.

Barbara: He was an avid hunter and he lived in the woods before he went in the military.

Danny: Yeah>

Barbara: When I met him, and we married, and we moved here, he no longer went hunting. And everyone kept telling me he was an avid hunter. He loved to hunt. And I said, 'He never goes hunting.'

Joe: Is there a reason why?

Danny: I just got tired of shooting a gun.

Barbara: He wouldn't hunt for sport. He wouldn't kill for sport.

Joe: Okay.

Barbara: And I think Vietnam changed that part of him.

Joe: I guess that's what I was wondering. Because of the experience...

Barbara: That's my opinion.

Danny: Yeah.

Joe: Okay, so it's 1968, you guys meet. You dated once. Did you start going...

Barbara: We dated a few times. Actually, we met in May and we married in July.

Joe: Okay.

Danny: Quick.

Barbara: Actually, if we had stayed together much longer, maybe we wouldn't have. (laughs)

Joe: Wow! That's quick.

Danny: That was quick. Everybody thought she was pregnant.

Joe: That's what everybody asks.

Barbara: And 8 years later, we adopt a child.

Joe: Oh, Okay. That's Kevin?

Danny: Yeah.

Barbara: But this was a very small town.

Joe: Well, here it is.

Barbara: It was then, a very small town. There was a mobile home park. No one had ever met me.

Joe: Right.

Barbara: I'm a stranger from out of town. And we moved the wedding date up. So, everyone in that mobile home park...

Joe: So, were you in Tampa or were you down here to get married?

Danny: Tampa.

Joe: Okay.

Danny: 'Cause I was still in the service.

Joe: Okay, so when you got married, you were still in the service.

Barbara: Yes.

Joe: So, when did you get out of the service? How long after you were married?

Barbara: We were married on July the 28th and they gave you an early out in October of 1968.

Joe: Okay.

Danny: Yeah.

Joe: So, in October, did you stay in Tampa or did you move back here?

Barbara: No, his father. That's why he didn't re-enlist. He kept asking him to consider coming back to work.

Joe: Alright. So, you come back to Punta Gorda. How much had changed since you left before?

Danny: Quite a bit. Just new buildings coming up. But, Port Charlotte wasn't there when I was growing up. It was all pasture land.

Joe: Okay.

Danny: So, there wasn't any buildings, except, we called it the Murdock Store. That was the only thing there.

Joe: Oh, that was still there.

Danny: And Port Charlotte and Punta Gorda Isles, they started happening.

Joe: Where did you guys live? Did you move to Punta Gorda or Port Charlotte?

Danny: At the Slip-Not.

Joe: Oh, so you lived there again?

Danny: I was raised there my whole life. I never left. The first time I ever changed my address was not too long ago. My address has always been 1601.

Barbara: That's true.

Joe: So, the Slip-Not had been around, 1952 to 2012, right?

Barbara: We sold it in 2012.

Danny: U.S. Cleveland had called me one day and said you now are the oldest business in Charlotte County with the same owner and same location.

Joe: Yep. I read that when I was doing research on you.

Danny: So, I never gave it a thought until he called me. And he was our historian. This guy lived and breathed history.

Joe: Oh, I know. I wish I could have met him. I read his book, of course.

Barbara: Yes, he was.

Danny: Hurricane Charley kind of messed him up a little bit. He was so sad.

Joe: That's what I heard. Well, let's talk about the Slip-Not then. First off, why the name? Your dad chose that?

Danny: They were driving back to Illinois and the attorney told them that they had to have a name for the business before he could start the licensing process. And they were looking at records. You know, names of records and nothing clicked. So, on the way how they'd seen a big billboard sign and it had a piece of scotch tape stuck to an egg and it was like dipping it in water. And the commercial was "This tape slips not."

Barbara: See, Slip-Not is not spelled with a 'k'. Ever.

Danny: With an 'n'.

Joe: Slips not, N-O-T.

Danny: N-O-T. And, I don't know. That's how it started.

Joe: Okay, somewhere between Illinois and Florida there's a billboard.

Danny: So, they called the attorney and told him, and he said, 'Oh where did you come up with this?' And they told him the story and it's been that way ever since.

Joe: That's a great story. Okay. I guess I thought it was near the water because I thought the slipknot...]

Barbara: Everyone thought it had a 'k' in it and people spell it with a 'k'.

Danny: They started it with an 'n', so I just left it that way.

Barbara: It was never spelled with a 'k'. But you're right, Slip-Not, the know will not slip like water.

Joe: So, for someone who didn't have the pleasure of going to the Slip-Not for a beer, how big was it? And how many people would be able to fit in there in a night?

Barbara: You mean, to date when we sold it?

Joe: Well, I guess let's start with when you first had it. How big was it in the 50's?

Danny: Actually, we lived in the bar.

Joe: Upstairs?

Danny: There was no upstairs. We lived at one end of the bar. Our kitchen was in the bar. Our bathrooms were in the bar. Everything. Our beds were in the bar but in another room. So, that's where I was raised, right there.

Joe: How? What time would they close, so the kids could get to bed at a normal time?

Danny: Two in the morning, 7 to 2, except Sundays.

Joe: 7 AM?

Danny: Until 2.

Joe: And you served food there as well?

Danny: Sandwiches.

Joe: How was it, as a kid, trying to get to sleep? Wasn't it difficult?

Danny: No. Some nights it'd be noisy, but it wasn't too bad.

Joe: You were definitely separated from the bar.

Danny: There was a thick wall, you know. There was an insulated wall between our living quarters and the bar.

Joe: What an interesting way to grow up.

Barbara: Did you share the same bathrooms?

Danny: Yes, the same bathrooms. Except when the bar was open, I would go out back and take a leak.

Joe: Okay.

Danny: I didn't want to go in the bar.

Barbara: I remember them saying they had common bathrooms.

Danny: Yes.

Joe: Do you remember regulars? Who your regulars were?

Danny: Yeah, we had quite a few.

Joe: Any famous ones? Locally?

Danny: Elmo Strickland, he brought dirt for my father in the parking lot.

Barbara: Hendrickson used to come in a lot.

Danny: Yeah, Ed Hendrickson, Bobby Hendrickson. They were a family, obviously. Bobby South was an old-timer.

Joe: Any rough night you remember? Like trying to get rid of a drunk?

Danny: See, Arcadia was a dry county on Sundays. So, Arcadians would always come over to Punta Gorda. And Punta Gorda boys didn't like Arcadians coming over. So, we had to be careful. I mean, dad was always there on Sundays to make sure nothing happened.

Joe: Right. So, did your dad work every day?

Danny: Every day.

Joe: Really?

Danny: Every single day. And my mother. They opened, they'd clean it and closed it. The same thing over and over.

Joe: They must have enjoyed it.

Danny: Oh yeah. It was hard work, but they enjoyed it.

Barbara: Trying to build a business. I remember your mother saying one time, or your dad, they only made 7 dollars and 70-something cents for the whole day and night. They thought, at some point, they were going to have to close it. Remember?

Joe: Oh, when they first opened up?

Barbara: This is hearsay for me.

Danny: Yeah, my mother had a ledger and in it, she kept notes. She kept notes on everything. But, in one of them it says, 'Things are picking up. Four cars went down the highway today.'

Joe: (laughs with Barbara) Wow.

Danny: It was kind of funny. Then they'd talk about how much they'd make. Sometimes it was 7 dollars, eight dollars a day.

Joe: How many kids did they have?

Danny: My brother and sister.

Joe: Okay. Where were you in the order?

Danny: The youngest.

Joe: You were the youngest, okay.

Danny: My brother passed away and my sister, she's still around.

Joe: She lives in town?

Barbara: Yes.

Danny: Yes.

Joe: Oh great. Awesome. I hope to meet her sometime.

Danny: She don't live too far from us.

Joe: So, those first few years were pretty rough. When did things start to pick up?

Danny: Gosh. I don't really remember. I know on Saturday nights and Friday nights, it was pretty busy. And I never... see, our bathroom was in the bar, so I'd always go outside. So, on weekends, I never went to the bathroom in the bar. It was all woods behind us.

Joe: (laughs) Number one and number two?

Danny: Yes.

Joe: Okay.

Danny: It was the woods all the way to Shreve Street and there was nothing there.

Joe: So, there was plenty of bathroom space out there.

Danny: Yeah, we had a lot of room.

Joe: Wow, what an interesting...

Danny: It grew up pretty quick and then the company came in and started putting the park in.

Joe: That had to help.

Danny: Yeah, that helped a lot. In fact, I think that's what kept them in Florida. Because they were good bar people. They would drink a lot.

Barbara: The workers.

Danny: The workers.

Joe: How old were you when you actually started officially working for your parents?

Danny: Well, every morning before I'd go to school, I would empty the trash and sweep the bar.

Joe: This is as a little kid, at 6 or 7 years old?

Danny: Yeah and I didn't get an allowance, but I could have whatever was on the floor.

Barbara: Money-wise.

Joe: Oh, really?

Danny: And, the bartender that helped dad out, would throw money on the floor so I could sweep it and pick it up.

Joe: Oh, that's nice. Do you remember his name?

Danny: Yeah. (sighs)

Joe: It's okay. It's just a side note.

Danny: His son is still around.

Joe: Oh, really?

Danny: I don't think he is. I can't think of the name.

Joe: That's okay. So, your brother and sister also helped around?

Danny: No, they never worked. My sister worked at Slip-Not, later in years. My brother never did.

Barbara: With us.

Joe: That doesn't sound fair. You had to do chores, but they didn't?

Danny: Well, yeah. I never thought of it that way.

Joe: I would have thought of that. (laughs)

Barbara: Maybe they did when you were younger.

Danny: I think my brother helped at a station, like a grease monkey.

Joe: Oh, okay. So, he had a job.

Danny: Yeah, he had a job. Not I done that up until I was in high school.

Joe: Yeah, I figured until you left for the Air Force.

Danny: Yeah, I swept and emptied the trash. Didn't have to do anything else.

Joe: Okay.

Danny: And then mowed on weekends in the park. You know, for change.

Joe: Did they ever have... I ask, because I'm a musician. Did they have bands play on weekends?

Danny: Yeah, they had one...

Barbara: Not your parents.

Danny: Yeah, they did. They had a few.

Barbara: They only had Winston, that I remember. That was the first time, but that could've been before me.

Danny: They had had bands back when the bandstand was almost to the living quarters there at that corner.

Barbara: I don't remember.

Joe: Really? What kind of music?

Danny: Oh jeez. I don't remember that. I just knew they were loud.

Joe: I was wondering if it was Blues or Rock.

Danny: I don't know, probably Country.

Barbara: Back then, it would have been Country.

Joe: Country, that makes sense.

Danny: Yeah.

Joe: I just wanted to picture it in my head, if you had bands or not. So, 1968 rolls around, you come back down. You have a new bride. Everyone thinks you're pregnant, (laughs) but you're not. So, what did you do then? I'm sure you had to do more than sweep and take out the garbage.

Danny: I would still sweep and mop the bar. Check the drawers. Bring in stock.

Joe: Were you a bartender too?

Danny: No, never.

Barbara: You did all the maintenance in the park. You took care of all of the park: pumps, septic, everything.

Joe: Oh, really.

Danny: We had 22 septic tanks and I had to pump them quite often.

Joe: What kind of staff did you have to have? How many employees did you have?

Danny: We had one guy in the park who helped me and a couple of bartenders.

Joe: Okay.

Barbara: Was Walt there when we first went down?

Danny: No, the guy was named Brownie.

Joe: Brownie? Sounds like a nickname.

Barbara: It does.

Danny: They just called him Brownie.

Barbara: I worked at the bank. I didn't work there.

Joe: You worked at which bank?

Barbara: First National Bank, which is now Bank of America. I worked there 8 years.

Joe: That's the same location?

Barbara: Yes, same location.

Joe: Okay, that's where I bank.

Barbara: But it was First National Bank then.

Joe: Okay, good. So, you had a job. You lived at the same place as your parents? Or did you live in the bar still?

Danny: No, we lived in a mobile home.

Joe: Okay.

Barbara: His parents still lived behind the bar at the time, but they had changed it. It was built up better.

Joe: So, it had grown since it started.

Danny: Yes, it started growing, yes.

Joe: So, how many people could fit in the bar?

Danny: Back then?

Joe: Back then.

Danny: Sixty or seventy?

Barbara: Maybe. You had booths and all the bar stools.

Danny: A couple of tables.

Joe: Plus, the park was still being used.

Danny: Yeah.

Joe: Capacity?

Danny: Yeah, the park was full. The park stayed full.

Barbara: If I'm not mistaken, didn't you have at the address was 63 Lots

Danny: Yes, 63 lots.

Barbara: 63 lots, at the time.

Joe: Oh wow.

Barbara: Yeah, right. Eventually, we moved to 63. Yes.

Joe: Okay, so that's where you lived?

Barbara: We lived in the park from the time we went there.

Danny: Do you have a bathroom?

Joe: Oh, sure. Let's take a break. I'll turn this off. End of part 1.

[Audio transitions to the second part of Oral History interview.]

Joe: Okay, this is part 2 of my interview with Danny and Barbara Biehl. It is May 24th, 2018. We left off with them moving down in 1968, helping out at the Slip-Not Lounge. And now I'm going to ask you, in 1970, around 1971, you acquired 5 acres of land that helped out a lot?

Danny: Right, in the back.

Joe: Tell me a little bit about that.

Danny: My father had a chance to get an extra 5 acres and so he went ahead and purchased that and started, what we call, the new section. We had the old section and the new section.

Joe: Okay.

Danny: And that held 43 lots.

Joe: So, you're up to 106 now?

Danny: Yeah, and, so then, about 3 or 4 years later, Alto Orr, which was a longtime resident, he had property join in the back section, and he wanted my dad to buy that. You know, extend the park to this. He didn't want to do more, and we couldn't handle. He didn't want to expand anymore.

Joe: Well, that must have increased business. Were there problems with having that many more customers staying on your property?

Danny: No.

Joe: You never had any fights or anything?

Danny: No, never had a fight.

Barbara: The mobile home park supported the lounge when it was offseason.

Joe: Oh, okay.

Danny: Yes.

Joe: Did you have year-round people living there?

Barbara: We had permanent people

Joe: How many?

Barbara: Because we were a retirement mobile community.

Joe: Oh, interesting.

Barbara: And they rarely left.

Danny: They were there all the time.

Barbara: We had some, snowbirds that owned the mobile home. They owned their mobile home, they didn't own their lot.

Joe: Right.

Barbara: We owned the property, but they owned their home and they paid rent.

Joe: Okay, so the home could leave. They could drive off.

Barbara: We had some travel trailer parks, but we went to actual mobile homes that were secured. Especially in the new section. There were no travel trailers.

Joe: I guess this is a tough subject to talk about because a lot of mobile homes get destroyed in hurricanes. Obviously, we live in Florida and there's been a lot of hurricanes through the years. Donna, as well.

Danny: I remember Donna.

Joe: Did that affect your father's business?

Danny: It turned a couple of mobile homes over.

Joe: Okay. Nobody got hurt or anything?

Danny: No.

Joe: I don't know which ones came through the 60's and 70's.

Barbara: Charley.

Danny: Charley was the one.

Joe: Charley, of course.

Barbara: Charley was the main one. There were no others that ever damaged the Slip-Not while I lived on the property.

Joe: When I do these interviews, I always talk about the important events that come along historically, and obviously Charley in 2004 was major. Do you mind talking a little bit about that?

Danny: Well, we had a park one day and the park was gone the next day.

Joe: Really? It was completely devastated, huh?

Danny: Yes.

Barbara: No one was hurt.

Danny: Nobody was hurt.

Barbara: We had 22. See, the Slip-Not was so secure, the building itself. Who was it? Who wanted to use it as a fallout-shelter, as a shelter?

Danny: I forget. He worked for the county. They wanted to make it a hurricane shelter, but I told him we couldn't because of the people in the park.

Barbara: We'd take all people.

Danny: We do our park people first.

Barbara: We always maintained enough food and water to accommodate our tenants in case of a bad storm.

Joe: So, you had enough room in that. So, this building, by 2004, it had gotten pretty big.

Barbara: It had gotten big, but the outside is what made so much seating. Our tiki area.

Danny: Yeah, it was the biggest part.

Barbara: We would have taken in any tenants that needed to be.

Joe: You say a lot of people left, but the way I always hear the story is that everybody thought it was going to hit Tampa, and then it cut.

Danny: Well, it was.

Barbara: Some of them had children living out of state, and they wanted their parents to come.

Joe: Of course.

Barbara: So, they did. But we had some, they're just die-hards, you know.

Joe: Yeah, there are always die-hards.

Barbara: And they were excited to be at the bar.

Joe: Right, so how many people did you have?

Barbara: Twenty-two.

Joe: Twenty-two people.

Barbara: But, when we heard that time, it was just a matter of what? Forty-Five minutes, it seemed like.

Danny: Actually, I was out mowing and we she called me and said the hurricane changed and it's coming in our harbor.

Barbara: No, they said we were going to get some of it. But it made... we were already, you didn't board everything up because you didn't think we were going to get it. But, I remember, on the radio, in 45 minutes span, we were going to get a direct hit. It was coming directly into our harbor.

Joe: The radio told you that? They told you, 'in 45 minutes'?

Barbara: I'm saying in about a span of 45 minutes from what I had heard and being with the people, it seems like everything changed within that period of time.

Joe: Wow. Okay.

Barbara: That it was making a turn into our harbor. So, and they were saying we would get the storm surge, 7 to 8 feet. So, I got everyone out of the Slip-Not and into our two-story home, which is on the same property.

Joe: Okay.

Barbara: So, that they would not... the water would not come in.

Joe: Okay, so let's talk about the storm when it hits.

Danny: We didn't get our storm surge.

Barbara: he wasn't with me, he was in the Slip-Not.

Danny: I was in the bar.

Joe: Oh, you were in the bar.

Barbara: He, one of the workers and our son, was in the Slip-Not. And then I had 22 tenants in the two-story building. And when Charley did hit, when it started, my kitchen window blew in,

glass went everywhere. Everything in my kitchen went down through the middle and down the steps. I was getting everyone downstairs into a really secure area because it used to be, for a lot of years, the coin operated laundry room and showers for the tenants in the park.

Danny: It was all concrete.

Barbara: It was a coin operated laundry and everything, so that was solid concrete.

Joe: Wow. Can I see any of this? Can I go back? Or is it all gone?

Danny: it's gone.

Joe: It's all gone?

Barbara: What do you mean? We have a CD of the storm.

Joe: Cool. I'd love to see it sometime.

Barbara: I may have two copies.

Joe: So, you guys are having some serious damage here.

Barbara: Oh, yeah, we had serious damage.

Danny: Big-time.

Joe: What happened to all those homes out there? The trailers?

Barbara: You know what was so strange was, you would see one and it was just shambles, it was all the way down to the ground. And then you would walk a little further down and it would be intact. Do you remember that?

Danny: Yeah.

Joe: So, you'd see another one that was good.

Danny: One of our bartenders, Sharon, she lived on lot 1 by the bar. Now, she lost her roof and the wall, but her bongo drum was still sitting up in the living room where she put it... sitting up.

Barbara: That one home, the desk. The home was totally gone, and the desk was sitting where it always had sat, in that one home. The homes in the new... we always called it the new section, the back section. Those were like, some of those didn't have any damage, even though the winds... So, they said it was the outer bands. The tornadoes in the outer bands. You know, how it would take this home and the tornado would go up and then it may skip something.

Joe: Okay.

Danny: But parts flying damaged all of them.

Barbara: That's what did so much damage at our home.

Danny: I think her sister's, was probably the best one.

Joe: Really?

Barbara: My sister's mobile home? If her one door had been closed into her home, because she had a craft room added on, she would have had no damage.

Joe: Wow. So, 106 lots. How many homes were out there at the time of Charley?

Danny: 106.

Barbara: Well, no, remember, we had taken a couple of lots and put the ship in. See, you put the ship in, in February. You and Don brought the ship in.

Danny: Okay, that's right.

Barbara: We took some lots out to do a tiki area.

Danny: Yeah, we took 3 or 4 lots.

Joe: Oh, so this is the ship you were telling me about. I guess we can digress a little bit. What was the story behind the ship?

Danny: Well, it was a bar.

Barbara: It was a tiki bar.

Joe: Okay.

Danny: But, it started out... what gave me the idea was the shrimp boat in Naples. It was for sale, but it was an old one. And a friend of mine, Don, I said, 'hollow that thing out and that'd make a heck of a bar.

Joe: Oh, cool.

Danny: So, we went looking at it and it was in bad shape. And he said, 'Well, I'll just build one. So, we were at the IHOP and he drew it out on a napkin. 9:33

Joe: Who is this guy?

Danny: Don Amick. He's been around a long time.

Joe: How do you spell that?

Barbara: A-M-I-C-K.

Danny: And he said, 'Well, I'll build it'. So, he drew it all out on a napkin and I said, 'When do you want to get started?' He said, 'Let's start now.' So, that's what we did.

Joe: So, is this 2003? Before Charley?

Barbara: No, this is just before Charley. Well, it was the same year actually, because it was February, I believe, when you brought the ship in.

Danny: Yeah.

Barbara: Was it February or March? And Charley hit in August.

Danny: We just got it all done but the hurricane didn't hurt it at all.

Joe: That's good.

Barbara: It didn't even break the crow's nest.

Joe: Oh, okay. I guess I was trying to get a number. Approximately about a hundred...

Barbara: Lots?

Joe: Yeah, how many were damaged?

Barbara: I'm gonna say a hundred. Maybe 102.

Joe: Out of those hundred, how many were damaged by Charley?

Danny: All of them.

Barbara: Well...

Danny: All but one or two.

Barbara: They declared this over 80% damaged. Right?

Danny: So, we couldn't build back.

Barbara: So, we couldn't build back.

Danny: Yeah, the city wouldn't let us put it back.

Joe: So, was that the end of the trailer park?

Danny: Yeah, that was the end.

Barbara: That's when it ended.

Joe: Oh, that's sad.

Barbara: Yeah.

Danny: And I had 5 acres of nothing out back. And then we had no trailer, so I made the one whole side a parking lot, down Henry Street.

Barbara: We were so busy because of so many things being devastated afterwards. So, we had the ship, and um...

Danny: Right after Charley, we had no power, so... but everybody wanted to come in and have a beer and a drink. And I said, 'I've got no ice.' And what, an hour or two later we had truckloads of ice.

Joe: Oh, what happened?

Barbara: You know when ice, they come around, the Red Cross, and Salvation Army and all them set up and they give you water and ice.

Joe: Okay.

Barbara: they said, 'If we give ice, can we just come here to be together?' The customers, you know that would... And so, the Salvation Army set up in our parking lot to feed the people in the surrounding area.

Joe: Oh, that's a good place to be.

Danny: Yeah.

Barbara: And so, we told them, you know, we have to keep the beer cold. So, the ice that they were given to keep their perishables cold, the brought to the Slip-Not.

Joe: Okay, and this went on for how long?

Barbara: This went on for, well, you used his every, um, generator just to keep the cooler going. You see, the thing was, we were loaded with beer and food because the night Charley hit, Friday, August the 13th.

Danny: Friday, the 13th.

Barbara: Friday, the 13th. Friday night, the 13th, we had a class reunion. We had food, beer, it was our son's 10-year class reunion and Charlotte High School, that year, was having their cocktail hour at the Slip-Not.

Joe: So, you had a ton of food, which I guess is a good thing.

Barbara: We had fun. Food, that they ordered, that we didn't prepare, in our huge coolers. You know, food and beer, extra beer and all kinds of stuff.

Joe: So, you had extra food.

Danny: We gave it to the Salvation Army.

Joe: Great.

Barbara: Yes, they took it. And hamburgers, of course. We were known for our hamburgers. That's what we were always known for.

Joe: You're making me hungry.

Danny: They took hamburger. They used all the food we had.

Barbara: But the people needed a place to get together because everything was in shambles. Everyone was so, like, 'What are we going to do? Where are we going to go? How are we going to live? How are we going to survive?' You know, and like, the Slip-Not was their area that they could come and talk about it to other people and be there.

Joe: That's great. So, you had a support system.

Barbara: And some of them would bring guitars and some would sing, but that was the meeting place.

Danny: I told them when they came in, I said, 'The only bad thing here is my cash register doesn't work, so you're going to have to drink the beer for free.'

Joe: Aww.

Danny: And they loved it.

Joe: That's great.

Danny: But they had a curfew at what, 9?

Barbara: Yes, because the...

Joe: Of course. How long was the curfew?

Barbara: What was it called?

Joe: The National Guard?

Danny: Yeah.

Barbara: We had to, because we had looters right after the storm.

Danny: Yeah, that night.

Barbara: He went out, with a gun.

Joe: That is terrible.

Danny: They were stealing and stealing, so the National Guard stayed there for what? Several weeks.

Barbara: Well, they were all over, but they certainly came, yes, because we manned everything we could, because we had looters right after the storm.

Joe: Really?

Danny: Actually, it was that night, because the hurricane was over just before dark.

Barbara: The hurricane ended, right, before dark, because it was so fast moving. Thank god. That's what saved us. That's what saved Punta Gorda.

Joe: Right. If it had lingered, it would have been horrible.

Barbara: If it had been like Katrina and just turned.

Danny: Yeah, but it was a quick one.

Joe: So, the looters were really bad? That makes me sad.

Barbara: Isn't that sad? Because these were senior citizens who lived on fixed incomes.

Danny: And all their belongings were all over scattered.

Joe: and you had a lot of ground to cover, so you couldn't be everywhere.

Barbara: Basically, 10 acres.

Danny: Yeah.

Joe: And it was just you with one gun? That's all you had?

Danny: Yeah.

Barbara: But then you had Kevin and you had Mike and all of you guys went out in the jeep and tried to, you know...

Joe: So, you mentioned Kevin. So, you had one son?

Barbara: We have a son, Kevin, and a daughter, Danielle.

Joe: Okay, and Danielle lived there too?

Danny: yes.

Barbara: Not in the park. But yes, she lives in Punta Gorda. They both live here.

Joe: So, Kevin helped you out.

Danny: Kevin had his home. He was in 63 and that one blew away.

Joe: Wow, what an experience.

Barbara: It was an experience.

Danny: It was a total loss.

Joe: The people that were with you the entire time, the 22 people. Are they still around? Are they still friends of yours?

Barbara: Oh yeah. Some, a couple have passed. Like we said, a lot of them were older. But yes. Oh yeah. Listen, at the time, before Charley. We had 16 employees?

Danny: We had 17 employees at one point.

Joe: Okay, that's what I asked you before. How many employees.

Danny: That was after.

Barbara: When we sold, we had at least 16 employees, but we had longevity with every employee. I mean, some 25 years

Joe: Really?

Barbara: Bartenders.

Joe: Well, that's always a good sign. That's always a sign of a good place to work when the workers stay there a long time.

Barbara: we had lots of longevity.

Joe: I feel bad that I never went. My parents have lived here since before Charley. 2003. They live in Port Charlotte.

Barbara: They may have heard of us.

Joe: they've heard of you but they're not bar people. Well, now they would consider themselves bar people because my brother and I are both musicians, so they come see us play.

Barbara: Are you really? See, I would have... I handled all that.

Danny: That was her job.

Joe: You did book bands?

Barbara: I booked all the bands, I did the office work. Oh yeah. And I was the night person.

Joe: What kind of music did you have when you were running it?

Barbara: When I was running it?

Joe: Yeah.

Barbara: Pretty much basic.

Joe: Rock, covers? That kind of stuff?

Barbara: Rock and roll. I never had much country.

Joe: Okay.

Barbara: Country created problems.

Joe: Really? It brings in the wrong element, huh?

Barbara: Isn't that something how country could create a problem? But we had some that would throw in a few country songs. Do you know the Crashers? I don't know if you have ever heard of them.

Joe: The Crashers? No, but it sounds like a good name.

Barbara: Toucan Jam, Andy Gene, so many entertainers.

Joe: I know the Boogiemens and the Gold Tones have been around for a while.

Barbara: Actually, the Boogiemens never ever played at the Slip-Not and I don't know why I never had them down there.

Joe: Just one of those things?

Barbara: Yes

Joe: Okay. Well, I love music, so I had to ask.

Barbara: I love music. Yes.

Joe: I wish I had seen the place. So, if I go there now, what would I see? You said the ship is still there?

Barbara: The ship is still there. The lighthouse is still there. And I'm thinking, what we call the beer bar. We built that around an oak tree.

Joe: Okay.

Barbara: Around a large oak tree.

Joe: So, that's still there.

Barbara: because we would not allow the oak tree to be cut or moved because the oak tree we planted the day we got Kevin, our son. So, the beer bar was built around that oak tree.

Joe: I'll go see that oak tree, for sure then. How old is Kevin now?

Barbara: Kevin is 41.

Joe: Okay, so it's 41 years old.

Barbara: Yes.

Danny: I went out in the woods and pulled it up by its roots. That's how small it was.

Joe: Well, I will definitely make a point to go out there.]

Barbara: I'm not sure you can get in, but possibly you can.

Joe: Okay>

Barbara: I don't know. (to Danny) Did you say that there was...

Danny: There's someone living there in the house.

Barbara: Plattner's still has the property. Plattner Dealership. But he never ever put a vehicle on it. It's still kind of...

Joe: Is it just sitting there?

Danny: But if you want to go in there, I can go in there and take you through it.

Barbara: He might be able to get you in there.

Joe: Well, let's go back to Charley and how it affected everything.

Barbara: Well, it devastated. It changed our lives. And it changed our tenants' lives.

Joe: Right.

Barbara: Because some had to go to homes. You know, it was devastating.

Joe: There was nowhere for them to go.

Barbara: No.

Danny: They slept everywhere.

Barbara: Danny wanted to build back, but with the setbacks, you know, you had to come up to new codes. And remember, we were the oldest park in Punta Gorda.

Joe: So, the codes were different.

Barbara: The codes were a lot different. Yeah, we were not only the oldest business, but the oldest park. Right? Is that correct?

Joe: So, how long until at least the bar could open up? Because you said you couldn't take in money.

Barbara: After hurricane Charley?

Joe: Yeah.

Barbara: Oh, that bar was already open. They were doing it on paper

Joe: Okay.

Barbara: Because here comes Budweiser, once we could get through, yeah.

Danny: I think we were down...

Barbara: We had damage in the bar, though, definitely.

Joe: Does the insurance help with all that?

Barbara: Definitely. Oh, yeah.

Danny: Yeah, they did.

Joe: Okay, good.

Barbara: And FEMA. FEMA was set up in the next-door parking lot over there.

Joe: So, FEMA was good too?

Danny: Yeah.

Barbara: Oh yeah, FEMA.

Joe: It's such an obscure word, but how long, do you think until things got back to normal?

Barbara: Oh no, it was... normal?

Danny: Well, FEMA moved into the back 5.

Joe: And how long did they live there?

Danny: 3 years?

Joe: 3 years.

Barbara: FEMA would put some homes there. Right. They paid us to put homes there for people.

Danny: They built it back. And then, I figured well, the city would let me put it back, since FEMA put it up, but.

Joe: So, homes were built on your property then?

Barbara: Well, they were really just brought in temporarily. Temporary homes.

Danny: They rode them in and hooked the electric back up, and the sewer and the water, put all new in.

Joe: Did some of your tenants, did they benefit from that?

Barbara: I don't think any of our tenants. Did they?

Danny: I can't remember any.

Barbara: I don't think any of our tenants benefited from that. These were families that had absolutely nowhere to go that FEMA places into those kind of things.

Joe: So, your tenants had to find new places to go.

Danny: They could have come in, because one of the options of them doing that was our tenants that lived here have first option to move in.

Joe: Oh.

Danny: But they didn't.

Barbara: The majority of our tenants that continued to stay, you know, and have a mobile home, moved to Alligator Park.

Joe: Okay.

Barbara: And they are still there, a lot of them.

Joe: I guess what I'm getting at is that obviously, Hurricane Charley pretty much devastated you guys.

Danny: Everything.

Barbara: Yes, we only had the Slip-Not then because, it was, he, to build back with the new setbacks, was astronomical. We would've had to charge an ungodly amount and we would only be able to put how many homes.

Danny: The one that had 63, we could probably only put 40 in there, because of the new setbacks. It wouldn't have been worth it.

Joe: Yeah.

Barbara: And the people that lived in our park were on fixed incomes.

Joe: Right.

Barbara: See, our lot rent at the time of Hurricane Charley, was only \$211. That included water, sewer, garbage and mowing.

Joe: In 2004? Wow, that's a great deal. I was paying rent back then, I know how much rent was. That's a good deal.

Barbara: They owned their home, but that was the lot rent they paid us. But it included, you know, the lawn, their water, their sewer, garbage, everything.

Joe: So, after Charley, it was just a bar then. And restaurants, sandwiches.

Danny: When my dad first opened the park, the rent was \$15 per lot. But they paid their own electric.

Joe: So, you said FEMA was there for 3 years? So, you wouldn't even say the town was normal until... 2008?

Barbara: Yeah. At least. When did we get the parking lot all set up? We didn't have the lighthouse in when Charley came in, only the ship.

Danny: Yeah.

Barbara: Then we built the lighthouse, which is 3 levels, but that was the bandstand. We built a bandstand for our bands with curtains that would close.

Joe: I would've loved to have played there for you guys.

Barbara: Close so if it rained, their instruments wouldn't get wet.

Joe: Thank you. I appreciate those things.

Danny: Oh, they loved to play there.

Barbara: They did love to play.

Joe: I've played a lot of outdoor shows out here and when that rain comes in...

Barbara: Oh, it'll ruin your instruments.

Joe: Amplifiers aren't cheap.

Danny: Yeah, they'd draw that curtain.

Barbara: We had waterproof that would come around the bottom and would snap down.

Joe: And you said the lighthouse is still there.

Danny: it is.

Joe: I will go take a look at that, for sure. So, 2008, things kind of get normal.

Barbara: Basically.

Danny: To me, it was never normal.

Barbara: No, it was never normal.

Joe: I guess that's what I want to get to, and I don't want to get into a sore subject, but I was going to ask, how come the bar closed in 2012?

Danny: We sold it.

Barbara: We sold the bar.

Joe: Oh, okay.

Barbara: We were still open, but we had had it for 60 years and we worked it day and night.

Danny: yeah.

Barbara: And our children really didn't want it. That's a hard life.

Joe: Yeah, it is. The life you described.

Barbara: If you're a musician, you know what your life is like. Well, when you take it and you have to consider all of the laws, all of the alcohol that's going to be consumed and you're responsible for everyone who consumes whatever they consume in your place, on the premises.

Joe: That's true.

Barbara: And insurance isn't everything. There's so much to it, but we were there, 24/7. When we sold the Slip-Not, I had my first thanksgiving off in 19 years.

Joe: Oh, wow. That is a tough life.

Danny: And Christmas.

Barbara: Every holiday. We open Christmas.

Joe: Wow.

Barbara: So, we would do all the work on holidays and let the employees have that holiday off, until time to open. But on Christmas, they opened by volunteers only.

Danny: Yeah.

Barbara: And they were always in line, wanting to open.

Danny: That was the best tip day.

Barbara: Yes, because people would get bored after they eat.

Joe: Yeah, they want to take a break from their family.

Barbara: Let's go down to the Slip-Not. Are you gonna open? So, we would open at 4 o'clock. They would make so much in tips because the people would say, 'Oh, we're so happy you're here with us on Christmas Day here'.

Joe: We played a couple days after Christmas at the Celtic Ray and I was thinking, 'it's probably not going to be a great crowd', and that place was just packed.

Barbara: Packed. People get bored.

Joe: Well, it sounds like such a great place. I wish I could have gone there. It sounds like you were very close with your employees, as well.

Barbara: We were very close to our employees and we had our regulars. We could have never survived all those years without those regulars.

Joe: Any employees you want to mention while we have this on record? Long-time.

Barbara: Yes. Darlene Bishop was with us for 25 years.

Joe: Wow.

Barbara: Sharon was with us, I think, for 23. 23 years, 24 years. Walt, when he passed away, had been with you. How many years? He was your little right-hand man.

Danny: He was there, oh, over 20 years.

Barbara: Yes.

Joe: Really?

Barbara: Yeah, but he passed away. But yeah, and we had...

Danny: 7 and 8 years.

Barbara: We had Mike Champagne was Danny's right-hand man. Do you know him?

Joe: Yeah, I've heard the name before.

Barbara: Now Robin is Mike and Carol's daughter and Mike and Carol both worked for us. And Robin is married to our son, Kevin.

Joe: Oh, okay.

Danny: Well, actually, it was Mike, Carol and Robin. All 3 of them worked for us.

Barbara: All 3 of them worked for us.

Joe: Wow, it really is a family business. So, you went out on your own terms then. You had 60 years.

Barbara: Oh yes.

Danny: Yeah.

Joe: I guess I was just worried that Charley pushed you to it.

Danny: Oh, no.

Barbara: No. We could have continued. Now we did want to put something on the back 5 acres.

Joe: Yeah?

Barbara: We tried. The city kept blocking us.

Danny: Whatever I wanted, they didn't want it.

Barbara: They didn't want, you know. And right there, it's kind of hard.

Joe: Yeah, a Historical Center would be really nice.

Barbara: (laughs) You would have thought we would have been grandfathered in, a little bit, you know, being there. But that's not the way it worked out. And, you know, things work out the way they're supposed to. I mean really.

Joe: And you guys, it sounded like you were working hard for a lot of years.

Barbara: We were...

Danny: I would take people home who had had too much to drink.

Barbara: That's what we were known for. We would drive them home and take their vehicle.

Joe: That's great.

Barbara: So, they could wake up safe and still have their vehicle at home.

Joe: Somewhere along the line, things changed. I remember living in Atlanta in the late 90's, someone sued a club because someone got into a car accident.

Barbara: Oh listen, we had that. A guy used our ATM machine. Remember?

Danny: Yeah.

Barbara: And then he left, and he was killed on a motorcycle and his wife sued us, tried to sue us, but he was already intoxicated from another place.

Danny: He never got a drink at our place.

Barbara: He used the ATM. Our bartender did not serve him.

Joe: Did they track down the other bar and sue them? Is that how it works.

Barbara: I think it got dropped because she got in trouble. She was lying about quite a few things.

Joe: Oh, okay.

Danny: See, we had cameras, so we had proof of everything.

Barbara: Oh yeah.

Danny: He couldn't have gotten into our place without getting on camera.

Joe: It just seems to me, logically, personal responsibility. What I put in my body is my responsibility.

Barbara: It's true, but you know, our girls, our servers and bartenders always knew that they had to watch. That's what we asked them to do. But I have a man, we had a man. He's been

here forever. Dale McDaniel. Now he is a man's man and he is a redneck and he said, 'I'm not giving my truck keys to nobody'. Especially a woman.

Joe: Ooh. Who was this guy?

Barbara: Dale McDaniel. And I say, 'Dale, give me the keys'.

Danny: He says, 'Am I that far?' Yeah.

Barbara: he'd say, 'Am I that far?' And I'd say, 'Yeah'. He said, 'But you're the only woman that I'm giving my keys to.

Joe: Well, that's the beauty of when you had people living on the lot. They should be able to stumble home, right?

Barbara: I have to tell you this because this is unique. This is when you really care about your people, I feel. Danny has a jeep. He welded a tow bar on the front of his jeep, so that he could hook, instead of me having to follow late at night or one of the other employees follow and drive another vehicle. He would hook, if they had a trailer hitch, his trailer to the back of their vehicle and he would drive them home. And then drive his jeep back. And, yeah...

Joe: While we're talking about how hard you guys worked, did you keep the same hours? 7am to 2am?

Barbara: Oh, no. We went in. I always... there was some mornings we went in at 5:30.

Joe: 5:30 in the morning? And the bar was still open until 2?

Barbara: Yeah.

Danny: I think we changed to until 8, didn't we?

Barbara: Yeah, but used to, we had customers. This was before your mom and dad died. We had customers at 7:30 in the morning.

Joe: Oh, okay.

Barbara: So, those were the prison guards.

Joe: I guess we didn't talk about that.

Danny: The prison, when they opened, we had all the night shift come in and that was their days. And it was a night-, they loved to party.

Joe: Right.

Barbara: Jukebox going at 7:30 in the morning, hamburgers cooking.

Joe: Wow,

Barbara: And they're out there partying.

Joe: When did this start? The prison opened when?

Danny: Yeah, when it opened.

Barbara: I don't know when it opened, but it was before your mom and dad passed away.

Danny: The bar would be a total mess, so I had to re-sweep it, re-clean the whole place.

Joe: Wow.

Barbara: I think it was in the early 90's.

Joe: Oh, okay. So, your parents passed away in the 90's?

Barbara: Yes.

Danny: Yes.

Joe: And that's when you took over?

Danny: Yeah, completely.

Barbara: He took over totally in '98.

Joe: Okay.

Danny: But I worked there my whole life.

Barbara: '97 actually.

Danny: I was actually the manager. My dad was trying to cut back.

Joe: Right.

Danny: it was a good life.

Joe: That was my final question. What is a lifetime of sleep deprivation like? (laughs)

Barbara: For someone who didn't want to be around alcohol and who was never gonna marry a man who drank, I think I thoroughly enjoyed my life.

Joe: well, you married a man who doesn't drink.

Barbara: But I was in the business. (laughs)

Joe: And you never had a drink at all?

Barbara: No. I've tasted it. I'm not against alcohol. I can't stand the taste of it.

Joe: Oh, okay.

Barbara: I've never found a drink I like.

Danny: She's tried every brand they make.

Barbara: Wine, everything. I do not like it. So. It's a waste of money.

Joe: That makes sense.

Barbara: So, I just never drank. But, some of the customers didn't know it.

Danny: After we sold the Slip-Not, we lived across the railroad tracks from the Slip-Not. And, from where we were, I could see the light. So, I would call over there and say, 'You don't have the night lights on'. And they said, 'How do you know?' And I said, 'I'm looking right at it'. I'm at the house. That's how close we moved from there.

Joe: Right.

Danny: But we had been gone 4 or 5 months, and our bartenders would call us and say, 'Hey, this person's ready to be taken home.'

Barbara: Well, the one that he kept.

Danny: Tommy.

Barbara: Sharon.

Danny: But I would take the guys home that drank there and had too much.

Barbara: Some of them would call us.

Danny: Even though we don't own the place anymore. 'Yeah, but I need a ride'.

Joe: (laughs) So, you're still a taxi service. Well that's great. Well, I've taken a lot of your time so far. What I want to ask both of you. Obviously, you like Punta Gorda. What's your favorite thing about town?

Barbara: About town?

Joe: About this town?

Barbara: About this town? I loved, you know, the quaintness of it. Not in the beginning, I didn't, because I came from a large city.

Joe: Yeah, you came from Tampa.

Barbara: I came from Tampa, yes.

Danny: They never sleep in Tampa.

Barbara: And I'm so thankful that I did raise my children in a small town, even though it's big now. But I love, I love Punta Gorda. I think it's a beautiful place to live. It's friendly. There's just so much I love about it.

Joe: How about you, Danny?

Danny: We moved down in Riverside. We had been talking the last couple months of selling out there on the water and moving back into town.

Joe: Oh, okay.

Barbara: Possibly.

Danny: Yeah, possibly. It'd be nice, but we're used to big areas.

Joe: Okay.

Danny: You see, the park was 10 acres. Where we're at now is a lot of property, across the street.

Barbara: We own the property across the street.

Joe: Well, you obviously spent most of your life here.

Barbara: I will tell you this. He's been the Charlotte High School president and still is.

Joe: Oh, you are?

Barbara: Yes, he is.

Joe: Oh, I didn't know that.

Barbara: For years.

Danny: In fact, we got something going on at Beef O'Brady's tomorrow night.

Joe: Oh, you do? What's tomorrow night?

Barbara: They used to do the boat auction.

Joe: Oh, yeah. This Beef O'Brady's right here on Taylor?

Barbara: Yeah.

Danny: It's an appreciation for all the coaches.

Joe: Okay.

Barbara: It's the last day of school almost.

Joe: I've interviewed Mr. Massolio.

Danny: Oh yeah, he'll be there.

Joe: His father, not the coach.

Danny: Well, I don't know if his father will be there. His son will be there. All coaches will be there.

Joe: That's excellent.

Danny: Free food and free beer. They'll all be there.

Barbara: Bush Club does that every year for them.

Danny: For about 28 years.

Joe: Great.

Barbara: When Kevin started high school, you started.

Joe: It's not a fundraiser?

Barbara: It used to be. Well, it basically is.

Danny: We have a... yeah.

Joe: Is it open to the public?

Danny: Yeah, we don't have that many members, but the booster club lives off the interest now.

Joe: Oh, okay.

Barbara: They do.

Danny: And we do very well with interest.

Joe: I was going to stop by, but I might have a gig. I'm not sure.

Danny: Come on by.

Barbara: What kind of music do you play?

Joe: Well, I play in several cover bands because that's pretty popular around here. I'm playing tonight at the Heron's Glen on 41 on the left side. That's pretty much standard covers, Brown Eyed Girl, Margaritaville, that kind of stuff.

Barbara: That's what everybody likes though.

Joe: But I played at The Celtic Ray this past weekend with a Buddy Holly cover band which I started. And a Beatles cover band and we'll be playing there again August 10th.

Barbara: You play Buddy holly music?

Joe: Oh god, I love Buddy Holly.

Barbara: Do you?

Joe: He's my hero, yeah.

Barbara: Well, where are you going to be? I'll have to come.

Joe: Well, we're going to do it at the library on July 24.

Danny: The grand opening?

Joe: Well, actually, you're right. We're going to be there on June 2nd. We're going to... and this is how insane we are. We're going to do 12:00 at the Mid-County Library, pack up our stuff and then we're going to do 2:00 at the Punta Gorda Library. We're going to do the Budding Hollies. That's the name of the Buddy Holly group. But, on July 24th we're going to be doing the Buddy Holly and the Beatles cover band. We unveiled that at The Celtic Ray on Saturday and it went over really well. I was really happy.

Barbara: One band I know, and I know everyone in it. I don't know if you're familiar with them, American Made?

Joe: Oh, yeah.

Barbara: They played for us. And Kevin, he's the head singer and all that.

Joe: Your son?

Danny: No.

Barbara: No, no. His name is Kevin, that is the head of American Made.

Joe: Oh, okay.

Barbara: I know him very well. His brother lived in our mobile home park.

Joe: I'm in another band in North port called Stone Krow, and I think they know some of those guys.

Barbara: They probably do.

Joe: It's not the same band, but the drummer in that band was in Maiden Kane. (laughs) Which made me think of the same name. I think they're friends. Those are the bands and I'll be at The Celtic Ray on August 10th.

Barbara: Alright.

Joe: I have your phone number, so I can remind you if you like.

Barbara: Alright, yes.

Danny: It's not too far from us.

Joe: Thank you so much for your time, and please say hello to Vic and Charlotte for me.

Barbara: in fact, we're going to the hospital now.

Joe: I know. You said you were going. I'm on lunch, maybe I'll drop by with you.

Barbara: Thank you.

Joe: How is he? Is he going to be okay?

Barbara: You know, honestly, I don't know. There were a couple of blood clots is what I was told. One on the legs and one on the lung. But I think, possibly today he may be going to a rehab center. You know, and that's good. Because then they can work him. And hopefully, get him back.

Danny: I got to go get rid of one more cup of coffee.

Joe: It's been great talking to you. Thank you very much for your time, sir. And thank you too.

Barbara: Joe, nice meeting you.