

The Changing Tide: A Documentary Photo Essay of Panama City Beach from  
Recollections of a Mom and Pop

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### Abstract

This documentary photo essay focuses on a period in the history of Panama City Beach, Florida from WWII to 2013 as told through Mom and Pop moteliers, Ben and Eloise Graham. Their efforts to grow their family, their business, and their beloved Panama City Beach overlapped and blended, like the emerald green waves in the Gulf of Mexico. This account is by no means comprehensive and covers only some of the people, places, and events that contributed to what Panama City Beach is today. The story is told through a qualitative research analysis approach using the themes and categories that surfaced in the September 17, 2013 interview. Ben and Eloise Graham, along with several other moms and pops, developed the first motels, hotels, and cottages along the pristine shores of the Gulf of Mexico in Florida's panhandle in the early to mid twentieth century. In so doing, these families joined together through hard work, community service, and teamwork to unite several communities into the city of Panama City Beach. Together, these mom and pop moteliers and early business owners established the infrastructure that transformed the area to a desirable community and a popular beach destination.

*Keywords:* documentary photo essay, Panama City Beach, Florida, Ben Graham, Eloise Graham, Redneck Riviera, Miracle Strip, Pier Park, Emerald Coast, mom and pop, qualitative research

The Changing Tide: A Documentary Photo Essay of Panama City Beach  
From Recollections of a Mom and Pop

The purpose of this documentary photo essay is to present the history of Panama City Beach (PCB), Florida through the recollections of two octogenarians who were integrally involved in that history making since the 1950's. This account is by no means comprehensive and covers only some of the people, places, and events that contributed to what PCB is today. Ben and Eloise Graham, along with several other moms and pops, developed the first motels, hotels, and cottages along the pristine shores of the Gulf of Mexico in Florida's panhandle in the early to mid twentieth century. In so doing, these families joined together through hard work, community service, and teamwork to unite several communities into the city of Panama City Beach. Together, these mom and pop moteliers and early business owners established the infrastructure that transformed the area to a desirable community and a popular beach destination. In addition to the theme of *together*, throughout a two-hour interview on September 17, 2013, *then and now* comparisons emerged. This changing tide refrain, most suitable for a beach community, forms a navigational chart for this essay.

### **Methodology**

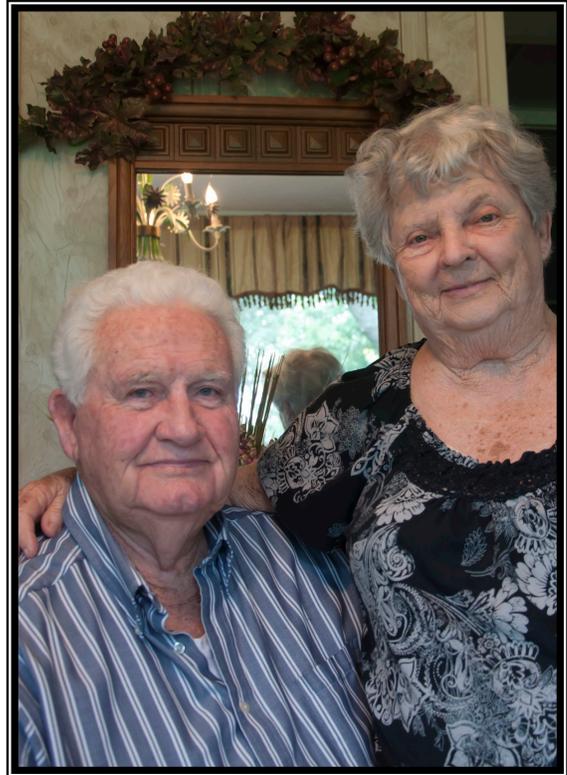
After obtaining informed consent, a two-hour interview was conducted and recorded on a cassette tape player. The tape was transcribed and is included in the appendix. The typed transcript was given to the interviewees within one week of the interview and they suggested no changes or corrections.

The Local History Archives in the Bay County Library, the Florida Memory website, and several books on Panama City Beach history were used for verification of information revealed in the interview and for 20<sup>th</sup> century digital images. Articles and ads in the *The New York Times*

also provided an interesting means of triangulating data. An iPhone 5 and Nikon D90 were used for taking current photos of places mentioned by the interviewees, and these photos were edited with Adobe Photoshop Lightroom software. Using a semi-standardized interview and qualitative analysis (Berg & Lune, 2012), the content was examined for categories and themes and these were interwoven non-chronologically with the events, people, and places of Panama City Beach, Florida.

### **Meet A Mom and Pop: Ben & Eloise Graham**

Behind Gulf Coast State College and Florida State University-Panama City Campus, just across the Hathaway Bridge on the Panama City side, is a quiet neighborhood on a circular street. Shaded deep and broad yards envelop homes; some are 30-40 years old, while others are sprawling and new. After parking on the paved circular driveway of this two-story brick home, I approached the front door and wondered about a worn green walker by the entrance. The tall 84-year-old Ben Graham, with thick snow-white hair and intelligent blue eyes, welcomed me in a confident warm voice. I followed his unsteady gait through the foyer, the kitchen, and a formal living room. He mentioned trouble walking since having knee surgery.



*Figure 1. Ben & Eloise Graham, 2013.*

Mr. Graham invited me to set up for the interview at a table donned in fall decor and then exited to tell his wife of my arrival. (Previously, during a phone call, Mr. Graham said he would

like for his wife to participate in the interview.) In a few moments, Ben reentered with his wife following close behind. She navigated through the home with a red walker. They asked me to call them Ben and Eloise. With a gentle laugh, eighty-three year old Eloise commented about taking a nap after her morning yard work. Now I understood the tatty green walker outside. I then told her how impressed I was with their yard and with the fact that she still works in the yard! Themes of do-it-yourself and hard work emerged before the interview even began. I also complimented their beautiful view of the bayou, and remarked on the picture windows that stretched the width of the house.

Ben was born in 1929, just a month before the stock market crash known as Black Tuesday, and Eloise was born the following year. The two married in 1952, shortly after Ben's service in the Marine Corp (1946-51). Ben fought in the 1950 Chosin Reservoir battle in North Korea. Eloise, the daughter of J. P. Stephenson, grew up on the family dairy farm in Greenwood, near Birmingham, Alabama, enculturated into the family business mentality.

Her parents and extended family, already in the embryonic motel business on the Gulf coast, made frequent trips to what is now called Panama City Beach. When Ben and Eloise married, her parents let them move into the Greenwood farmhouse; Mr. and Mrs. Stephenson headed to the beach to run their motels. Said Eloise, "back in the old days (motels) was big wooden buildings. They're not like the motels



Figure 2. J. P. Stephenson Court. Motel owned by J. P. Stephenson, father of Eloise Graham.

today.” (E. Graham, personal communication, September 17, 2013). Other motels owned by the Stephenson family were the Tropical Breeze and The BelAire.

### Getting Started

For the first 12 years of their marriage, Ben worked at American Cast Iron Pipe Company (ACIPCO); he earned \$1.04 per hour when he started employment. Eloise

worked for U.S. Steel and made \$200 a month: “We thought that was big money!” (E. Graham, personal communication, September 17, 2013). They spent weekends driving back and forth to the coast, helping with the family business and eventually bought their first two-story apartments situated on two lots on the north side of highway 98 (across the road from the beach).

During this time their first son Alan was born. Eight years later in 1962, their second son, Mark arrived. That summer Mrs. Stephenson had health problems. Eloise moved to PCB with the boys to run their apartments and to help her mother. She conveyed how challenging it was to run a business with a new baby in tow. Ben stayed in Alabama to continue working at ACIPCO. In noting how this job provided he and Eloise with their start in life, Ben also gave insight into corporate values:

When the owner of it (ACIPCO) passed away, he left all of the stock to the employees, and he left instructions for us to run it on the Golden Rule. So we had two or three thousand employees. That’s the way we started out. And we got a bonus three times a year for the profits and they furnished all our medical. (B.



Figure 3. Tropical Breeze, Aerial View

Graham, personal communication, September 17, 2013).

### Business Strategy & Work Ethic

Like other mom and pop moteliere the Graham's borrowed money to buy their first property: "Well you don't have anything to start with you know...we had to borrow every dime



Figure 4. Green Star Court, postcard front.

we got" (B. Graham, personal communication, September 17, 2013). According to a *New York Times* article, furnished two bedroom cottages rented for \$75 a week in the summer, and \$65 a month in the winter (Blassingame, 1962).

As the Grahams turned a profit, they built more hotel space. They worked hard as a family, living for years in one room in the back of their Green Star Court. "We had long hours, like 16-18 hour days", (B. Graham, personal communication, September 17, 2013). Cleaning rooms, doing laundry, and building maintenance was part of their routine, especially when the fishing was good and employees didn't show up for work. Watkins (2012) in an article about mom and pop hoteliers said,

There was a time -- as recently as two decades ago -- when operating a hotel, particularly a small one, was a straightforward, albeit strenuous task. Cleanliness, service and up-to-date facilities were the core principles of inn-keeping, and those who could master these foundation skills -- and Mom and Pop owners were best at it -- were usually assured of success.

(Watkins, 2012, p. 2).

In addition, with tourism being seasonal, Ben found other work to supplement the family income during the winters. Drawing from a high school course in electrical wiring, several winters Ben did electrical work: "...the first really big job was the Holiday Inn. Philip Stiles built it." (B. Graham, personal communication, September 17, 2013).



*Figure 5.* Aerial view overlooking Holiday Inn

Hotel, Panama City Beach, FL, 1965.



*Figure 6.* Holiday Inn today, 2013.

The Grahams purchased the Jones Motel, located on the beachfront. They remembered the light fixtures were simple bulbs dangling from cords. They demolished that building, and constructed The El Dorado (Figure 7), one of the first four story motels, right across the street from Green Star Court.

We built large apartments facing on the water with kitchens in them and everything and that was you know sort of the way the condos are now... Those were the some of the first ones like that. (B. Graham, personal communication, September 17, 2013).



*Figure 7.* El Dorado Motel, postcard front.



*Figure 8.* Majestic Beach Resort. Site of former El Dorado Motel and Green Star Court Motel.

As their hard work, long hours, and investments paid off, the Grahams purchased a home. The purchase price was \$18,000 and the monthly installments were about \$100.00. By comparison, US Census Data reported Panama City Beach median home value in 2000 at \$98,956 and in 2010 at \$215,420. The Graham family lived in their home from September until February, “...we lived as a family...enjoyed the boys being in school, and playing ball” (E. Graham, personal communication, September 17, 2013). They moved back to the motel each February with the arrival of Spring Breakers, stayed through the summers, and on through Labor Day weekends.

The Grahams started out with two rooms, and ended up with two motels and 48 rooms by the time they sold both to Woody Minor in 1985. “Minor later sold to Dykes, and then Dykes sold to the Majestic” (B. Graham, personal communication, September 17, 2013). Success was bittersweet: “...it was heartbreaking the day I went out there and they were tearing down the Green Star and the El Dorado” (E. Graham, personal communication, September 17, 2013).

**Changing Tide in Real Estate**

Opportunists and innovators like the Grahams and their cohorts (Bennetts, Churchwells, Gheeslings, Grays, Pledgers, Stileses, Stephenson, and Thomases to name a few) began PCB development with cottages and court style travel motels. A 1957 ad in the *The New York Times* placed by broker Sam Hearn offers small tourist courts for sale at prices ranging from \$22,000 to \$65,000, some being beach front property. The tides have definitely changed in real estate: A one-bedroom condominium unit in a PCB high rise today is approximately \$200,000.00. The courts and motels birthed hotels, chains, and eventually the multitude of high-rise condominiums lining the shores of PCB in 2013.

**Classified Ad 101 -- No Title**  
*New York Times (1923-Current file); Oct 6, 1957;*  
 ProQuest Historical Newspapers: The New York Times (1851-2009)  
 pg. 192

**LIVE IN FLORIDA  
 WITH INCOME**

Our company has some small tourist courts on U. S. 98 and some on the Gulf of Mexico. You can live in the court and run it yourself. Some are only open 5 months of the year. You can spend the rest of the time fishing and hunting. **WHY NOT START LIVING?**

4 units on U. S. 98.....	\$22,000
6 units & 3-bedroom house on U. S. 98.....	36,500
8 units & 2-bedroom house..	58,000
7 units on Gulf of Mexico...	65,000
7 units on Gulf of Mexico..	50,000

**SAM B. HEARN, BROKER, Inc**  
 Box 177, Panama City Beach  
 FLORIDA

Figure 9. Live in Florida with income. 1957 ad in *New York Times* indicating prices of court motels for sale.



Figure 10. Aerial view of beach houses, 1961.



Figure 11. Front Beach Road aerial shot, 1950.



Figure 12. Panama City Beach coastline, September 28, 2013.

### Adversity Leads to Innovation and Growth

#### World War II

In the years prior to the Graham's full time PCB life, World War II was underway, and with this came the need for ships. The Wainwright Yard, just across the bridge from PCB, was one of 18 shipyards in the country producing Liberty ships. It built 102 ships and 6 tankers between 1942-1945 (Womack, 1994 & 2001).

Also in 1942, the government established a Navy



Figure 13. Wainwright Shipyard.

Section Base across the St. Andrews Bay from the shipyard (on the PCB side of the bridge); by 1945 it was a U.S. Navy Mine Countermeasures Station. Today, the official name for the navy base is Naval Surface Warfare Center Panama City Division. It is a major research, development, test and evaluation laboratory and employs approximately 2,000 civilian and military personnel with an annual payroll of about \$117 million. NSWC Panama City Division contracts services, buys local goods, and maintains an active construction program. Its annual economic impact on Bay County is about \$336 million. (*Base history*, n.d.).



Figure 14. Aerial view of Navy Base Parade Grounds,

1945.



Figure 15. Aerial view of Navy Base, 1962.



Figure 16. Naval Support Activity Panama City today, aerial view.

With the influx of shipyard workers and military personnel at the Navy Base and Tyndall Air Force base in eastern Bay County came the need for housing and entertainment. This contributed to the growth of Panama City and Panama City Beach. Edgewater Resort in PCB was originally built to house shipyard workers:

...(they) built ...that (Edgewater) for the workers at the shipyards during WWII when they were building ships there, and we had the Old Dutch and a few nightclubs or honkey-tonks or whatever you want to call it...Jenkins' place out there, and Little Birmingham. (B. Jones, personal communication, September 17, 2013).



Figure 17. Edgewater Gulf Beach Apts., 1967



Figure 18. Edgewater Beach & Golf Resort, 2013.

**German submarines.** During WWII, German submarines torpedoed hundreds of vessels off the U.S. coast (Sixty-three die, 1942). At the front entrance of Captain Anderson's Restaurant (one of the owners, Jimmy Patronis, currently

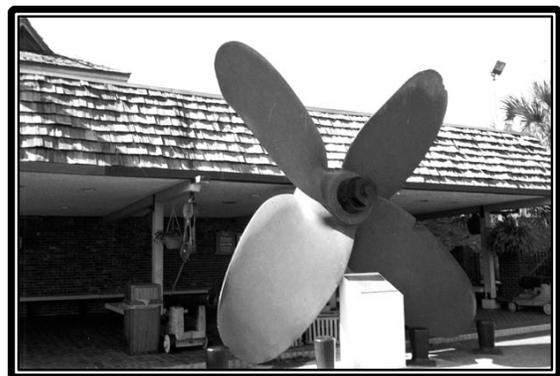


Figure 19. Propeller at Captain Anderson's Restaurant. Retrieved from the sunken Empire Mica, torpedoed by German submarine in 1942.

represents Florida House District 6) on the Grand Lagoon in PCB, is Empire Mica's propeller.

The Mica was on a maiden voyage from Texas to England and was hit by two German torpedoes near Indian Pass and Apalachicola. Fourteen seamen survived, but 33 died.

In post WWII America the tide had changed from the Depression, to an economic boom, to industrialization, and to women in the workforce. The fallout of war actually set the stage for the success of mom and pop moteliere like Ben and Eloise Graham and their PCB counterparts.

### Hurricanes

Dealing with hurricanes is a way of life for Floridians, so much so that Ben had trouble remembering the names and years of particular hurricanes and the damage they caused. One that hit Panama City Beach in 1975 was the exception as it was named Hurricane Eloise. Past hurricane experience had fueled the idea of building the El Dorado high and open underneath "so if a tidal wave come through it was just go through and wouldn't damage it ... which it did (with Hurricane Eloise)", (B. Graham, personal communication, September 17, 2013).



*Figure 20.* Storm damage from Hurricane Eloise, 1975.



*Figure 21.* Storm damage from Hurricane Eloise, sea wall, Panama City Beach, Florida, 1975.

Returning to the beach after evacuation, the Grahams found that only the seawall had been washed away and in true Mom and Pop spirit, Ben rebuilt 500 feet of seawall in front of the El Dorado and neighboring hotels. “It was so much a foot, everybody had to come up with their money. I did the contracting and put the seawall in. It’s still there” (B. Graham, personal communication, September 17, 2013). Later, when they built their home on the bayou, they installed 12-inch walls, using 2 x 6 studs, and brick; it is built to withstand 150 mph winds. New structures arise after each hurricane, constructed according to stronger building codes designed to reduce future damages. The face of PCB changed after each hurricane, Eloise in 1975, Hurricane Opal in 1995, and Hurricane Ivan in 2004: The changing tides of adversity certainly contributed to growth.

### **Pedestrian Walkways Birthed From Adversity**

Another idea birthed from hardship changed the view along coastal Highway 98 and improved pedestrian safety after Mark, the Graham’s youngest son, was hit by a car. He survived, but this led to concern for motel guests having to cross the busy highway to get to the beach or to other entertainments. The Moms and Pops made friends with their guests and often had customers that came back year after year. One particular evening, Ben sat outside, talking with a friend and patron, Tom Webb, Secretary of Transportation for the State of Florida.

Tom suggested I contact...the bridge inspector for the State of Florida...so I contacted him and he drew up a (pedestrian) bridge and we put the bridge over the highway between the two motels...we actually bought the beams and put the bottoms in it, and of course, had to build the stairways (B. Graham, personal communication, September 17, 2013).

This was in 1969 (see Figure 7 for first pedestrian walkway on Panama City Beach). Ben loaned those plans to other hoteliers, and though many have been replaced, pedestrian walkways are a common sight.



Figure 22. Pedestrian bridge 1, 2013.

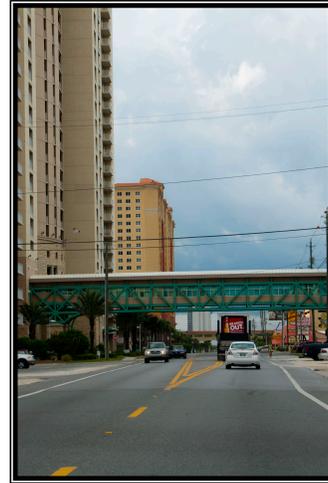


Figure 23. Pedestrian bridge 2, 2013.



Figure 24. Pedestrian bridge 3, 2013.



Figure 25. Pedestrian bridge 4, 2013.

### **Joined Communities Led to Infrastructure & Growth**

#### **Incorporation**

Regarding the time period when Mom and Pop Graham opened their motel business, Ben reflected, “everything was dirt roads, except that very front road”. As tourism flourished, and

with the growth of Tyndall Air Force Base in eastern Bay County and the Navy Base on the beach side of Hathaway Bridge, more and more people decided to permanently stay. Yet communities were divided with several different mayors.

Everyone had their own little city up and down there and the water line was all we had. We didn't have sewage (lines). It just came to a time when all that was pushing to come in, so that was the reason all the places joined together and then the City came in and put in sewer lines. (B. Graham, personal communication, September 17, 2013).

After some disagreement (Womack, 2001; Cooper, 2011), several small municipalities including Edgewater Gulf Beach, Long Beach Resort, old Panama City Beach, and West Panama City Beach were combined into one municipality and officially named Panama City Beach.



Figure 26. Placemat: Map of Bay County. (1954).

The new unified city was established on August 12, 1970 and Dan Russell, who had been mayor of West Panama City Beach, was elected the first mayor. At that time, this narrow strip of Florida Panhandle land with nine miles of oceanfront had a population of less than 2,000. The local families and their politicians, State Representatives J. R. Middlemans and Joe Chapman, along with State Senator Dempsey Barron projected unification would bring growth. (Womack, 2001). After the cities unified, they formed the Beaches Chamber of Commerce. Each member chipped in \$1000 each to hire their first executive director who immediately began marketing PCB to Canadians. Ben also recalled another promotional strategy:

Well, Barney Gray sort of started the Motel and Restaurant Association and he started buying these books by the hundreds and taking them out to different cities and stuff like that. (B. Graham, personal communication, September 17, 2013.)

The 1970's leaders were accurate in their predictions. According to US Census figures and projections, the population of Panama City Beach was 8,424 in the year 2000; 12,068 in 2010; and, is projected to be 14,141 by 2018 (Figure 27). The miles of sandy white beaches, easy access to deep sea fishing, water sports, and a sundry of amusements made PCB

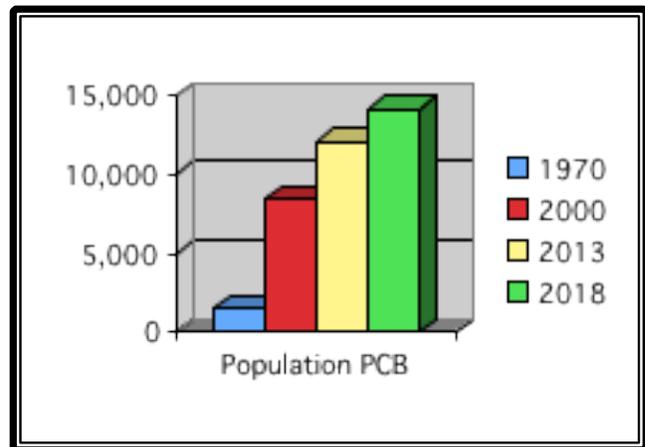


Figure 27. Population of Panama City Beach, Florida based on US Census.

a beloved destination for generations of families and winter residents. Even during the changing tide of difficult economic times, as in the 2007-2009 recession, tourism flourished as the major industry:



If you draw a circle 300 miles, you just take in so many cities...Birmingham, Atlanta, and all of them you know, and it is what you might say ‘a tank of gas away’ and so when things got bad, people would shorten their vacation up and come to Panama City Beach. (B. Graham, personal communication, September 17, 2013).

Figure 28. Southern Region of United States: PCB is a "tank of gas away".

### The Hathaway Bridge

The Hathaway Bridge connects the cities of Panama City and Panama City Beach, both in Bay County. “You’d be stranded on an island out here if you didn’t have that bridge, and then you’d have to go all the way around through West Bay to go to town!” (B. Graham, personal communication, September 17, 2013).

Reflecting back to the first bridge, Ben said, “It was just a lil’ ole’ flat bridge...They’d have to raise it and lets the boats through”. According to Womack (2001) this bridge caused

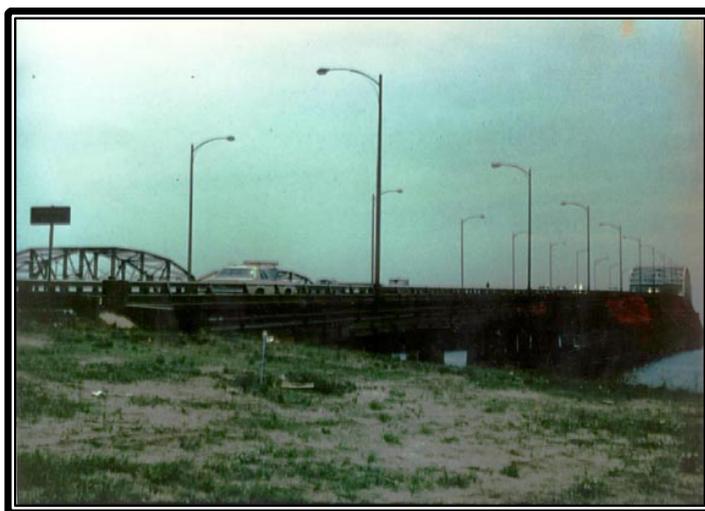


Figure 29. Hathaway Bridge number 1 with number 2 in background, (n.d.).

problems for naval and civilian personnel; tugboats and barges often rammed into it; this lead to bridge closures lasting several days. The Hathaway Bridge has been replaced three times. The current concrete structure has several lanes in each direction and a flyover that helps

eastbound drivers quickly pass over Thomas drive.

The bridge is a symbolic dividing line between the beach folks and the townies. Ben and Eloise indicated the people in Panama City, especially the business people looked down on the beach people. Football is an example. Before



*Figure 30.* Hathaway Bridge number 3, 2013.

PCB had its own teams, parents had to take their kids across the bridge, into town for sports. Eloise recalled they took their oldest son into town to play: “(we took him) into town, Drummond Park...and he tried out and the coach came out and said, ‘you don’t live in town, you live on the beach. If y’all want a football team, start you a football team’. Well, he (Ben) did, he started a football team”.

Eloise noted a current shift in attitude between the two Bay county cities, “Now the tide’s turning, the beach is great!” Laughing knowingly with his wife, Ben joked about a billboard on the PCB side inviting people to shop on the Panama City side of the bridge! In years gone by, the beach folks had to cross the bridge for medical care, shopping, and schools and the town folks had to cross the bridge to go to the beach. Now shopping, restaurants, and doctor’s offices are commonplace in 2013 PCB, yet the only hospitals are located on the Panama City side of the bridge. Beach residents do, however, enjoy restaurants, shopping, parks, and events in town and the Panama City residents frequent PCB for entertainment, restaurants, Pier Park, and of course, the beach.

## The Airport

The first airfield, Tyson Field, was a 32-acre site on 11<sup>th</sup> and Balboa in Panama City. It opened in the early 1930's. Panama City Christian School currently occupies the site that lies adjacent to the Bay County Government Offices and Bay County Library. Then a 282 tract on Pretty Bayou in Panama City was donated for a larger airport. The first flight arrived at Panama City – Bay County International Airport on September 1, 1948 (Womack, 1994).



*Figure 31.* First airfield, Tyson Field opened in 1930's. Site of Panama City Christian School in 2013.



*Figure 32.* National Airlines airplane on tarmac, Panama City – Bay County International Airport, 2<sup>nd</sup> airport, 1967.

The tide changed with growth and led to a need for a larger runway for bigger jets. After many years of controversy over location, potential noise, and wetlands issues, a new airport was built on the Panama City Beach side of the Hathaway Bridge in rural West Bay on 4,000 acres of St. Joe land. Southwest Airlines joined Delta in providing flights. Northwest Florida Beaches International Airport opened on May 23, 2010 and was the first international airport to open since the attacks of September 11, 2001. More than 800,000 passengers arrived and departed in 2012 (ECP, 2012).



Figure 33. Northwest Florida Beaches International Airport opened in 2010.



Figure 34. Southwest Airlines Plane on tarmac at Northwest Florida Beaches International Airport.

**Schools**

The first school according to Womack (2001) was established at Inlet Beach in the late 1800’s. When the Grahams’ sons grew up, only one school existed in PCB and it was Hutchinson Beach Elementary School. “We knew it when it wasn’t but about 50 or 60 kids down there; it’s really grown.” (B Graham, personal communication, September 17, 2013).



Figure 36. Hutchinson Beach Elementary School class picture: Mrs. Bragg’s Second Grade Class, 1956.

Beach students were bussed across the Hathaway Bridge to attend middle school and Bay High School until J.R. Arnold High School opened in 2000. Today, in addition to Arnold High, PCB has Patronis Elementary, Hutchinson Beach Elementary, Breakfast Point Elementary and Middle School, and



Figure 35. Patronis Elementary School, one of several schools in PCB 2013.

Surfside Middle School. Ben commented about the schools in present day PCB: “I don’t think you can do any better than the beach. The beach has really good schools.”

**Amusements as Commerce: From *Redneck Riviera* to the *Emerald Coast***

Tacky, but certainly enjoyed, amusements earned Panama City Beach membership in the Gulf Coast Region’s *Redneck Riviera*:

Hotel rooms, single cottages, apartments, and duplexes— you name it, the beaches west of Panama City had it. As of June 1 (1946), most of the accommodations were booked for the summer. Those resorts attracted over 150,000 visitors that summer— a record that would stand for years to come. It was there, along the beaches of the eastern Panhandle, that the Redneck Riviera defined itself, and from there it spread. In addition to sand and surf, Panama City Beach and Long Beach were becoming “amusement centers” with rides, shooting galleries, roller-skating, and bowling in addition to bars and dance halls. Tacky from the start with more tackiness to come, the resorts were soon joined by independent promoters who knew just what folks from the lower South would pay to see, and in 1946 the Snake-A-Torium opened, just in time for Christmas (Jackson, 2012, pp. 35-36).

Some of the popular entertainments in the 1950’s and 1960’s mentioned by the Graham’s were the PlayHouse, Fritz’s Liquor, the Old Dutch, and Little Birmingham. They also mentioned the Hangout at J.E. Churchwell’s Long Beach, and the Casino.



Figure 37. The Playhouse, 1967.

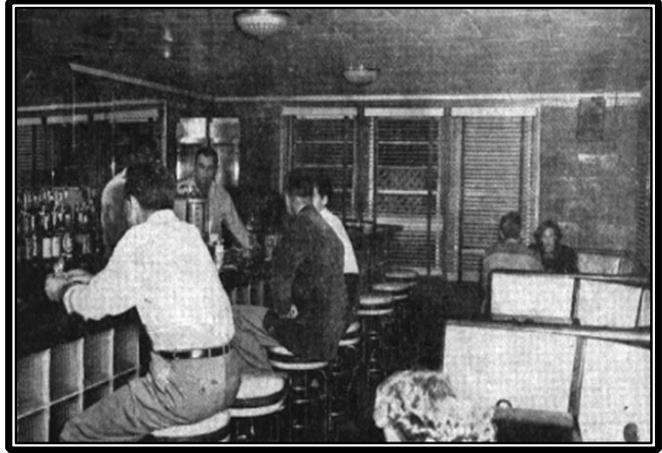


Figure 38. The Playhouse inside, 1953.



Figure 39. Old Dutch Inn and Tavern at Panama City Beach, Florida. (n.d.).

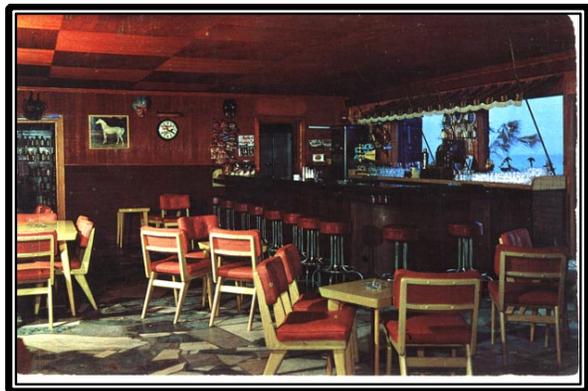


Figure 40. Little Birmingham Cocktail Lounge. (n.d.).

According to Ben & Eloise (Personal communication, September 17, 2013), the Casino was a big building that was moved from Shell Island to Long Beach and converted to an entertainment center.

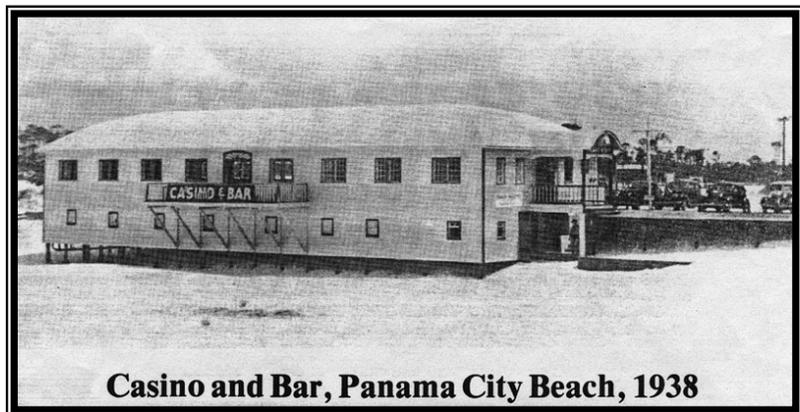


Figure 41. Casino and Bar, 1938.

The Hangout was in front of the Casino; it had two dance floors and jukeboxes. Don Campbell, in a collection of memories compiled by Weeks (2011), captures the flavor of the Hangout:

The Hangout was *the place* to see and be seen on the beach, usually all night and all day (as soon as you could drag yourself and your buddies out of the bed). Some didn't have to get out of bed – they slept on the beach.



Figure 42. *Dancing at the beach*, 1950.

The dancing started early, at The Hangout, with the jukebox playing the newest 45s continuously. The music had to be loud to drown out the scratching of the sand between the dancer's shoes and the dance floor, which was surrounded by a wooden fence that was a natural seat for spectators to lean or sit on. Some made the mistake of dancing barefoot,

resulting in large painful blisters full of sand (Campbell as cited in Weeks, 2011, p. 116).

The Hangout also had a bowling alley, a skating rink, and a few rides. The changing tides of growth and development led to the disappearance of many of these former amusements being replaced with the new. Long Beach is now a resort with several high-rise condominiums.

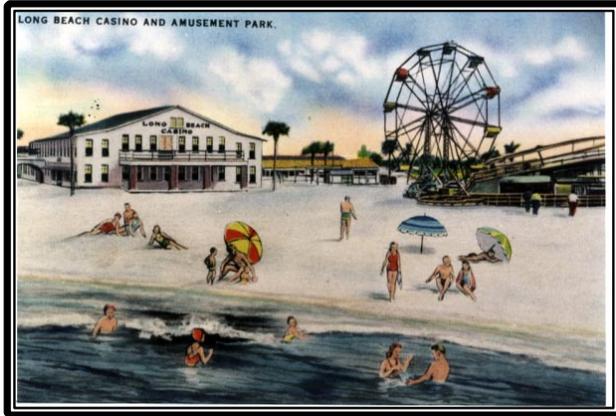


Figure 43. Long Beach Casino and Amusement Park.



Figure 43. Long Beach Resort today, 2013.

Ocean Opry, built by Wayne and Patsy Rader in 1978, was another familiar entertainment center. The Rader family performed and they brought in many famous country singers during its 27 years. Ben recalled, "...that was good, clean family fun and we were glad to have it." Ben and Eloise discussed a marketing strategy used by Ocean Opry depicting the cooperation between business proprietors. Ocean Opry gave tickets to motel owners to share with guests. Lodgers who visited Ocean Opry would get a free drink and free popcorn, and tracked the referrals. The motel owners that sent the most visitors to Ocean Opry at the end of the season won a cruise. Ocean Opry was sold to a developer and closed in 2006 (*Ocean Opry*, 2006). The development plans fell victim to the recession; a church currently utilizes the former home of Ocean Opry.

Gradually demolished were some of the early *Redneck Riviera* entertainments and these were replaced with retail stores, fast food chains, and variety of new entertainments including mini-golf, go-carts, and rides.

Near the geographic center of PCB where Front Beach Road, Middle Beach Road, and Thomas Drive intersect is Ripley's Believe or Not and an upside-down house, WonderWorks.

### Miracle Strip Amusement Park

PCB vacationers and locals often equate PCB with Miracle Strip. Jimmy Lark built a small park in 1946. Lark enlarged the park in 1963 and it “boasted the fastest roller coaster in America” (Womack, 1994 & 2001), the Tornado. Rides like the Abominable Snowman, Galaxy, and Dante's Inferno were added year by year (Waddell, 1995), and Miracle Strip itself drew people to PCB. This contributed to economic growth for surrounding hotels, restaurants, and businesses. The park enjoyed success for many years; the Lark's added a second amusement park, Shipwreck Island, in 1983.

The tide changed, however, as stiff regulations were imposed and as business leaders pushed to shed the image of the *Redneck Riviera* (Lawlor, 2007; Van der Veer Hamilton, 1987). Over 20 million people had visited Miracle Strip by the time the doors were closed in 2004 and the prime real estate was sold to developers for building luxury condominiums (Miracle Strip



Figure 45. Wonderworks and Ripley Believe It or Not, modern entertainments, 2013.



Figure 44. View of Panama City Beach with Miracle Strip Amusement Park in background, 1975.

Park, n.d.). Unfortunately, the impact of the 2007-2009 recession led to the demise of the plans for Miracles Resort Park and for seven years, a chain link fence surrounded the remains of the former amusement park, vines taking over beloved rides. Locals and tourists alike often expressed sadness over the loss of such an icon and many were relieved to see a replica of Miracle Strip being established at Pier Park, the modern entertainment hub.

The original Miracle Strip carousel was located and restored and a replica of the Ferris wheel is in operation. Little by little, rides are being added. Some of the original rides have been located and are being

restored. According to the Miracle Strip at Pier Park Facebook page, a 1938 caterpillar ride, a teacup ride, and a roller coaster will open soon. The Facebook page has over 16,000 likes and user comments reflect fondness and excitement about the return of Miracle Strip.



Figure 46. Pier Park, the modern entertainment hub, 2011.

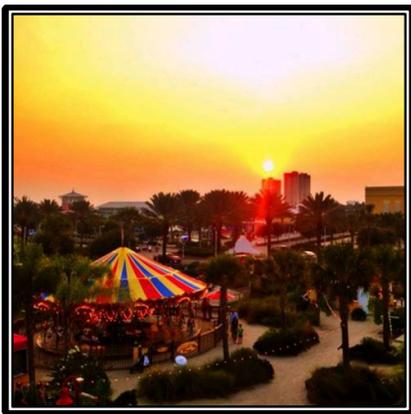


Figure 47. Miracle Strip at Pier Park in sunset.



Figure 48. Ferris wheel in sunset at Miracle Strip at Pier Park.

## Spring Break

From mid-February to April, college students descend upon PCB for Spring Break, spending money and bringing in vital revenue to the local economy. While a fun time for many, excessive drunkenness of Spring Break partying contributes to balcony falls, car wrecks, moped wrecks, and deaths from intoxication.



Figure 49. Spring Break on Panama City Beach. 1950.

Binge drinking during Spring Break PCB attracted the attention of researchers Dietrich, Josiam, and Smeaton (1998). Through interviews with nearly 800 spring breakers, they found the mean number of drinks consumed the previous day was 18 for men and 10 for women; 91.7% of the men and 78.1% of the women had participated in a binge-drinking episode during the previous day. The reputation of Spring Break contributed to some unsuccessful attempts by family coalitions to block it (Higgins, 2009).

Ben Graham sees Spring Break as more dangerous than it was in past years and attributes this to the changes in music and types of people who visit PCB for Spring Break. Ben also referred to the Girls Gone Wild events that made national news and resulted in a long-standing legal battle.



Figure 50. Spring break, 2013.

Businesses, however, continue to advertise to

college students. The current Panama City Beach Convention and Visitors Bureau markets PCB as the place to be for Spring Break 2014, promising all-star events, waterfront hotels, late night

parties, and good times. Two local beach clubs, quite different from the Long Beach Hangout, are centers for Spring Break activities. Spinnaker offers bands, celebrities, and great times. Club LaVela boasts the reputation of being the number one spring break destination in the world.

### Fishing

Fishing is another amusement and main industry for PCB. Ben said a dish he equates with PCB is Grouper Supreme, a filet of grouper topped with jumbo lump crabmeat and white wine cream sauce. Randolph in a 1956 *The New York Times* article captured the lure of the Gulf for anglers:

The water is so clear against this bottom that pier fisherman can cast at their fish, and see them rise to strike. The beach water is lime-green for a couple of hundred yards, then blue in a narrow channel, then darker green, then several shades of blue....At one time of the year or another the game fish include king and Spanish mackerel, dolphin, red snapper, speckled



Figure 51. Onlookers watch display of fishes caught by fishermen on a charter boat - Panama City Beach, Florida, 1967.

trout, flounder, cobia (ling), jack crevalle, pompano, bonito, amberjack, sharks up to 500 pounds, many rays (giant manta, sting, leopard and butterfly), barracuda, bluefish, whiting, ladyfish, croakers, redfish, sheepshead, spadefish, sailfish, and tarpon. (Randolph, 1956, p. 20).

A 1962 *New York Times* article indicated fishing was the primary year round attraction. Charter boats that year charged \$75 a day; party boats charged \$7 per person, with tackle and bait

included (Blassingame, 1962). The Anderson's Marina website today indicates a price of \$50 per person for five hours on a party boat. Charter boat pricing today varies depending upon number of people and length of trip. Fishing, like other industries, has experienced not only changing tides, but also a swell of turbulence between anglers and government regulators:



Figure 52. Raffield fishing, 1950.

They've regulated it (fishing) until it's hard for people to even make a good living out of fishing.... We used to go out and just catch all the fish we wanted...if we were going to have a big fish fry, then I'd go get on the boat and always had a bunch of fish. You could depend on catching fish back then in those days. (Ben Graham, Personal Communication, September 17, 2013).

Ben indicated frustration with the futility of the fishing rules, because people avoid the regulations by going off the coast of Mexico to catch fish out of the Gulf.



Figure 53. Three red snappers, staying within government limits.

Pam Anderson, Operations Manager of Anderson's Marina, often speaks out against over-regulating fishing. She points out that fishing impacts every other area of the tourist industry so critical to Panama City Beach. In a 2013 interview about the shortest red snapper season ever (27 days) Pam Anderson said: "We have private anglers that do not want to go out because they don't want to pay that much in fuel to go out and catch one or two red snapper when they know how many are out there" (as cited in Anderson, 2013). In October 2013,

regulators opened an additional 21-day snapper season. To the dismay of many, Tropical Storm Karen interfered and prevented anglers from taking advantage of the extra days.

### **Role of Community Service in PCB Development**

Throughout the 2013 interview with Ben and Eloise Graham, evident was the theme of community service as integral to the history making of PCB. Ben said a group of local leaders ate lunch often at Spanky's; they made deep friendships. They helped each other and jointly developed the city. They made professional and political connections that were advantageous to mutual goals of community development and commerce. As the communities grew and became centralized, service organizations formed: "I joined the Beaches Optimist Club because we were starting to have baseball teams, and midget football teams, and we brought all those things in...we sponsored a Boy Scout troop", (B. Graham, personal communication, September 17, 2013).

Eloise added she was a Cub Scout mother and Ben was a den leader. In addition, Ben coached football teams and together they travelled with the teams. They brought in the Snapper Bowl; it continues to operate today. Since it's founding in 1963 (Garman, 2013) Ben said the Beaches Optimist Club has accumulated a \$700,000 trust fund. Profits from the investments are used to fund scholarships and other services to youth.

Another example of the community service by founding families was the building of a football field:

We built the football stadium over there, Pete Edwards Field. Me and Eddie Green and one or two more people all went together and built that. My wife planted shrubbery all around it. (B. Graham, personal communication, September 17, 2013).

Eloise quickly added that someone stole the plants!

When asked if the Optimist Club has trouble getting younger members, Ben was quick to say yes, but he made an interesting point.

He indicated there is not as much a need anymore for the things that led to starting their club. They worked together and brought in a variety of community and recreational activities in the past, which are now managed very well by the City of



*Figure 54. Frank Brown Park, 2013.*

Panama City Beach. Frank Brown Park is one example. The Graham' son, Alan, a

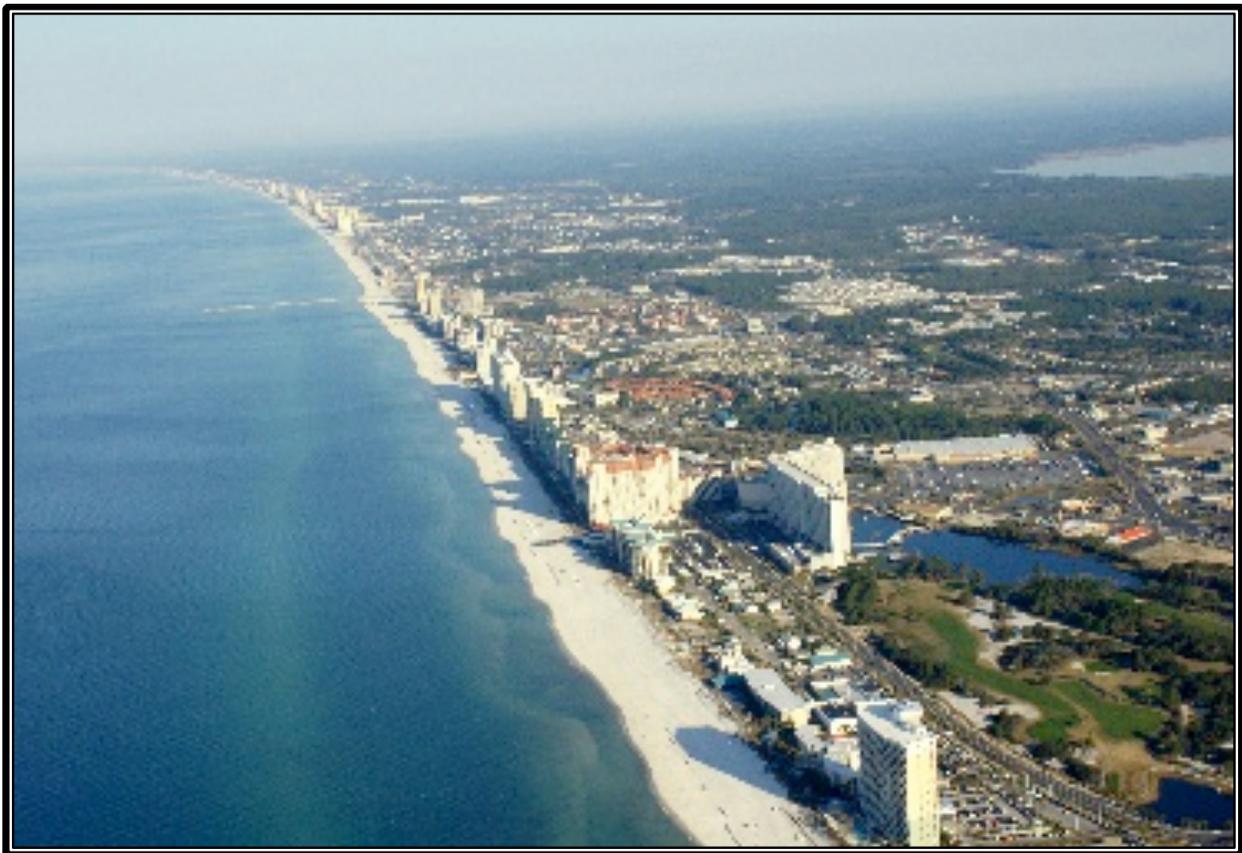
FSU graduate and football alum, is in the Rotary Club and participates in an annual event called Grills Gone Wild, an event for charities. Like his parents, Alan too helped build a ball field; his Rotary Club helped build a padded field for people in wheelchairs. Children, adults, and veterans who are disabled use Miracle Field (Vaughn, 2009).

### **Conclusion**

This documentary photo essay focuses on a period in the history of Panama City Beach from WWII to 2013 as told through Mom and Pop moteliors, Ben and Eloise Graham. Their efforts to grow their family, their business, and their beloved Panama City Beach overlapped and blended, like the emerald green waves in the Gulf of Mexico. Both their sons, Alan (realtor) and Mark (criminal lawyer) are graduates of Florida State University; they too carry on the legacy of volunteerism and higher education. For companies considering moving their businesses to Panama City Beach, Ben, still the promoter at 84, said,

“They would have a good place to have their employees, because it is not union controlled, and there are plenty of people here...to work...it would be a good place for business and it would be a good place for people to have their families as we’ve got excellent schools”. (Ben Graham, personal communication, September 17, 2013).

Hard work, togetherness, and community service of the moms and pops provided the foundation for the thriving Emerald Coast city that is visited by tourists and cherished by the 12,000 people who call Panama City Beach home. If successive generations adopt the values of the Mom and Pops - hard work, togetherness, and community service – Panama City Beach, Florida will continue to thrive.



*Figure 55.* Aerial View Panama City Beach today, 2013.

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## Appendix

**Transcript of Interview Held on September 17, 2013****With Ben & Eloise Graham**

**Main Research Question:** In the year 2013, what are octogenarian Mom and Pop moteliers perspectives on the history of Panama City Beach?

<b>Question/Comments by Marlene East</b>	<b>Response by Ben &amp; Eloise Graham</b>
<p><i>This is an interview on September 17, 2013 with Mr. &amp; Mrs. Ben Graham at their home in Panama City regarding the history of Panama City Beach, Florida and the surrounding area. This is for course requirements in a Qualitative Research Class in a course at University of West Florida toward a Doctorate in Education</i></p>	
<p><i>The first thing I have to do is get your consent on tape and I've got one for each of you, a form, a formality we go through for the college and it basically says that I'm doing this for a course towards my degree at University of West Florida, and I will be asking you questions about your personal experience in the area, history about Panama City Beach. And you are free to stop the interview at any time, if you need to take a break, or anything, you just say the word, okay?</i></p>	
<p><i>And you have some choices there about confidentiality. If you don't want your name in this at all, I cannot put your name in it. If you want me to disguise your identity I can do that, or if you don't mind having your name in it, that is a choice too. You get to pick on of those, and then on the next page it talks about that I will give you a copy of the transcript when I get it typed up because you might want to share it with your family and friends, and when I get my final project written, I will share that with y'all too. And what I will be doing, is, I will type the transcript word for word, and then I will go in and write a paper on it, and I will put pictures with it, and all of that, and you will have that to share</i></p>	
<p><i>And then, you've got a choice as to whether or not you would want me to ever send this anyplace for publication or not. Right now it is a school assignment, but if you were okay with me submitting it like to the News Herald</i></p>	

Question/Comments by Marlene East	Response by Ben & Eloise Graham
<i>or something like that, that's a choice you have too.</i>	
<i>Do you need something to put under there? Will that help? Here's a pen for you too.</i>	
<i>Do y'all have any questions about that?</i>	Ben: No, I don't
<i>How do you feel about your name being in it or out of it or sharing it with a paper, or</i>	Ben: You just decide, whatever suits you.
<i>Okay, I will show you which boxes to check on there then. But you will get to read it first anyway</i>	Ben: This is nine ELOISE: 17
<i>17, yes, m'am.</i>	BEN: In '13
<i>So this one right here is if you are okay for me to publish it, you just initial it</i>	ELOISE: okay
<i>And this one here is if you are waiving confidentiality...this one here is if you are giving me to publish it down the road at some point, if you are okay with that, and then on the first page</i>	BEN: is that the only one on here
<i>Yes, sir, that's the only one on that side, and on this side, this is the one saying you waive confidentiality. Ok, that's good, I'll take those back and I will give you a copy of that. There's one y'all can keep and I'll need the one with your signature</i>	(Both initialed to waive confidentiality and granted permission for publication if interviewer desires, and each signed the consent)
<i>And I brought y'all my card so you can remember my name. I'm a counselor over on the beach and I work with a lot of families and children in the area.</i>	
<i>These are the questions that I put together. I made you a copy so that you can follow along or if you don't understand anything I'm asking, maybe seeing it this way will be helpful.</i>	
<i>Don't let it overwhelm you. I think of lots of things to ask</i>	ELOISE: giggles
<i>So we will do our best to get through and if you need to take a break or anything, you just say the word.</i>	
<i>The tape recorder is going. I'm not going to write down everything you say, I'll be taking some notes, as we go along, okay?</i>	
<i>So, could y'all please state your full names for the tape?</i>	ELOISE: Carol Eloise Graham BEN: Benjamin Edward Graham
<i>Do you like to be called Carol or Eloise?</i>	ELOISE: Eloise
<i>And call you Ben?</i>	BEN: uh hum
<i>And we went over the consent form and you don't have any other questions about that, and today is September 17, 2013 at the home of Ben and Eloise Graham in Panama City.</i>	
<i>This is a Panama City address, correct?</i>	ELOISE: Yeah BEN: Yes it is. It's an address in Panama City, but this is in the county
<i>Right, in Bay County.</i>	
<i>Ok, when did y'all come to this area?</i>	ELOISE: Ben probably remembers more than I do. (Chuckles)...he's got a

Question/Comments by Marlene East	Response by Ben & Eloise Graham
	<p>good memory            BEN: We came in 1952. We just visited here on our honeymoon. That's when we got married. And we lived in Bessemer in Birmingham</p>
<p><i>So y'all were already married when you came here... '52 was the year my parents got married</i></p>	<p>BEN: Did they?            ELOISE: My family was already here, had moved down here. They lived here.</p>
<p><i>And what did they do?</i></p>	<p>ELOISE: They had a motel, cottages, apartments, I guess</p>
<p><i>So that was why your family came, they had a motel and cottages on the beach</i></p>	<p>BEN: yeah.</p>
<p><i>Did anyone else come with y'all when you came as a couple? Did you have children later on?</i></p>	<p>BEN: We lived in Birmingham in Bessemer and after we got married. I worked at American Cast Iron Pipe Company and she worked for U.S. Steel.            ELOISE: for 12 years (laughs)            BEN: and her parents were living on the farm, a dairy farm in a place called Greenwood. And they let us move into the house and they came on down because they already had motels here. Which you know back in the old days was big wooden buildings. They're not like the motels today. But that's where we started out.</p>
<p><i>That's how you got here</i></p>	<p>BEN: Yes, we lived there for 12 years on the farm, driving back and forth to Panama City Beach</p>
<p><i>Now was American Cast Iron Pipe and U.S. Steel in Birmingham?</i></p>	<p>BEN: Yeah.</p>
<p><i>And when you first got here, what neighborhood did you live in...did you live right here or...</i></p>	<p>BEN: We lived on the beach, where the Majestic Motel is.</p>
<p><i>Is that where the cottages were too?</i></p>	<p>BEN: yeah            ELOISE: We first bought a little two-story, house apartments...it was one lot wasn't it Ben            BEN: 2 lots            ELOISE: 2 lots and it was on the North side of the highway. So we would come down, and mother and daddy would rent it for us and we'd come down and help 'em on weekends to get caught up</p>
<p><i>Like help maintain the property and all that kind of stuff?</i></p>	<p>ELOISE: Yes, that's how we really got started            BEN: Each time we built, we would build like we had two, then we built four            ELOISE: chuckles            BEN: and then we added on and built 8 until we built the motel on the north side of US 98.</p>
<p><i>And what was the name of that one, was that the Majestic?</i></p>	<p>ELOISE: No            BEN: No, it was the Green Star and the reason we named it the Green Star (Eloise chuckling)...all of the motels in that area went by the family's names that owned them. (Eloise chuckling). And we had the Whites, and the Wrights, and the Wilheights, and the Carl Stephenson, and the J.P. Stephenson. So we decided to keep from any confusion, we would just put a name on ours, so that's how. And they had the neon tubing that was green, and I told them to but a star on it, and that's how we come by with the Green Star.            ELOISE: And when we finished the downstairs part, my mother had health problems. They were looking after 'em. And I had had a new baby. My second son was born. My oldest boy was 8. So I brought the baby and my oldest boy and we moved down for the summer. And Ben stayed in Birmingham and worked at ACIPCO and I ran the apartments with the baby (laughs exhaustedly)</p>

Question/Comments by Marlene East	Response by Ben & Eloise Graham
<i>That was a handful!</i>	<p>ELOISE: laughs            BEN: Now the company I worked for American Cast Iron Pipe Company. When the owner of it passed away, he left it, all of the stock to the employees, and he left instructions for us to run it on the Golden Rule. So we had 2 or 3 thousand employees. That's the way we started out. And we got a bonus three times a year for the profits and they furnished all our medical</p>
<i>What a great business plan</i>	<p>BEN: Yeah, and the man that owned it and passed it on to us was named John Egan, and uh...</p>
<i>What were the wages at that time</i>	<p>BEN: I started out at the very bottom at a dollar or \$1.04 an hour            ELOISE: and I was making \$200 a month, and we thought that was big money (laughs)</p>
<i>Times have changed haven't they</i>	<p>BEN: Well, back in those days you could take a dollar and buy a lot with it, like her car was a 1951 Pontiac and I think she paid like \$2,000 for the car            ELOISE: (laughs) brand new            BEN: brand new</p>
<i>That's unreal, the difference. What about your children, you said you had, had your 2<sup>nd</sup> child</i>	<p>ELOISE: Two boys</p>
<i>Do they live in the area Are they in the motel business?</i>	<p>ELOISE: Yes, they're here too            ELOISE: No, but talking about the motel...we finished the motel on the north side, and this old, big old barny place was on the waterfront side. And we decided our guests would try to get to the beach, and the people over there were very rude, even though it was a public walkway, they didn't want our guests walking by their old place. So this couple was retiring and they sold this old motel to us. It was just apartments, they used to rent them            BEN: It had 9 units in it, and 2 of them with small bedrooms, and there was four, 2-bedroom apartments on the upstairs and downstairs, two large apartments that would sleep like 8-10 people. And above the office, not on the water, was their living quarters.</p>
<i>So that was how you got property right on the beach</i>	<p>ELOISE: right on the beach, we bought that            BEN: That was the Joneses motel</p>
<i>That was a smart move!</i>	<p>BEN: That was the Joneses motel and we paid \$65,000 for it            ELOISE: Waterfront property</p>
<i>Oh my gosh! That's unbelievable.</i>	<p>ELOISE: Laughing knowingly. That's really when I moved down then when we bought Joneses, cause you were driving back and forth every weekend            BEN: Well, Mark was a baby and he was born in 1962</p>
<i>That's when I was born in 1962</i>	<p>ELOISE: The old building we bought, of course, they didn't have air conditioning, they had big fans, you know, and            BEN: Honey they did have air conditioning            ELOISE: I thought we put the air conditioning in            BEN: Joneses had air conditioning in every unit</p>
<i>Did either of your grandparents ever visit this area and tell you about it when they were younger and what did they recall</i>	<p>BEN: No, her mother and father was in the motel business, her uncle was in the motel business, and she had two aunts at that time didn't you?            ELOISE: Uh hum            BEN: Tropical Breeze and then what was the one on            ELOISE: Was it BelAire            BEN: BelAire out on the beach, yeah, and</p>
<i>Does anyone still have the sign for the Green Star</i>	<p>BEN: NO, all of that is gone,</p>
<i>I didn't know if someone saved the sign, that would be a cool piece of memorabilia</i>	<p>BEN: Now I had one that I put on the back of my car and it somewhere in the attic.            ELOISE: Just an old wooden sign</p>

Question/Comments by Marlene East	Response by Ben & Eloise Graham
<i>So once y'all pretty much got into the motel business full time, did you work that together, or did you do other jobs too?</i>	BEN: She came down a year before me and run the motel because it was more than her parents could handle and us get the most out of it and
<i>I've heard stories of a lot of the motel owners starting out living in a motel room for years</i>	BEN: Oh, we did ELOISE: We lived in one room in the back, in the very back lot of the Green Star. Yep we did.
<i>It paid off, though, didn't it?</i>	ELOISE: Yeah BEN: Well you don't have anything to start with you know
<i>That's what America is about in a lot of ways, isn't it</i>	BEN: Yeah, we had to borrow every dime we got. We had to borrow the money when we got married.
<i>What about military service, were you in the military?</i>	BEN: I was in the Marine Corp. I went in in '46 and came out in '51... '51 the end of 51
<i>Did you go overseas at all during that time</i>	BEN: I was in the Korean War
<i>The Korean War, okay</i>	ELOISE: He was in the Chosin Reservoir, if you've ever heard of it
<i>I have not...The Chosin Reservoir</i>	BEN: That's in North Korea
<i>I'll have to look that up</i>	BEN: Well that's a big deal, (speaking louder), that's the most famous battle in the Marine Corp history. We had 12-14,000 Marines up in the mountains in North Korea, and 150 or 160,000 Chinese come across and surrounded us and we had to fight our way out of there... and uh...we just you know...we didn't account for how many casualties there were. In the Korean War itself it was like about 50,000 casualties
<i>So that was just before y'all got married in 1952</i>	BEN: I met her just when I came home from Korea. We just dated a couple of months, didn't we? ELOISE: 3 months
<i>How has the motel industry changed since y'all started out?</i>	ELOISE: laughs BEN: I think we may, we may have sort of went ahead of what was around us, because we built one of the first four-story motels on the water ELOISE: We tore down that old building on the water BEN: The Joneses Motel
<i>Did you have to get approval for the four stories back then? I know there's been a lot of fighting over story height in the last few years</i>	BEN: No. But the idea was, we wanted to have it open under the motel where if a tidal wave come through it would just go through and wouldn't damage...which it did. Eloise... ELOISE: Laughs
<i>Hurricane Eloise after you?</i>	ELOISE: Laughing. BEN: We built like large apartments facing on the water with kitchens in them and everything and that was you know sort of the way the condos are now
<i>We have a few of those</i>	BEN: Those were the some of the first ones like that ELOISE: The first walkway over the highway on the beach
<i>Yes, Mr. John was telling me that you paid for that yourself and brought it in...tell me about that</i>	BEN: Well the Secretary of Transportation for the State of Florida, Tom Webb, was one of my customers. They were coming over to the motel, and I was talking to him on night, sitting outside in our chairs and I told him the one thing that really bothered me was my customers having to cross that traffic
<i>It's dangerous...</i>	BEN: and, my son got hit by a car, Mark. So he suggested that I build a pedestrian bridge, which there weren't any over highways, federal highways, in the State of Florida at that time. And he suggested that I go to the ...hmmm, he was the bridge inspector for the State of Florida, but he actually lived in Dothan, Alabama, so I contacted him, and he drew up a bridge and we put the bridge over the highway between the two motels
<i>So you had it built or you brought something in that was sort of pre-made and adapted it?</i>	BEN: We actually bought the beams and put the bottoms in it and of course had to build the stairways

Question/Comments by Marlene East	Response by Ben & Eloise Graham
<i>What year was that?</i>	BEN: That must have been in about ELOISE: That's when we built the El Dorado BEN: '69 wasn't it ELOISE: I can't remember (laughs) BEN: Well, '69
<i>..The man on the moon year, right?</i>	Both laugh. BEN: Yeah, but now, I had loaned those plans out to like the Edgewater and different places has borrowed those plans and built overpasses on them but nobody ever paid me for the plans
<i>(laughs) you should have gotten a patent on that thing, right?</i>	BEN: Yeah
<i>What did you like most about being in the motel business?</i>	BEN: Well it was a good living, made good money, we had a lot of really good friends that came down, and as time went along, we were a little more strict about who we rented to. And in the end, we actually just rented to families.
<i>That's what we do with ours, I'm real careful who we rent to</i>	BEN: And we had a good return business, but we enjoyed the year and we enjoyed seeing our customers every year came down. And they'd have their children, and they'd grow up and
<i>...they'd come back with their kids probably</i>	BEN: uh hum
<i>What about you, what did you like the most about it Eloise?</i>	ELOISE: Well I really...we moved over there. We finally bought a house on Joan Avenue on the beach and we would move over to the motel in about February cause we'd open for Spring Break, and we'd close right after Labor Day and we'd move back home. And then we sort of lived as a family and enjoyed the boys being in school and playing ball, things like that
<i>What a great life for kids...</i>	
<i>What did you like least about that business?</i>	BEN: Well it was just a couple running it, like a Mom and Pop motel. We had long hours, like 16-18 hour days...and those customers coming in want to see you when they come in. ELOISE: And it got to the point where the help you got just wasn't very good and very dependable
<i>Did you see that with work ethic for years go downhill</i>	ELOISE: Yes
<i>Yes, we see that a lot. My husband owns a company in Atlanta and it is really hard to get people that have a good worth ethic and give you a day's work</i>	BEN: Well the people in this area had a completely different ethic about working than they did when we were in Birmingham; you was at work on time every day, and I worked 12 years at this company, and I missed one day in 12 years and I was late to work one time. Well down here, if the mullet start running...
<i>(laughing)...the employees run to, right?</i>	BEN: Yeah! They think they can go catch fish, that's just the way it was back in those days. ELOISE: We ended up with how many units in all, Honey? BEN: .. ELOISE: 46? BEN: No, 47. NO really 48 or 49 we lived in one. ELOISE: WE had our own laundry in the back where we would run the laundry, and the maids would come and they would do the servicing and the cleaning, but they would never do the laundry. It was left up to us to finish the laundry. And they'd hurry and get through with their work, and leave, you know, that was it. Then some days, none of them would show. And I'd end up with 40 something units to service, the laundry, everything. So really and truly, it was...
<i>So that was one of the downsides to it, it was hard, hard work, and it being unpredictable, the people.. to count on them</i>	ELOISE: We finally hired one of them, just to sit back there and do nothing but the laundry, but she never finished it, she never did it. My mother lived right down the street and she and her husband would come down there and fold towels a lot for us and help us out.

Question/Comments by Marlene East	Response by Ben & Eloise Graham
	BEN: Well our help stayed with us, we paid them well. And we had some of them that was there with us over 20 years, and they worked, some of them worked for the school system, and they'd work for them in the winter time and in the summer work for us
<i>Let's talk about your neighborhood; You live in a neighborhood right behind FSU Panama City. When were most of the homes built in this neighborhood?</i>	BEN: in the 1960's
<i>Does this subdivision have a name?</i>	BEN: It's Ashland
<i>And you built here in the 60's</i>	BEN: Oh no, we just moved in our home on the beach in '63 or '64 and Barney Gray that had the Barney Gray Motel had built three houses, and his son was married, and he built this 3 bedroom 2 bath brick home. And his son and his wife separated and we moved into the house new at that time...on Joan Avenue, 2205 Joan Avenue. And he sold the house to me for the amount of money that he had in it
<i>That was a good deal</i>	BEN: It was \$18,000 for the house and the lot, and I remember our payments was like \$100 or \$105 a month ELOISE: He got a VA loan on it BEN: And uh...
<i>So when did you move out here</i>	BEN: I lived there 12 years and I moved ELOISE: And we started looking at property on the water BEN: We've been here since 19... ELOISE: You built the house, I think you've got '70 or '72 out there on the concrete BEN: Yeah around 1970 cause we've been here 33 years I believe. ELOISE: When he found this lot, you didn't even know it was on the water. There were so many trees and brush, it was in terrible shape, they'd not done anything to it, it was bad.
<i>What was the bridge like at that time, The Hathaway Bridge?</i>	BEN: It was just a lil' ole' flat bridge (Eloise laughs). They'd have to raise it and let the boats through and it was just a single road from the beach to the bridge and they was nothing along that road hardly
<i>Was that the road right on the beach?</i>	ELOISE: You come across the bridge and come right on down, and they had a playhouse, nightclub, and Fritz's liquor store, and they just wasn't anything on that road at that time. It's developed up. That's when Ronny was just a kid cause we'd come up and get his birthday cake in town and bring it back ELOISE: We'd have to go to town for everything, they wasn't anything out here..if you went to a restaurant, you went to town.
<i>Are people who live in this neighborhood employees of GCSU or FSU?</i>	BEN: No. ELOISE: Most of the houses were here when we built. BEN: This neighbor over here was Don L Brookins, the Tax Collector, and the next house was Spivey, he had a water well system. And you go on around and they's a doctor ELOISE: What was his name Monico? BEN: I don't know...oh there was a Dr. Monico over here, and then he passed away, and there's another doctor built a big house around there, and they are mostly just I guess you'd say average income type people in this neighborhood over here, except for that one of there ELOISE: Laughs.
<i>That's one's newer, huh?</i>	BEN: That's HARRIS house, HARRIS Business Machines. Troy and DeeDee. And they're just like a little old family. We just love 'em. And couldn't have a better neighbor.
<i>Going back to the early 50's when you first</i>	BEN: Well we had no organizations to amount to anything on the beach.

Question/Comments by Marlene East	Response by Ben & Eloise Graham
<i>arrived and working in the motel business, how would you describe Panama City Beach back then?</i>	And I joined the Beach Optimist Club because we were starting to have baseball teams, and midget football teams, and we've brought all of those things in. And the City now sort of sponsors that and they have places for them. And the Boy Scout Troop we sponsored a Boy Scout Troop...we didn't have anything back then
<i>There were no schools on the beach</i>	BEN: Yeah, there was on Panama City Beach ELOISE: There was Beach School
<i>Oh, there was Beach Elementary, okay</i>	BEN: yeah, Frank Brown was the principal ELOISE: But there wasn't any sports and our oldest son... BEN: You had to go into town ELOISE: to play football, into town, Drummond Park I believe, and he tried out and the coach came out and said, "you don't live in town, you live on the beach, if y'all want a football team, start you a football team." Well he did, he started a football team. BEN: Me and a guy named Larry Malone that's my nephew and he had the Stingray Motel. But we started all the, not just me, but the different men in the club and all, started all the activities with sports and community. The town, especially the business people, looked down on the beach, because people would go and there and buy stuff during the summer and Labor Day when the business shut off, they'd all jump in the car and go back home, and they'd be owing them money and they wouldn't pay them until the next year.
<i>There still seems to be a battle between Panama City and Panama City Beach</i>	BEN: Yea ELOISE: Now, the tide's turning, the beach is ..great BEN: Now the City's got a sign out there that says, "Shop in the City" (Both laugh)
<i>I've heard teachers at Arnold say that when they left Bay High and Mosley to go teach at Arnold when it opened, people quit talking to them</i>	ELOISE: Oh yeah, oh yeah. They sort of look down on beach people BEN: I will give you one good example. Things like that really hurt you know. ELOISE: My son Alan...he was above average football player and the team voted for who they wanted for the Captain. Well Alan was from the Beach, and they voted him Captain. So the coaches got together and came back and said, "we're gonna have two Captains this year, (laughs), the one that the players voted for and the one the Coaches
<i>They didn't trust the Beach Captain by himself</i>	BEN: (laughing)...and the one that the Coaches voted for and the Coaches voted for someone in town. You know that's just the way it was back then.
<i>And scandals with coaches and athletics still continues doesn't it</i>	BEN: uh hum
<i>What was it like when y'all first came here just to drive along the beach?...Y'all built a 4- story but there weren't any other...</i>	BEN: You had this Edgewater was a pretty large
<i>So that's been there for a while</i>	BEN: yes, see that built that for the workers at the shipyards during WWII when they were building ships there and we had the Old Dutch and a few nightclubs or honkey-tonks or whatever you want to call it...Jenkins' place out there, and Little Birmingham ELOISE: The motel next to us when we bought had lights hanging down from the cord from the ceiling (laughs) you know
<i>...no light fixtures...</i>	BEN: no, the only appliances they had in them was the gas stove and a small refrigerator and one light hanging in the middle of the room with a pull cord on it
<i>Were there a lot of dirt roads on the beach too</i>	BEN: Everything was dirt roads except that very front road ELOISE: But Ben worked when we closed up we would work in the winter time. He was an electrician one or two winters. BEN: I worked as an electrician about four or five winters

Question/Comments by Marlene East	Response by Ben & Eloise Graham
<i>That's what my husband does, he's an electrical contractor</i>	ELOISE: And Ben, I know he hung curtains and blinds BEN: Well uh, the biggest job, the first really big job was the Holiday Inn. Philip Stiles built it. And I had taken this electrical course in high school and I was familiar with what they call uh, the metal pipe that you put, run the wire
<i>Conduit? (I have an electrical husband (laughs) and I know that one!</i>	BEN: Conduit, yeah ELOISE: laughs BEN: They had _____ conduit and they didn't have that one before. Well I was familiar with working with that so that sort of helped my job good
<i>Yeah. When you could break away from the motel and all those long hours, what did you do for fun back then?</i>	ELOISE: Well we didn't have any fun except in the winter (laughs) and I was a Cub Scout mother and he was Den leader for boy scouts and then he was the coach for the football team and we travelled with them
<i>So your lives revolved around your kids a lot Are you related to Gregg George? I looked up your name and saw the connection in the obituary for your sister</i>	ELOISE: We went to the old Gulf Beach Baptist Church BEN: His mother was my sister
<i>My parents went there, we moved them up here 2001 or 2002 from Arcadia and they went to Gulf Beach Baptist and Gregg preached their funerals..nice man</i>	BEN: Yeah
<i>Do you know about how many motels were here when you first arrived?</i>	ELOISE: Ben may BEN: They was probably, they wasn't anything out on Thomas Drive, it was all Navy where the Navy had their towers during WWII you know, and that all started in about 1960 it started building up out there a little bit.
<i>What was Panama City Beach most known for like in the 1950's and 1960's? the beach?</i>	BEN: Well you have Panama City Beach which was owned by the Pledgers, and they had a dance place there and they had rooms and all and that was a little city of its own. Panama City Beach, that was it. And then you had Long Beach, and that was Churchwell, J.E. Churchwell. And he had all those cottages in the store and all that and the railroad track right there ELOISE: Had a Casino
<i>..had a casino?</i>	BEN: Now the Casino was this big building that used ot be out on Shell Island and before they cut the pass in for the boats to go in and out, they moved that building down off of Shell Island onto Long Beach, and they made an entertainment center out of it. It had two big dance floors and had juke boxes ELOISE: had bowling and BEN: and everybody went up there
<i>Did they allow gambling back then, was it legal?</i>	ELOISE: I don't think so. They had what they call a Hang-Out out in front of it where all the young people would dance BEN: go down there and dance ELOISE: they had a juke box, and they had a few rides and a few games, and a skating rink
<i>Did y'all have a favorite spot on the beach where you liked to go? In front of your motel, or..?</i>	ELOISE: yeah BEN: We just about spent 24 hours a day there. And you was asking one question about...that's when I did all the remodeling and the maintenance, and when we bought that big Jones Motel it had to be painted on the outside just about every year
<i>Are any of those still there or have they been torn down and what's there now?</i>	BEN: No. The Majestic.
<i>So you sold out at some point to the Majestic</i>	ELOISE: No, we sold to another guy BEN: We sold to Woody Minor and Woody Minor sold to Dykes, and then Dykes sold to Majestic ELOISE: But we tore down that big old two-story building and rebuilt the El Dorado. But it was heartbreaking the day I went out there and they were

Question/Comments by Marlene East	Response by Ben & Eloise Graham
<i>I'll bet, because that was your life....</i>	tearing down the Green Star and the El Dorado (laughs). ELOISE: yeah BEN: If you go down to the Carousel, on the other end of the beach, and you go to Back Beach Road and you see the sign there that points down to the front there where the Carousel is
<i>Yes, sir I know where that is</i>	BEN: and on the right hand side there's this one big building and its...what color would you call that building? ELOISE: Well Honey, I don't know if they've painted it... BEN: Well Honey, what color was it? ELOISE: It was pink! (laughs) BEN: Yeah, well, I think it is sort of that way now, and that is the upstairs of that Jones Motel. I give it to a guy to tear it down and clean up the place under there...and so that building's still down there
<i>..that's something</i>	ELOISE: He moved the whole part of the front building and that's their home now
<i>..so that's on this side of The Carousel or the other side (from here)?</i>	You do down and turn where that sign tells you to turn to go to The Carousel, and you just go couple of blocks toward the beach and its own the right hand side.
<i>What about Miracle Strip, when did that come in here, the amusement park? I know it is not there now, but parts of it are out at Pier Park.</i>	BEN: Well it started out with a small park that was in Birmingham that run during the winter and in the summer, they'd come down here with their rides, and that's the way it got started with Jimmy Lark, and they just kept adding onto it. They brought the big Ferris wheel in and.. ELOISE: roller coaster
<i>Was that a big part of your kids' growing up years?</i>	ELOISE: I would take them down there at night.. BEN: That was the place everybody wanted to come... they wanted to be near that park
<i>I was thankful I got to take my kids there before it closed down, because it was such a fun part of Panama City Beach</i>	BEN: Well they built that water park on the back down there
<i>Yes, that was my next question about Shipwreck Island...do you know much about when it was built?</i>	BEN: It was built after Miracle Strip
<i>What about Ocean Opry? That was the Rader family, right?</i>	BEN: Yeah, Wayne Rader and Bill and Moonshine, and uh...I don't remember, I can't put a date on when they opened that up. ELOISE: I know we were in the motel business BEN: Oh yeah we were, (emphatically) and that was good clean family fun, and we were glaaaadd to have it ELOISE: ..and we would..that one summer they gave us tickets to give out, if we sent a customer there, they got a free drink, free popcorn. The motel that had the most at the end of the summer, you got a trip. BEN: They give you a trip on a cruise ship
<i>..they had some good marketing going on...</i>	ELOISE: Laughs
<i>What about drive-in movie theatres? Were there any drive-ins?</i>	BEN: There was one right across from where the Fountainbleu is now and its over where that golf course is across the street from the Fountainbleu.
<i>Was PCB ever known by any other name?</i>	BEN: Well you had Edgewater Beach....
<i>..Long Beach you said earlier</i>	BEN: Longbeach, yeah, and then Edgewater and ...on down to ....Panama City Beach got that name when they joined all the beach together, when they all voted to come in under one.. ELOISE: make it a city

Question/Comments by Marlene East	Response by Ben & Eloise Graham
<i>That makes sense, it is such a small strip of land</i>	BEN: Well Edgewater had a mayor and Panama City.. ELOISE: and we had a mayor up at our end BEN: yeah, Church? Was a mayor and over at Panama City Beach, Kenny Pledger, Mr and Mrs. Pledger was the mayor over there. Everyone had their own little city up and down there and the water line was all that we had. We didn't have sewage. It just came to a time when all that was pushing to come in, so that was the reason all the places joined together and the City came in and put sewer lines
<i>...so you could get the infrastructure together</i>	
<i>Do y'all need to take a break or anything?</i>	BEN: oh, no.
<i>What have y'all heard about this area's role in the Civil War? I know that's way back, but did you hear people older than you talking about it? I've heard some stories about Shell Island with the Confederates on one end of the Island the Union on the other...</i>	BEN: Well right over here on Beach Drive and all, they had a salt mill where they brought water in, boiled it down, and got the salt out of it. And I think there's a marker there.
<i>Yes, I've been to that in one of their reenactments one time</i>	BEN: yeah.
<i>What about the history of Indians in the area?</i>	BEN: I don't know nothing about that
<i>We found when we built our house on N. Lagoon and they dug up a big pile of dirt for the swimming pool, my little boy was out playing in it, came in with a giant arrowhead, he thought it was a shark's tooth! And we kept finding them and pieces of pottery</i>	BEN: Oh, yeah. The Indians lived all along down here cause they could live right out of that bay
<i>Oh yeah, they had everything to eat and live off of</i>	
<i>So you never discovered any Indian artifacts or anything like that....</i>	BEN: uh uh (no)
<i>What's your thoughts about all the development along Back Beach Road in the last decade, what's your thoughts about that, and Pier Park?</i>	ELOISE: I love it! I think the Mom and Pop motels were outdated, they were old, they needed torn down, and I think there's some more out there that could be torn down, but I think it has really made our beach.
<i>It is really beautiful. We love living here.</i>	BEN: If you draw a circle 300 miles, you just take in so many cities...Birmingham, Atlanta, and all of them you know, and it is what you might say 'a tank of gas away' and so when things got bad, people would shorten their vacation up and come to Panama City Beach
<i>You already told me so things you did in the Optimist Club. Is there any other things, other than starting the Boy Scouts and the football....</i>	BEN: We started the Chamber of Commerce and I was trying to think what Jim's last name was...we hired him...each one of us give a thousand dollars to bring him in here
<i>..to be like the director of the Chamber?</i>	BEN: yeah, and then he went North and met some radio program announcer up there called the Colonel or something and he started announcing, and that's the way the Canadians started coming down.
<i>What are the membership dynamics of the Optimist Club? Is it mostly people who are retired and did own businesses in the area?</i>	BEN: Yeah, you don't really have a need anymore for the things that really started our Optimist Club
<i>That's an interesting perspective</i>	BEN: Yeah, we've got about, I'd say, about 50 members and we have nearly, nearly..we have about \$700,000 that we have invested, that we use

Question/Comments by Marlene East	Response by Ben & Eloise Graham
	<p>the profits off of for our programs, and then we have a lot of other things that we do</p> <p>ELOISE: How many scholarships do y'all have?</p> <p>BEN: Well I think we've got about 15 out here at Gulf Coast and then the rest of them are at Florida State, got one at Troy</p>
<p><i>I was the director of the Lighthouse for the Blind in Atlanta for 12 years and we were sponsored by the Lions Clubs so all my board members were members of Lions Clubs and they struggled and struggled to get new members in. Is that a problem you've had in the Optimist Club?</i></p>	<p>BEN: It is the same thing with all the clubs. Lions Clubs and all of them is just way way down. And they had different clubs in Lynn Haven and over in downtown and they just don't have the clubs anymore</p>
<p><i>It is sad to see that kind of community service going away, but I never thought about it from the perspective you just said, about there's not as much of a need for those things because y'all did it!</i></p>	<p>BEN: Well the City has got all the facilities for them down there, the ball fields, the baseball, the swimming, and all that kinds of stuff</p>
<p><i>..and all these non profit organizations popped up so you've got walks for cancer, heart association, and all of that.</i></p>	
<p><i>What about, can you think of two or three community leaders from the area who have made a lasting positive impact on PCB?</i></p>	<p>BEN: Yeah, uh, Jimmy Lark, uh back in the old days, Barney Gray, and uh Dick Arnold</p>
<p><i>What's some of the things that they did for the area?</i></p>	<p>BEN: Well, Barney Gray sort of started the Motel and Restaurant Association and he started buying these books by the hundreds and taking them out to the different cities and welcome stations and stuff like that. And then of course Jimmy Lark started that park down there which was a main attraction. And then Dick Arnold had Beach State Bank and he sort of financed a lot of the people getting started in the motel business</p>
<p><i>What about, were there any significant events that you think really changed the area?</i></p>	<p>BEN: Well they started that deal in the Fall on the fish deal to bring people in. I don't know what happened in that, but it was really going good. And it seems like one group got a hold of it and they started using it for their own interests and the City took it back over</p>
<p><i>Are you talking about advertising to bring in people who are interested in fishing?</i></p>	<p>BEN: Yeah, it was the Chamber of Commerce</p>
<p><i>What about WWII (1939-1945)...do have any reference points to that as it relates to PCB?</i></p>	<p>BEN: Well, we just heard stories when we come here about the German submarines being out there in the Gulf. They thought they had somebody in the Old Dutch. And I met a woman that come and spoke at the Optimist Club and she came down here to ah, I don't know if she was with the CIA or FBI or who it was but, to see if they could find anything going on. She lived right down there near the Old Dutch. But, not any real event.</p>
<p><i>Were things going on at the Port to help with the war?</i></p>	<p>They were building ships</p>
<p><i>I read one time at St Andrews State Park, that during WWII they had soldiers that would patrol the beach on white horses in white uniforms, for camouflage...that would have been something to see</i></p>	<p>ELOISE: oh, (laughing)</p> <p>BEN: yeah, that's more or less what I was saying, the Navy had all those patrols all up and down the beach over there</p>
<p><i>What about the real estate boom? What's your thoughts on all of that? The Boom and the Bust?</i></p>	<p>ELOISE: laughs</p> <p>BEN: Well, that's just something that's national, you know the economy</p>

Question/Comments by Marlene East	Response by Ben & Eloise Graham
	going down and uh, I think it was, in my opinion, it was just dirty politics, it was Dodd and whatever it was, the other one, he's out of there now, and they loaned people money that weren't even qualified to even borrow money, and they couldn't pay it back when they got it and it's kind of like Jimmy Carter, had all the farmers go in and borrow money on their farms, and they'd buy new pickup trucks and everything, and they ended up, a lot of them ended up losing their stuff, but that's not any of our business
<p><i>Right, it wasn't the fault of this area is what you are saying, it just affected us all, right?</i></p> <p><i>What about hurricanes? You mentioned (Hurricane) Eloise, when was that, Hurricane Eloise?</i></p> <p><i>...impact/memories of Hurricane Opal and any others</i></p>	<p>...silence</p> <p>ELOISE: _____ was in college I remember</p> <p>BEN: We lived at Joan Avenue because we ran off up in the country and got into a tornado up there, like to have got killed. Was in the National Guard Armory up there and we looked out and we could see the windshields blowing out, busting out of the cars and everything, and we finally got back down the road, and there was just a couple of little ole' leaves a layin' in the yard. We should have stayed home</p>
<p><i>That happened to us with (hurricane) Ivan when we left here, we got in worse trouble in Atlanta</i></p>	<p>ELOISE: But it got our motel though</p> <p>BEN: It washed the seawall away and came up to the swimming pool, but all I had to do was fill back in and build a, I built around 500 feet of seawall,</p> <p>ELOISE: It was my mother's and my neighbors on each side of us it got all the seawall down through there and he took it over and built all the seawall back for all of us</p> <p>BEN: It was so much a foot, everybody had to come up with their money. I did do the contracting and put the seawall in and it's still there.</p>
<p><i>What about any other hurricanes..Opal?</i></p>	<p>BEN: Well, I don't remember 'em. I remember hurricanes but I don't remember which one ones were which. Now this house here is built for 150 mph winds. All these walls right here are like 12 inches. It's like 2x6 studs on the exterior, plus the brick and everything, so we just stay here.</p>
<p><i>We put a lot of extra tie downs in our house, and did a lot of extra things to</i></p>	<p>BEN: The only time we got in any trouble was when they come and ordered us out.</p> <p>ELOISE: Laughs. We were at the motel then.</p> <p>BEN: I was gonna stay there</p>
<p><i>Yeah, when they make you evacuate the beach</i></p>	<p>BEN: yeah, uh huh.</p>
<p><i>I'm going to flip this tape over, do y'all need a break or anything</i></p>	<p>ELOISE: no</p>
<p><i>Ok, you want to talk about that for a minute?</i></p>	<p>BEN: You have on here to talk about family and your grandchildren</p> <p>BEN: No, but I have an expert on it!</p> <p>ELOISE: Laughs</p> <p>BEN: And that will take up the rest of the time!</p> <p>ELOISE: Well we had two sons, and they were 8 years apart, both of them live here. Alan, my oldest one, is in the real estate business, Counts (Real Estate).</p> <p>Mark's a lawyer, and works downtown. And Alan had two boys and they are married and one of them (sweetly and happily) has two little girls so we have two great granddaughters! And Mark married and he has one daughter, and she is 16. She goes to North Bay Haven. She's a hostess at Carabbas. She works there. She's beautiful (laughs).</p>
<p><i>..you are just a little proud!</i></p>	<p>ELOISE: Chase, Alan's youngest is at FSU. He's tried to work and go to</p>

Question/Comments by Marlene East	Response by Ben & Eloise Graham
	<p>school and it just wouldn't work. He couldn't get the courses, he'd get one course one quarter and one the next quarter, so he quit his job and he's full-time at FSU. His wife just finished her, she didn't get her master's, did she Honey?</p> <p>BEN: She got her degree for teaching</p> <p>ELOISE: She's at Breakfast Point</p> <p>BEN: 2<sup>nd</sup> Grade</p> <p>ELOISE: 2<sup>nd</sup> grade, yeah</p>
<i>What's your impressions about the value of tourism to the area?</i>	<p>BEN: Well, that's the number one, and uh, as for Bay County, it is still number one, and the Air Force at Tyndall would be a close 2. Both of them really contribute a lot to this area</p>
<i>How has Spring Break changed from when you saw it in the 50's to what it is like now?</i>	<p>BEN: There's a different type or class of people coming in here now and they..it is a lot more dangerous because, like the music that they have is one thing. If they'd put good country music out here in all these places, all the trouble would go away</p> <p>ELOISE: (Laughs)</p>
<i>(Laughs)..That would make a big difference, huh?</i>	<p>BEN: Yeah it would</p>
<i>What about the fishing industry?</i>	<p>BEN: Well, they've regulated it til it's hard for people to even make a good living out of fishing</p>
<i>Were there regulations at all in the 50's and 60's</i>	<p>BEN: Not that I knew of. We used to go out and just catch all the fish we wanted. Now, if we don't catch the fish here, they go around by Mexico and they catch them over there, you know so...silence</p>
<i>Do y'all have a favorite fishing story?</i>	<p>BEN: Not really, I used to, when it was like if we were going to have a big fish fry, then I'd go get on the boat and always had a bunch of fish. You could depend on catching fish back then in those days.</p>
<i>What about the Port of Panama City and its value of the area?</i>	<p>BEN: Well it really is a lot of help to the area and it helps the area North of here. I know one business is that woodchip that they are shipping down here and they ship it out and it goes overseas. Then of course, lumber, and John Henry Sherman is the one with him and one or two more of the business people in town are the ones that started that Port up. I remember when they started it.</p>
<i>If a corporation, someone representing a corporation was talking to you about considering coming to this area now, what would you tell them, about bringing their company here?</i>	<p>BEN: They would ah, they would have a good place to have their employees because its not union controlled and there are plenty of people here as far as somebody to work, and it may be that they have to train some of them to do their jobs, like the air conditioning people in Lynn Haven and you know different ones, and you know they've got the boat place over there, and they have to teach those people how to do it but it would be a good place for the business and it would be a good place for the people to have their families as we've got excellent schools.</p>
<i>That's my next question, what is your impression of the school system here?</i>	<p>BEN: It's uh, I don't think you can do any better than the beach. The beach has got really good schools.</p>
<i>I agree. I'm glad my kids went to those</i>	<p>BEN: and that Beach Elementary school, we knew it when it wasn't but about 50 or 60 kids down there, it's really grown, and they've got good teachers, and they're just like people in your neighborhood that teach down there.</p>
<i>Let's go back to desegration, back, was that the 70's, what do you remember about that in the area?</i>	<p>BEN: Well my son was in Jencks (Middle School). It seemed like that when they integrated the students coming in weren't able to keep up with the pace that the schools were going at and so they slowed them down, and education hasn't been as good since the government got into it. They really hurt the education system. And that's the reason so many of these charter schools are doing so well.</p>

Question/Comments by Marlene East	Response by Ben & Eloise Graham
<i>Was there much local reaction to the Brown vs. the Board of Education ruling?</i>	BEN: No ELOISE: (laughs)
<i>There wasn't in my town either, it was peaceful ...not racism, really</i>	BEN: This place here, there's not ever been a problem between the ...
<i>...it's not a big issue here</i>	BEN: Yeah, the foreigners, you might say the Chinese, and the Vietnamese, you know, when they brought them over here and the government give them all these fishing posts, there was a little trouble there because they was letting them break the law about catching fish, but as far as the blacks and whites its not...
<i>Were the motels integrated when y'all first came here? Because I know the hospitals a lot were separate and my aunt had a drug store and they had separate water fountains in the 50's</i>	BEN: It's not BEN: No we never had anything like that and uh, the first African Americans, if that's what you want to call them, was teachers in college that came, and they would rent two units and they were no trouble. They drove nice cars and all of that and I never had any problem with them, and I really didn't have that many customers that were blacks...and why they keep calling theirselves African Americans, they are either Americans or they are not (Eloise chuckles) and I think they are using it for a crutch, and the sooner they get rid of that the better off they going to be because they can do anything they want to, there's nobody gonna stop them.
<i>What about when you frist came here as far as communication. Were there telephone lines in?</i>	BEN: Yeah, oh yeah.
<i>Party lines?</i>	BEN: No, the motels all had hard lines.
<i>I remember a party line when I was growing up.</i>	BEN: No, the motels all had hard lines.
<i>Do you remember how much did a postage stamp cost when you first came here in the 50's?</i>	ELOISE: (laughs) BEN: I don't think it was over a dime. But we had party line at the house where we were living up there and you could here them picking up and hanging up on you.
<i>She kept tabs on you didn't she?</i>	ELOISE: I had a grandmother that lived next door when I was growing up and she'd always listen to my phone calls (laughing)
<i>Back then did you ever conceive of anything like computers and smartphones, and email?</i>	ELOISE: I said "Mama please hang up!" BEN: Well they'd start talking about something and they would realize the only way they knew that was off that telephone
<i>And what is your impression of computers and the internet?</i>	BEN: No, no ELOISE: (laughs)
<i>What about the history of the airport....</i>	BEN: well that's just not for people our age ELOISE: it's passed us by, but BEN: and after jumping up for that telephone for 40 something years we don't even like to have a telephone ELOISE: We had 2, one for each motel, and boy they rang all the time.
<i>Well, the one here first on the Panama City side, do you know when it came in here?</i>	BEN: Which one you talking about? You talking about the one here?
<i>Oh really?</i>	BEN: No, but the first airport was up there where that Panama City Christian school was BEN: Yea, and it was just a grass runway, airfield, and then they built the one over there and people moved in around it and built houses around it and the noise over there got to be a problem, and they kept complaining about it and everything and the runway wasn't long enough for the big planes that are coming in now, so that's the reason that moved the airport out..
<i>Were you for or against it, the new airport?</i>	BEN: Well I was for them having a bigger airport that could handle any

Question/Comments by Marlene East	Response by Ben & Eloise Graham
<i>It's a long way out there.</i>	size plane but I wasn't necessarily for it being out there where it is. ELOISE: Yeah!
<i>Were there ever any efforts to have an Interstate come through Panama City?</i>	BEN: We tried to get it moved down this way and uh, we even give them money. We got money together and hired somebody to go and lobby for us on it and the people that got the money all ended up on land up there along where the interstate is ELOISE: (laughs) BEN: And the only cattle crossing under I-10 is up north of here, it was on Dempsey Barron's farm that they put a crossing under there for the cows.
<i>So looking back on that now do you still wish the interstate had come through here or are you glad that it didn't?</i>	BEN: Well you see, if we want to go to Pensacola, that's the worst 100 miles you'll drive
<i>Oh, I know, I make that drive</i>	BEN: But if you want to get on the interstate, you've got to drive 40 miles further just to get on the interstate, and that really shouldn't have been.
<i>Did Amtrack ever come through here or have a stop here?</i>	BEN: No, Chipley is the closest place.
<i>I'm okay. Do y'all need a break?</i>	ELOISE: Would you like something to drink? BEN: We got a lot of drinks out there if you want one
<i>I'm good, so thank you. We alluded to this earlier, basic morality. How do you think it's changed since the 50's?</i>	BEN: Everything is less moral now. Everything they've changed, just like the gay couples marrying and all you know. And the morals is going down, down, down, and this is a repeat of of what happened in the past, and the Roman Empire and all of them went south you know, we doing the same thing
<i>..the same thing, history repeating itself, huh?</i>	BEN: Yeah.
<i>Living so close to FSU, are you a 'Noles fans?</i>	BEN: Well my son played football at FSU
<i>And I know Bobby Bowden has some property here, did you ever meet him? Carillon?</i>	BEN: Oh yeah, we knew him and his wife both. Now he's down at the beach on past Philip's Inlet BEN: Yeah, him and his sons have all got places down there, but
<i>Any stories in particular you remember about him? He spoke at my high school when I was growing up and Brad Scott was from my high school and coached with him at FSU. Brad is one of my cousins, and he went on to Clemson</i>	BEN: We've had, where he's come to our church and preached a few times.
<i>What church was that?</i>	BEN: That was Gulf Beach Baptist Church
<i>What about changes you've seen right here with the universities, Gulf Coast and Florida State?</i>	BEN: Well of course you know it was a two year college, and it looks like Gulf Coast is moving in the direction to be the biggest college around and then what they've done they've made Florida State start taking them in four years because they were taking them in four years. So I don't think that's really all that great of competition there. Gulf Coast is just wanting to be THE college and they were, to me they were a little bit greedy, they come in and tried to take over all the picnic tables down there and where the boat launch is down there, all that they want to take in under the college
<i>..that's a public park isn't it? Carl Gray Park</i>	BEN: Yes, and the students use it, boy they really use it but Dr. Kerly and them tried to get that and .. ELOISE: He backed off of that real fast though BEN: yeah, they about run him out of town!
<i>In your lifetime, how many times has the bridge (Hathaway Bridge) been replaced?</i>	This is the 3 <sup>rd</sup> bridge

Question/Comments by Marlene East	Response by Ben & Eloise Graham
<i>And what do you think is the main significance of the Hathaway Bridge to the area?</i>	BEN: Well, it's just you know, you'd be stranded on an island out here if you didn't have that bridge! ELOISE: (Laughs) BEN: And then you'd have to drive all the way around through West Bay to go to town
<i>It takes a long time to get all the way around doesn't it?</i>	BEN: Yeah
<i>What is the importance of the Navy Base to the area? You mentioned the Air Force base.</i>	BEN: Well its just you know having a place where you've got good paying jobs, and you've got engineers. Our grandson has got a masters in engineering and he works at Columbia Research and that's the Navy base, the Navy Base brings all that in
<i>Yes there are a lot of private companies affiliated with the base.</i>	
<i>Politically, how would you describe Panama City Beach ...republican, democrat, combination thereof?</i>	BEN: It's republican right now. It was democrat, everything was democrat until they got so sorry nobody could be a democrat no more ELOISE: laugh
<i>It seems like the party identity has changed from what it used to be</i>	BEN: Well look at your President Clinton and all you know, and all of the rest of them and all of the trash they brought in, and if their democrats they just get away with it, they don't say nothing and if they were a Republican, they'd kick 'em out.
<i>Have you known some of the politicians from here pretty well like Mr. Patronis, Mr. Bense, and Mr. Southerland?</i>	BEN: Oh yeah, I've got pictures with me and governor Graham, and of course Dempsey Barron, and ELOISE: Hutto BEN: and Will Hutto was a real close friend of mine and he was a Congressman. We actually went up and visited him in D.C. But I sort of got away from the political side
<i>Did you ever know Doyle Carlton when he was the Agriculture Commissioner?</i>	BEN: I knew his name
<i>He's a relative of mine from South Florida</i>	BEN: Yeah.
<i>Is there any one event regarding the history of the area that you are especially proud of, or have fond memories of? ..one particular Panama City Beach event?</i>	ELOISE: What about the Snapper Bowl? Y'all started the little Snapper Bowl, and you were a coach BEN: Yeah, we started that, and we brought all these teams in here and we would assign them out to the motels
<i>That was football?</i>	BEN: Yes, and we built the football stadium over there, Pete Edwards Field. Me and Eddie Green and one or two more all went together and built that. My wife planted shrubbery all around it, down there ELOISE: And they stole it! We'd put palms and BEN: we'd put plants down there by the road and everything
<i>And they stole it, oh my word?</i>	ELOISE: (Incredulously) Yeah, they'd did big palms that high and they'd dig 'em up and take 'em off, so we gave up on beautifying it.
<i>Was there any one event that brought shame or embarrassment to PCB that you can think of...that was kind of a big sore spot?</i>	BEN: Well I think the only thing now is the group that comes down here in the early part of the year and mainly from Atlanta, that's got all this sorryness going on in it, this Girls Gone Wild stuff and all that mess
<i>Yes, I know about that.</i>	BEN: Now my son does all the grilling and the barbecue, so he started the Grills Gone Wild ELOISE: Well it happens, he's got one coming up in November at Gulf Coast College, but it's going to be bigger this year, they are planning more BEN: Yeah, they're getting in the thousands and thousands of dollars on that now ELOISE: And they give it out to the different charities

Question/Comments by Marlene East	Response by Ben & Eloise Graham
<i>Out at Frank Brown Park</i>	BEN: They built a ball field out at the City that's got this soft surface on it...
<i>And the padding makes it nice where they can roll it</i>	BEN: And they bring these veterans from over here at the Veteran's Home out there and they feed them. ELOISE: Alan's in the Rotary Club, the Rotary Club built it, that field, and it is for the little children that's in wheelchairs and all and they let them hit the ball and then somebody pushes them around the base
<i>Are there any local heros, actors, or famous sports people from the area that you that you know of?</i>	ELOISE: yeah  BEN: Well we had a group that always ate lunch together, down at a place called Spanky's, and Wes Burnham used to bring in these golf pros and brought in a guy that was one of those lawyers the head of Disney, Joe Shapiro, he's the one that gave me the tickets that we all went down to Disney World on. And at that time he had one of his people had gone to Europe and they couldn't get back in the country and he asked me if I would help him. So I called Earl Hutto and asked him if he would look into it and see if there was something he could do to help him. We had movie stars actually and I can't remember their names. I see them on TV every once in a while
<i>I read something about Rhett Butler used to go to St. Andrews</i>	BEN: and Charlie Rich...I wished I could think of the name
<i>I meant Clark Gable</i>	BEN: yeah, he was out at Tyndall
<i>We are getting close to the end, what about poverty? Do you think poverty is a problem in Panama City Beach?</i>	BEN: Only by choice.
<i>What about the impact of drugs on PCB?</i>	BEN: Well that's been one of the bad things about it. But that's a national thing
<i>..it's not just here</i>	BEN: and we've got good law enforcement here and I guess they probably do as good or better job than anyone else around about that
<i>How severe is crime here...crime?</i>	BEN: Well up until the last few years, it wasn't bad at all, but now there's getting to be where every once in a while you hear of somebody getting stabbed or shot and I guess it is just the influx of so many people coming in here to live.
<i>What do you think is one the biggest challenges ahead for PCB?</i>	BEN: Transportation.
<i>Like public transportation?</i>	BEN: No. When they opened that new park down there, Pier Park North, you gonna have to get up early (emphasized) to get up and down that road to work in the mornings. And they just don't have the streets and highways to handle it. Now Tom Webb put this Middle Beach Road in. He was staying at my place. He bought the right of way and put the road in. And he had the money to run it all the way down to 79. But right down there by that Lake, there was a few people that was I guess you say they were political people and they were gonna have to come across there where their house were, and they blocked it. And Tom's remark to me was, "we are not going to fight those people to spend that money here, because there are people of So. Florida that will be just glad to have it". But that's the reason we don't have that Middle Beach Road go all the way through. It was really designed to be in two parts.
<i>What about restaurants, di you have some favorite restaurants in the 50's and 60's?</i>	BEN: We liked them all, but we did go out to Captain Anderson's. I've been a personal friend of Johnny Patronis all these years.
<i>When you think of particular dishes, are there one or two particular dishes when you think of Panama City Beach you think of this</i>	BEN: Oh yeah...Grouper Supreme ELOISE: laughs

Question/Comments by Marlene East	Response by Ben & Eloise Graham
<i>dish? A food dish?</i>	
<i>If you were describing local food and cuisine to a motel guest today, what would you tell them?</i>	BEN: I'd tell them to try Angelo's or Captain Anderson's and Longhorn, Olive Garden
<i>..even the newer ones too Carrabas</i>	BEN: yeah, and the Italian place over there where my granddaughter works BEN: Yep
<i>And what things would you want future generations to know about Panama City Beach as it has been during your lifetime?</i>	BEN: That it used to be a real, real nice easygoing place to live, before all these condos and houses came in here. ELOISE: laughs
<i>You sort of have mixed feelings about the condos, in some ways you like it, but it some ways...</i>	ELOISE: it's the number of people and the number of cars...I mean just to get down 23 <sup>rd</sup> street. BEN: Look at that one (condo) right there at Long 'Beach. I mean you can stand there and look up and see nothing but apartments in any direction
<i>..too many in one spot What legacy has your generation left for the future?</i>	BEN: I think we ah.....I think we...left a way of life. Raise your children in the church, send them to school and get good educations, get college degrees, and try to add on and bring the families up from what they were back in the 40's and 50's
<i>Is there any thing that we have not covered that you wanted to talk about? I asked a lot of questions, I know.</i>	ELOISE: (Laughs) BEN: No, not really ELOISE: I don't think we've told you anything you can use
<i>Absolutely you have! Certainly you have! Do you have any photographs of your hotel that I could take a picture of with my camera. I don't want to take your photographs If it is a lot of trouble, don't worry about it.</i>	ELOISE: I don't think I have the old ones but I think I have the new one. Let me see. BEN: Haven't you got one where my truck is parked out in front? ELOISE: Honey that would be in books BEN: I thought you had some postcards ELOISE: I've got postcards, that's what I'm going to get.
<i>And before I leave, I'd like to take y'all's picture if that's okay. I am going to turn this off.</i>	BEN: Oh me

### **Follow up Phone Call September 18, 2013**

<i>What were your birth years?</i>	BEN: Mine was September 1929 and Eloise was December 1930
<i>What was Eloise's maiden name</i>	BEN: Eloise Stephenson
<i>You mentioned her parents had hotels, what were the names of those?</i>	BEN: The J.P. Stephenson Motel and the Beachside Motel
<i>Eloise mentioned her grandmother that lived next door, what was her name</i>	BEN: Mrs. W. R. Stephenson
<i>You talked about the sale of your hotels, the Green Star and the El Dorado. Were those separate sales or at the same time?</i>	BEN: One sale, in 1985.