The Oral History of Charles LeBuff

August 7 & 21, 2020

Interview conducted by Paul Tritaik

Fort Myers, Florida

Oral History Cover Sheet

Name: Charles LeBuff

Date of Interview: August 7 & 21, 2020

Location of Interview: Fort Myers, Florida

Interviewer: Paul Tritaik

Approximate years worked for Fish and Wildlife Service: 1957, 1959-1990 (32)

Offices and Field Stations Worked, Positions Held: Worked with the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries. Moved to Sanibel Island to work on the Sanibel National Wildlife Refuge as Biological Technician (Wildlife). Founded and served as Project Director of Caretta Research, Inc. Also elected to serve on the first Sanibel City Council. Served as President of the Sanibel-Captiva Audubon Society.

Most Important Projects: Started Sea Turtle Work on Sanibel. Had a Federal Wildlife Officer Commission by 1960, and a concurrent (Florida) Deputy Wildlife Officer Commission. Helped the formation of the Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation (SCCF). Contributed to the loggerhead sea turtle being added to the Endangered Species List.

Colleagues and Mentors: Ross Allen, Dan Beard, Archie Carr, Don Carroll, Llew Ehrhart, Kipp Frohlich, Bill Julian, Bill Lehman, Nat Reed, Frank Lund, Jim Silver, Bill Ashe, Francis Bailey, Bob Barber, Glen Bond, Bob Bridges, George Campbell, Charlotte Shea, Red Giddens, Porter Goss, Ron Hight, Tad Lane, Chris Lechowicz, Russ Leffler, Bob Lines, Arthur Loveridge, Art Marshall, Bernie Murphy, Burkett Neely, John Oberheu, Del Pierce, Even Rude, Rudy Rudolph, Walt Stieglitz, Edythe (Ede) Stokes, Dick Thompson, John Edie, "Bird" Westall, Joe White, Ralph Woodring, Jack Watson, George Weymouth, Jean Williams, Lester Piper, Edward Phillips, Tommy Wood.

Brief Summary of Interview: He grew up in the Boston suburbs where he befriended the curator of Herpetology at the Museum of Comparative Zoology. In his mid-teens he and his family moved to Bonita Springs, Florida. He started working at the Everglades Wonder Gardens in Bonita Springs. He then applied and started working with the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries, where he met Tommy Wood. He started work for the Fish and Wildlife Service in 1959 after moving to Sanibel Island. Later he helped protect the sea turtles on the coast. He helped to get the loggerhead on the endangered species list and also worked to manage the alligator population and launch a nuisance alligator program on Sanibel Island. He then went on to write books (and lecture) about his experiences and interests. In part 2, Charles, talks about the Bailey Tract and different trails around Sanibel, and how that interacts with the wildlife. He also

talks about how he got involved in city politics. He then reflects on past colleagues and some of the adventures he shared with them.

[PART ONE]

Paul Tritaik: "Okay, this is an Oral History with Charles LeBuff, on August 7, 2020. And we're doing this via phone, due to the Coronavirus challenges. Charles is speaking from his home in Fort Myers, Florida and I am conducting the interview from my home at J. N. 'Ding' Darling National Wildlife Refuge on Sanibel Island. And so, Charles, first of all, thank you very much for devoting your time to share your career and history with us and I'd like to start with a little bit of a personal background, and where you were born—when and where you were born, and grew up and start there, is that okay?"

Charles LeBuff: "That's fine. You want me to just go ahead and start?"

Paul: "Yes, please."

Charles: "Okay, my full name is Charles Reginald LeBuff, Jr., spelled: capital L-e, capital B-u-f-f. It's an anglicized spelling of the French surname 'Le Boeuf, that was spelled L-e space, capital [B-o-e-u-f]. My ancestors came out of Jersey, one of the Channel Islands, after they escaped France during Huguenot persecution in the 1600s. My great-great grandfather went to sea with the British Navy. When he was mustered on the ship, his name was spelled phonetically to my present spelling, and it's been that way ever since.

My great-great grandfather had a great opportunity, he was a sailor onboard the H.M.S. *Warspite*, and I think it was about 1832 or '33, he was stationed out in the South Atlantic on patrols at the same time that Charles Darwin came aboard the *Warspite* as a guest of the captain. So, I'm hoping that my great-great grandfather had a chance to meet Charles Darwin. That story has been lost to history.

But he, eventually, after leaving the Navy, he moved to Newfoundland—am I doing, okay?"

Paul: "Yes, yeah great story, keep going."

Charles: "I heard a noise. Okay. He eventually, in 1837, moved to Newfoundland where he became a sea captain, married my great-great grandmother, and they had three children. The second child was Charles William LeBuff, and Charles William, my great grandfather was lost at sea between Newfoundland and Scotland in about 1871. So, my great grandmother had five small children when she was widowed. Apparently, she had some relatives in Boston, and in 1891 she and the children moved to Boston.

The oldest boy was Frederick LeBuff, he was my grandfather. He married and he had—well actually he had, they had three sons, the first one died shortly after birth. My father was the youngest and born in Medford, Massachusetts, the same town I was born in on March 25, 1936.

I grew up in a suburb of Boston. It was a wild area, about as wild as you could find in that vicinity. We had park lands and wild lands and ponds, farms and just a great spot to grow up. It's

about seven miles north of Boston. I became, early on enhanced by the wild things, salamanders, turtles, snakes, and birds. You name it I had an interest in it.

A few years later, by the time of my early teens, I had traded some other kids for a black snake, and I didn't know what it was. I took it into the—I put it in a brown paper bag, and then I took it into the Boston Museum of Science and a herpetologist there really couldn't identify it. And they sent me over to the Museum of Comparative Zoology and I had the great fortune of meeting the Curator of Herpetology at Harvard. He identified the snake. It was a melanistic garter snake. He sort of took me under his wing, and right now I'm forgetting his name, oh gosh what was it." (Arthur Loveridge)

Paul: "I was just going to ask you."

Charles: "Yeah, I can't believe I can't pull it out of my head."

Paul: "What time frame was that? Do you recall what years?"

Charles: "This was probably, '49 or '50."

Paul: "That was the Museum of Comparative Zoology?"

Charles: "Comparative Zoology at Harvard. Yes. And he kept me under his wing. I would visit with him frequently and he helped me a lot. I would do things around the lab and museum. Sort of a little internship developed and at the same time an internship developed at the Boston Museum of Science, where I would go on Saturdays and do different things.

So, I was in my junior year of high school, Medford High School, and I was heading for a career in commercial art. We had elective courses and for my Junior and Senior year I had selected commercial art. In 1952, a friend of my father's, who had once worked for my dad visited our home. My dad was a stair builder and did very fancy stairways in a partnership with a guy. The young fellow and his wife came to visit my dad. He had moved to Bonita Springs, and he came by the house to visit in June of 1952. He started telling my folks all these wonderful stories about wild Florida, in Bonita Springs. My dad had been looking for an excuse to leave his partnership, he was having trouble with his partner so he decided he would sell his interest in the business and relocate to Bonita Springs.

So, in November of '52, my mother, father, myself, three siblings, I was the oldest, a dog, and my pet six-foot indigo snake, made the trip to Bonita Springs."

Paul: "Where did you get the indigo snake?"

Charles: "Two friends of mine bought it for me as a gift, they paid $12 for it. They bought it from Ross Allen."

Paul: "Really?"

Charles: "Yeah, Ross had a side business where he sold snakes and turtles and those kinds of things. I forget what he called it."

Paul: "Hm. What was your father's and mother's and siblings' names?"

Charles: "Oh, my father was Charles, Sr., my mother was Ruth Mick, her people came out of West Virginia, and Canada, and my—I'm the oldest in the family, my brother next to me is Laban LeBuff, [L-a-b-a-n], and then a sister came along, Natalie, [N-a-t-a-l-i-e], she married into the Kirkland family, an old Florida cracker family in Collier County. My youngest brother is Laurence, [L-a-u-r-e-n-c-e], he married my sister's sister-in-law, so they married brothers and sisters, and their children are 'kissing cousins'."

Paul: "So, you said that you moved to Bonita Springs from the Boston area?"

Charles: "This is correct."

Paul: "That was what, 1952."

Charles: "We didn't own a car because we had lots of public transportation, and my father, till the day he died, never drove a car. My mother, decided to go out and take driving lessons, and she got her drivers' license. They went and bought a nearly new Ford Country Squire 1951 station wagon and about two weeks later, we jammed into that station wagon, and headed to Florida."

Paul: "How long did it take you to get from the Boston area to Bonita Springs, Florida?"

Charles: "Well, my dad was a Civil War buff, so we had to stop at every major battlefield. I think it took us about six days total."

Paul: "Do you have any recollection of seeing—impressions it made on you? How old were you when you moved?"

Charles: "I was 16, I believe, yeah."

Paul: "So you probably—do you have any impressions of what that trip was like?"

Charles: "Well, I think among the children, I was the most excited to make the trip. I wanted to leave Massachusetts. I wanted to go where there were wild indigo snakes and alligators."

Paul: "Oh, I bet."

Charles: "I was really happy because of my interests. My bother next to me wasn't really happy to leave, and the younger guys were just doing what they had to do. I don't think they had any real opinion about what their life would become. But I once said that that move was the greatest thing my parents could have ever done. We left that environment, every one of us are still alive, every one of us has been successful."

Paul: "That's wonderful. What time of year was it that you moved?"

Charles: "We arrived in Bonita Springs on November 29th and the next day we went to visit this friend of my dad's. His name was Don Carroll and he managed the Everglades Wonder Gardens. So that was my connection. I was in heaven when I walked in that place.

Paul: "I bet. How did he know Don Carroll?"

Charles: "Well, when he had his stair shop, Don worked for him in the summertime. Don had gone into the Army and he had an interest in snakes, he was very knowledgeable, and in the Army, he taught survival, snake identification, and snake bite therapies. He was stationed up in Georgia. I have forgotten what base. After his Army duty he married. He moved down and worked for Ross Allen and then Bill Piper who, with his brother Lester, had founded Everglades Wonder Gardens. Bill Piper was impressed by Don and hired him. That's what brought him to Bonita Springs.

Before I forget, Don had a very sad ending. In October 1956, he had left the Wonder Gardens in about '54 and gone to work with Florida Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission as an education officer. They gave him a semi-truck that was compartmentalized with cages and he carried birds, alligators, crocodiles, and rattlesnakes. He went around throughout the state of Florida, to do events, like fairs, carnivals. He had this assignment to go to Perry, Florida, up near Tallahassee, to the Pine Tree Festival. That's still held I believe. Don was on a stage giving an exhibition about how a rattlesnake bites and he took a hot five-foot diamondback out of the sack, put it on the stage. Using the old trick, he held a balloon out at the snake. The rattler struck it, broke it, and it popped. Of course, all the kids became excited over that. But the snake had become very active and was trying to get off the elevated stage. The state had just bought Don a pair of bulky snake-proof boots so he was feeling very confident, and rather than use his hook to restrain it, he stepped over and put his foot on the diamondback. The diamondback threw its body around, and contacted Don above his boot, behind his knee.

Apparently, it was an arterial bite, and he died 22 hours later in Tallahassee. Really, really a sad, sad event in my life."

Paul: "Wow."

Charles: "So I guess, going on from there I became employed at the Wonder Gardens during my high school years. My folks bought a permanent home on Naples and we moved to Naples. I was offered a job, I didn't have a car, so I had to wait until I had a car to travel back and forth between Naples and Bonita Springs. I guess it was late 1953, my folks bought me an old 1942 Ford Convertible. Now, some people say Ford didn't make a car in '42, but they made cars up until they switched to all military (in 1942). So, I had a genuine '42 Ford. It was a way to go back and forth to work.

Well in 1953, at Naples High School, I met a young lady from Marco Island. She had been raised on Marco in the days when she didn't have electricity or indoor plumbing. She was—I think she was in 10th grade. I was a senior that year. Her name was Jean Williams and we dated occasionally. Then graduation came along, and I was awarded a full scholarship at the University of Florida.

So, I was all set for college, and I had to register for the draft in April of '54. I didn't know what my status was so my mother took me to Fort Myers to the draft board for this area of Florida. It was in Fort Myers. We went into the draft board. I don't know if she made an appointment or not, but we were there to discuss my future. And this clerk was the world's—well the first dingbat I've ever met. Completely mechanical, no emotion. So, we asked about my draft status,

and mentioned I was planning to go on to college in the fall, and she became very irritated, and told me that I could start college, but they were going to draft me. I mean she threatened it would happen. So, that just burst my bubble. I didn't see me going on to enter college if I was going to get pulled out and put in the Army. That wasn't going to work very well.

So, I had started doing commercial art, started doing some little side jobs and things. I was picking up some bucks. And then I went on full time at the Wonder Gardens as the primary guide and it paid very well in those days. I could buy a new car. I was still living at home, but I was well off for being 19-20 years old.

In 19—I guess it was '56, the Piper Brothers had hired a brother-in-law to work there. We butted heads and I couldn't take him anymore so, I decided to quit. So, I went to work for my dad. We opened up a finish carpentry business. It was not a steady job, but I could make my car payments. I was doing okay.

And then in '56, the Fish and Wildlife Service back when one branch was the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries, had opened up an investigation—a field station at Naples Airport. 'Ding' Darling had something to do with it. I think he put pressure where pressure was needed. After his experience with red tide at Captiva he got the University of Miami interested. He gave them financial aid. It started very early work on the red tide.

So, the Bureau of Commercial Fisheries laboratory, whose office was headquartered in Galveston, opened this field laboratory. I went and applied, I had to take a written test and I passed it, got a high score. I was selected as a fishery technician and of course I had to have a lot of on-the-job training, because I didn't have much experience in microbiology, but I soon caught on.

Part of the job was lab work and part of it was collecting water samples. I would collect land water samples from the Myakka River north of Punta Gorda to a station out on US 41, on the Tamiami Trail near 40-Mile Bend. Those would be my regular vehicle trips. And sometimes, twice a week, Tommy Wood, who was the first manager of Sanibel National Wildlife Refuge, would come down in his aircraft, back then it was a Piper Tri-Pacer on floats. He would land at Naples Bay and if it was my turn to go with him, I would drive to the pier, what's called the Cove now, on Naples Bay. I'd get aboard the aircraft, we'd load up all of our collecting equipment, and we'd fly up as far as Pass-A-Grille, or down as far as Marathon. But these weren't always contiguous trips and were sometimes broken up because of his schedule. He was required—a condition of his employment was to be the aircraft pilot. Since he was the one with an aircraft at Sanibel, he was given the job to fly us around.

So, we would fly from Pass-A-Grille to Marathon, and as far inland as the Rim Canal at Lake Okeechobee. He'd land the seaplane and I'd get out on the float and grab a surface water sample and then take a device to get a bottom water sample. We'd fly those back to Naples and I would put them in the station wagon, and take them back to the lab for analysis.

Paul: "So you weren't looking at just red tide, you were looking at other harmful algal blooms in Lake Okeechobee as well?"

Charles: "No, they were collecting salt and freshwater for testing intermediate between Okeechobee and the Gulf to see what chemical levels were. Trying to get a handle on what kicked off red tide."

Paul: "Okay."

Charles: "We didn't really learn anything; we don't know anything more about red tide now than we did 60-whatever years ago. I mean we've changed the scientific name of the organism, we can forecast blooms now, with advanced technology, but we haven't really learned too much.

I remember one time, in my red tide days, Tommy and I flew up to Pass-A-Grille and we had a research vessel attached to the lab called the *Kingfish*, it was a 48-foot Chris-Craft and it had been stationed temporarily up in Pass-A-Grille. They had loaded bags of copper sulfate. We would tie the bags of copper sulfate to the floats, on each float, of the aircraft. There were areas where the red tide organism wasn't at bloom levels but there were fairly sizable populations. We called them a dinoflagellate back in those days, not an alga.

We would land and drift the aircraft; Tommy and I would cut the bags open. We were killing the organism with copper sulfate. So, we knew how to apply copper sulfate on a red tide bloom but it never panned out as a viable solution. It was impractical, the blooms were too extensive. We would use the *Kingfish*. I remember one trip, we went on, the captain was—his name was Mac, and the mate and cook was Herman. They were two seamen characters. I had a habit of getting seasick, so I had to be very careful.

So, my first day on the boat, my first run on the boat, we'd run a grid, we'd go out Gordon Pass in Naples and run a grid 20 to 30 miles out offshore, 20 to 30 miles south, and in this grid, we'd periodically stop the vessel and I would grab top and bottom samples, and go onto the next point. During this trip I got a little seasick, and I'm getting quite seasick, but I was determined that I would do my job and get everything done. Coming back into Gordon Pass, the sun was setting and Herman, being a cook—it was a slow trip back to the dock, it was a long way from Gordon Pass to the dock, and he put on some liver and onions. Here I had just been seasick, but those were the best liver and onions I ever ate in my life.

But then on another *Kingfish* trip, we ran a grid down to Shark River, then went on down to Marathon to spend the night. Tommy flew in the next day, and we had a freezer on board the vessel where we froze those water samples and he took them back to Naples. I think at this point you can cut some of this stuff if you want to—."

Paul: "No, this is good stuff."

Charles: "At this point, I believe I was about nine days short of my 21st birthday, so we ended up at this restaurant near the marina. It was a beer hall, seafood, great food. So, we ate, and they started—there was Mac and Herman and Tommy, and there was another guy there with me, he was a retired dentist, who had taken a position at the lab—I think there were five of us. And they're all adults, and they start slamming beer, and here I am drinking Coca-Cola. They had all had a pretty good amount of beer, and suddenly Mac says—he leans over to me, 'You want a

beer?' and I said, 'Yeah.' And he says, 'Hey, mate,' to the bartender, 'get my man here a beer.' I hadn't had much beer in my life, and after that they had to practically carry me back to the boat."

Paul: "How did you do on the boat afterwards?"

Charles: "I slept all the way back. There were no stops involved. So anyway, life went on, Jean and I, we decided to get married, and so I needed a steady income rather than just a part time job so, I did eat some crow, and I went back to work for the Piper's at the Wonder Gardens. I got a nice increase in my pay. Lester Piper sort of knew that this time I was just passing through, that I would go on to do other things.

And sometime in—I want to say it was early '58, I got home from work, and Jean was expecting our first child and she answered the phone, and she said, 'It's Tommy Wood from Sanibel.' Now I hadn't—I'd seen Tommy a couple of times, but I hadn't really talked with him, we had become very good friends, he knew my work ethic. So, he told me that he'd finally got the clearance to hire someone for the refuge and asked if I was interested. Of course, my first response was 'hell yes I'm interested,' and he said 'well, come on over.'

So, we picked a date and I drove up to Punta Rassa from Naples, I got on the ferry, I left the car parked in the parking lot at the ferry landing, and I went across on the ferry and he was waiting for me on the Sanibel side with an old military Jeep.

Now, I failed to mention, I had been to Sanibel earlier. I first visited there as a kid, it was 1952, when I was in high school in Fort Myers, so I had been around Sanibel. I went into the Bailey Tract in '52—this was for birders, for bird watching. And then I went there a couple of times in '56, '57, Tommy had lived down at the end of Woodring Point, part of the year where he had a private residence, and then part of the year at the Lighthouse, where the office was located. I think he did this for homestead purposes, tax purposes, I would guess."

Paul: "Uh huh."

Charles: "So, I had been to his house a couple times, met his wife, so I was familiar with Sanibel. I knew a couple of guys at Sanibel I went to high school with. One just left there, just moved to Fort Myers, that was Jim Pickens. The other one was Ralph Woodring, who I just spent, a couple of weeks ago, a great half a day with him interviewing him for a video project that I was working on.

So, I knew Sanibel, I knew the layout of the roads and all. I decided that it could work out. He was going to have to hire me as a maintenance man, that's the only thing that they had available. The salary was $1.87 an hour. It would be a condition of my employment that I would live in refuge housing which then was one of the quarters at the Sanibel Lighthouse.

So, I told him that day that I was very interested, that I would have to talk to Jean. I forget how far along she was. She was probably six or seven months then. I went back home, we talked about it. She, being an island girl, it really didn't matter to her. She had lived in much harsher environments than Sanibel would be, even though it would be pretty bad. So, she said, 'Yeah,

let's go ahead and do it, but we can't do it right now, we have to wait until after the baby is born.'

So, I called Tommy, told him that I would take it, but there was a condition, and that would be that I would have to wait until after our baby was born. He agreed. He put everything in motion, all the applications and stuff were approved, and we moved to Sanibel with what little furniture we had in late December 1958. My first day of duty, I believe was, January 5th, 1959—5th or the 6th.

So, when we arrived there, I put my belongings in Quarters 2 at the Lighthouse, and it was in pretty sad shape. It needed a lot of work and that was probably the first time the Fish and Wildlife Service screwed me, literally. When we moved into that house, it had no appliances, and appliances are normally part of your agreement, you'll have a stove, refrigerator, hot water heater, those kinds of things. No mention was ever made of that, it never came out of Tommy's mouth. So, we had to go in debt and go and buy those appliances. I was never reimbursed. When I look back to those day it was like 12 hundred bucks out of my pocket.

So, that was all well and good, and I started work, but as I said the house was uninhabitable. It didn't have anything. There was a little cottage there, a little Coast Guard cottage, opposite Quarters 2, where I would live. We moved into this cottage; it was Quarters 3. It was no more than two weeks. This little cottage was operated as a motel by the Fish and Wildlife Service. When I moved there, it was 96 cents a night. You could call from, if you were an employee of the Fish and Wildlife Service, you could call from Minnesota, if there was an availability and make a reservation. Now you'd spend a week, at 96 cents per night. That little place, the tourists even had an air conditioner, they had all the appliances. So, it was a pretty good deal.

So, we stayed there without paying any fee, Tommy waived the fee. So, then my dad helped me build cabinets and I went out and bought a refrigerator, hooked up a hot water heater, and then we were off and running on that January day."

Paul: "So January 5th, 1959 was a Monday."

Charles: "That's the day I started."

Paul: "Okay."

Charles: "So, it was different— of course we never had air conditioning, this was in the winter anyways, so we didn't need air conditioning, but we didn't even have a heater. I had to go out with my personal funds and I bought an indoor kerosene heater. I don't know why it didn't kill us, and we used that to warm up ourselves. We had no telephone, and there were no private telephones on Sanibel in those days. The office had a telephone that I could use in emergencies. I had to ask for—I forget the term, time and cost (charges), or something on the phone, and pay my share for that call. In the very, very early days we had one television station in Fort Myers. We drank rainwater, it fell on the roofs into a cistern. We also had a shallow well with a jet pump, and we could get water suitable enough, that in a pinch, you could drink it. That was just surface water there at Lighthouse Point."

Paul: "Did it have a lot of sulfur in it?"

Charles: "No, no not at all, it was very good water. The well was right out there, almost in the middle of the parking lot at the Lighthouse. We basically used that for showers. Later on, we had to change the tap for the water system. After Hurricane Donna in 1960, it ruined that water in that well, so we had to do other things.

But it wasn't easy, no air conditioning, the mosquitoes were tremendous, you can't believe the mosquito population."

Paul: "So the mosquitoes were worse than the biting midges, the no-see-ems?"

Charles: "The sand flies?"

Paul: "Yeah."

Charles: "Well, they're two different critters. I learned to cope with mosquitoes, the saltmarsh mosquitoes. I got to where I was pretty much immune to them. I mean they could be all over me and I wouldn't feel them. Even the other day at Ralph Woodring's house, I was sitting there and there were mosquitoes, he was swatting them and I couldn't believe it. I was just standing there, I could see them on me, but I couldn't feel them."

Paul: "But the sand flies were a different matter huh?"

Charles: "Yeah, they were—I got to where I could tolerate the bite, with no lasting indication that I'd been bitten, but they would make me scratch."

Paul: "Yeah."

Charles: "They're bad on Sanibel, but the worst I ever saw sand flies was over at Hobe Sound Refuge, over on the east coast. We did a two night's turtle tagging project there back in '72. I remember that I found a loggerhead up in the dunes. I couldn't stand to stay with her the sand flies were too bad. So, I would run back to the water's edge, where there weren't any sand flies, and get a deep breath, and then run back up to the turtle. Finally, I managed to stay with her long enough each time to check for tags. I'd check one flipper then run back to get a breath and repeat it. It was terrible, terrible."

Paul: "I spent some time on the beaches on the east coast of Florida. I know exactly what you mean. So, when you moved to Sanibel, in January—or no, it was December of '58—."

Charles: "That's when I physically moved, yes."

Paul: "And then you started January 5th, 1959 at the refuge."

Charles: "Right."

Paul: "So you had your first child born by then?"

Charles: "Yeah, she was born—Leslie, our daughter was born on October 17th, 1958."

Paul: "Okay, and I may have missed this, but did you say when you were married to Jean?"

Charles: "Oh, we got married New Year's Eve, 1957."

Paul: "Okay."

Charles: "I took her for a tax deduction."

Paul: "Ha-ha, okay."

Charles: "We've been married—well soon it'll be 63 years."

Paul: "Congratulations."

Charles: "Yeah, it's a battle."

Paul: "So, life living on Sanibel at the Lighthouse was a bit of a challenge it sounds like."

Charles: "Yeah, it was until—well let's see, in 1966, we hooked up to Island Water Association, so we had potable water, and then in '67, I bought a personal air conditioner for our bedroom at the Lighthouse."

Paul: "Was that your first air conditioner?"

Charles: "That was the first air conditioner in the ten years since we had moved there. When I first moved there, we were under South Florida National Wildlife Refuges, headquartered over at Loxahatchee at the time. Bill Julian was the Refuge Manager, and I recall one time—I only would have left Sanibel two times, and there was sometimes pressure put on me. But there were only two times, that I would have left, and that was one time, in 1960 I guess it was. Bill Julian was over for a discussion, talking to me. He came up with this idea that I could switch positions and go over to Loxahatchee, where I would have educational opportunities, and that sounded pretty good so, I agreed to do it, and—but the Regional Office shot that one down."

Paul: "Really?"

Charles: "I'll go into other stories if you want me, about this subject later on. The Regional Office, shot it down, so I could go on. I don't know if I would have been happy going to Loxahatchee."

Paul: "Where would you have gone to school, if you worked at Loxahatchee?"

Charles: "I don't know, if there was some junior college around Delray (Beach) or something, I don't know. That was something that we—we didn't have anything like that here in Lee County at that time. So, it sounded…it interested me; it piqued my interest."

Paul: "Right, well it's interesting that you had an opportunity to go to school, to go to college after high school, and you were sort of discouraged by the draft board and your number was never called, I presume."

Charles: "Oh, yeah, yeah it was."

Paul: "Your number was called?"

Charles: "Yeah, in 1959, I got drafted."

Paul: "Oh. Okay."

Charles: "I got deferred."

Paul: "Okay."

Charles: "Because I had a child."

Paul: "Okay."

Charles: "And then my classification was changed. I don't believe I was ever called up again, I think the classification took care of that.

Paul: "Okay."

Charles: "I didn't have to go in the military. Not that I didn't want to go into the military. I would have gone, of course, it just wouldn't have worked out at that time for sure."

Paul: "Right. So, what was your impression of Bill Julian?"

Charles: "I don't know, I liked Bill, he always treated me fine. That's when we got issued our first uniforms and Tommy and I would fly over to Loxahatchee. I remember we all went down to Boynton Beach or Delray Beach somewhere, went to a tailor, we were all fitted for these really fancy, dress uniforms—Stetson hat. I still have my Stetson, and of course our uniforms of the day were taupe-colored. I liked the uniforms."

Paul: "Yeah. Did you travel with Tommy anywhere else? I know he did, I think some biological surveys, or he flew biologists at other Refuges in the South Florida complex."

Charles: "Yeah, he usually had to pick people up to go with him so there wasn't room."

Paul: "Right."

Charles: "But I would fly with him to the Anclote Key Refuge, I don't even know if that's still a Refuge, it may not be."

Paul: "I think it was transferred to the State."

Charles: "It was part of the school land trade on Sanibel."

Paul: "Right."

Charles: "I would fly to Merritt Island. Curtis Wilson first went to Merritt Island. I was assigned over there, one or two duck seasons. Tommy would fly me over. Then I would fly with him quite often in the Keys, doing great white heron censuses, doing whatever he did on those refuges, we would always stop off at Key Deer, meet up with Jack Watson, and I got an education, believe me."

Paul: "Ha ha, so what was it like to work with Jack Watson when you were down there?"

Charles: "Well, I was only there once when Tommy wasn't there. We needed a Jeep and Jack had a surplus Jeep, and so I went down to tow it back. Yeah, I was going to tow it back. So, I took one of my brothers with me, the one nearest me in age, and we drove down to Key Deer. We met up with Jack, and the first thing he had to do was to show us his gun room.

He had a room—you name it, firearms, he had it. He could tell you where he got everyone of them, mostly from Cubans on some of the islands, where they were training for the Bay of Pigs, that sort of thing. My brother's a gun nut, so he—I bet he still remembers that. And that night I went off with him to—we went off with him to collect a buck Key deer carcass that had been killed on the road.

And he's telling stories, I mean, I heard stories about Jack, and I guess he was the interim manager at one time over at Loxahatchee and they had—Loxahatchee always had a gator poaching problem. Jack was determined that there was somebody out there in the marsh, and he could see him—without any lights. Jack had a Thompson submachine gun, and he sprayed the place up there with…."

Paul: "Oh my goodness."

Charles: "He was different. I think he started out as one of the Audubon wardens. I think he first was an undertaker in Miami and then took the Audubon warden job. Then I guess when Dan Beard hired Jack, he was a patrolman in the Everglades. Then he moved into town from there, and down to the Keys, I think."

Paul: "Yeah, I don't want to get you too far off script, but that was something I wanted to ask you about and that's the Everglades National Wildlife Refuge and the origins of that and how it became Everglades National Park or became part of Everglades National Park I believe."

Charles: "Well, I don't know, I'm not much of an expert on it but, after the war I believe—well it may have been before the war, they set up Everglades National Wildlife Refuge. I found maps of it online but I never did find them all. There are some that show the extent, and basically its footprint is pretty much what it is now, although it did include, I believe, more of the Big Cypress than the original Everglades National Park did.

So, Dan Beard was appointed the first Refuge Manager. I don't know if Jim Silver was Regional Director in those days or not, but he may have been. They set up the headquarters over at Davie, pretty close to the Opa Locka airport, there was a surplus building, and then he started to assemble wardens, Erwin Winte, Jack Watson, Lowe (Claude), one of the Lowes—he had a pretty good staff. I guess he concentrated on law enforcement, trying to stop all the illegal activity. I suppose there was probably plenty of illegal hunting going on out there, especially when the place was flooded. They would run out there with airboats and take deer and those kinds of things.

But when the big push came to create Everglades National Park, I think Beard became—yeah, I think he became the first Superintendent of Everglades National Park. I think in 1947. The Fish and Wildlife Service still had refuges—Key West, Great White Heron, Pelican Island, Sanibel,

Island Bay, and you know those satellite refuges, and there was still a Fish and Wildlife Service presence.

So, by then, the next Refuge Manager, his name—I don't know. (Gerald Baker) He developed a lease plan with the water management district in the State of Florida, so they formed Loxahatchee Refuge and they bought a small parcel of land near the leased land and they built the headquarters for Loxahatchee there. That became headquarters for later South Florida.

We were known on this coast as Gulf Islands National Wildlife Refuge Complex, I believe it was. Florida Gulf Coast Refuges or something like that."

Paul: "Of course you had the satellite refuges around Sanibel, Pine Island, Matlacha Pass, and Island Bay that were established back in 1908 under Teddy Roosevelt, so those were under—."

Charles: "And we had Caloosahatchee that was created by Wilson."

Paul: "Right, in 1920."

Charles: "River."

Paul: "Yeah."

Charles: And they were all categorized as, I think, you'll find in the narratives as Florida Gulf Refuge's and they extended all the way up to Pinellas Refuge and Island Bay Refuge, not Island Bay, Passage Key Refuge in Tampa Bay."

Paul: "Right."

Charles: "So, that was all part of Tommy's responsibility, the satellites. And then he would fly to Chassahowitzka. He would fly to St. Marks to do the mid-winter waterfowl counts, bald eagle surveys and things like that. He was on call with that aircraft to any other refuges."

Paul: "So, on the Bailey Tract there's a canal that's called the airplane canal or seaplane canal, that apparently Tommy would land his plane in with the floats. So, did he store his plane there on the Bailey Tract when he wasn't using it?"

Charles: "In '59 we still had that—oh, in '59 when I started work, they had upgraded, he had a Super Cub on floats and he kept that at his house on Tarpon Bay. He had an electric ramp, a huge dolly, under power. He'd run the aircraft up on the submerged ramp, and then we would pull it up with a cable-assisted electric motor to keep it high and dry out of the seawater.

So then when the mosquito control district began ditching Sanibel for mosquito control in the latter part of '58—in '59 they reached—pretty close to '59—they reached Tarpon Bay Road, and their ditching project didn't follow or stick to any property lines. The ditches just meandered through the marsh, connecting these small water bodies into one, for mosquito control purposes.

But when they got to Tarpon Bay, Tommy met with Wayne Miller, he was director of the mosquito control district. Tommy asked him to dig a ditch 60 feet wide, and 2,500 feet long, going close to the southern boundary of the Bailey Tract.

So, Tommy and I laid it out—they got the dragline across the road onto refuge property, and Tommy climbed up on the boom of the dragline. I had cut maybe four long white mangrove poles from along Woodring Point Road. We put flagging on three of them. And of course, there was no trail in those days. I had to walk from the east end of the Bailey Tract to the west end, through the grass, it took me forever to do it, dragging two of these poles.

When I got down to the end, I had to find the southwest corner of the Bailey Tract. There was a concrete monument. Each corner was marked. I found it and then I paced out—I think I paced out eight feet or something like that from the marker. I started trying the best I could to jab this pole into the ground. And they put a pole—Tommy would put a pole at the eastern end. So that—the plan was for me to walk back midway and put in the other pole.

So, I did, and Tommy lined me up, and they started digging. When they got done, the damn canal had a curve in it. It's still there you know, you can't see it as much, because it's so well vegetated.

I just did this special DVD project. I raised money through GoFundMe to produce a documentary on the Sanibel River. I got some good aerial photos, movie film that was shot in '73. The photographer, I arranged for him to get into a mosquito control helicopter and he goes the length of the Seaplane Canal, you can see that curve, and it was only like two years after we stopped flying that—we flew out of there for ten years, and then we upgraded to a Cessna 180. That was the last seaplane we had. I never flew it, in or around that ditch, but I flew our planes across the state of Florida. I've landed and taken off at Loxahatchee, but approaching and landing on Sanibel was a little bit too hairy, he wouldn't trust me."

Paul: "Oh, you actually flew? You piloted the plane a few times?"

Charles: "Oh yeah, I never got a license, but he'd let me fly it. He'd sit there and read the *Miami Herald*, smoke a (Salem) cigarette and leave me in charge. About 10,000 feet, 'keep a lookout now.' One time we are down in the Keys and he's got me on the lookout and all of a sudden, here came a Navy jet! It had just taken off."

Paul: "Oh that must have been a little frightening."

Charles: "It was. There was only one other seaplane pilot that ever landed in that canal—who ever had the nerve, and that was Special Agent Tommy Hines. He had a seaplane up in Sebring, he'd fly down and land it there."

Paul: "I would imagine that took a lot of skill—."

Charles: "Pardon?"

Paul: "I said, I imagine it took some skill to do that."

Charles: "Yeah especially in the cross winds, it was bad."

Paul: "Yeah."

Charles: "It was scary. And some mornings we could take off to the west, and there were no houses or anything out there then, but we sometimes had a headwind to help. When we flew out to the east, well, those power lines along Tarpon Bay Road were very concerning.

Paul: "Oh yeah. So, when you started in '59, so it was Tommy Wood, who was the manager, he was working under Bill Julian, who was the project leader at the South Florida Complex at Loxahatchee, but as far as who was stationed there, on Sanibel with you and Tommy, was there anybody else? Did you—I think you mentioned to me one time, there was a patrolman that was there?"

Charles: "No, there was a patrolman who lived up at Mango, at Tampa Bay, his name was Bill Lehman, and he was a patrolman that ran through there in the '40s before it became a refuge—until it became a refuge (Sanibel). He would patrol all of the satellite refuges, Pelican Island, and he was under, I assume he was under South Florida."

Paul: "Okay. Was he stationed there at Sanibel, or?"

Charles: "No, no. He was stationed at Mango."

Paul: "Mango, okay."

Charles: "The little town up on US 19, I think. Near US 19, just above Tampa Bay. Not quite as far as Tarpon Springs, I think."

Paul: "Okay."

Charles: "I met him once, he came to the Refuge—he went on to become—he was not there for the managerial position on Sanibel, originally, because he was already an active patrolman then. 'Ding' Darling didn't like him, he was—I think I can see why, he was sort of low key, soft spoken. He didn't have a lot of oomph in his voice. Different kind of guy, and I guess 'Ding' didn't like that. He put his thumbs down on that one.

I know there were several that tried it but couldn't take the environment of Sanibel, didn't stay. Finally, Tommy, it was '49, he was, I believe transferred in from Key West into the position. At first, he lived in a cottage that 'Ding' Darling provided up on Captiva and then the Lighthouse became available. We did negotiate a revocable permit with the Coast Guard, and we kept hold of the Lighthouse for our headquarters."

Paul: "So Tommy started in 1949?"

Charles: "I believe he started in April of 1949. His wife was named Louise and they had one son who was an attorney in Tampa. Tommy had married Louise, I think they had the one son, and then they had trouble, marital problems. They got a divorce and he remarried.

He had another son, one that would come sometimes in the summer. I'm trying to think of his name. I can't. He was maybe 'Chippie' or something. Chip Wood. Then they got a divorce and then he and his first wife, Louise, remarried."

Paul: "So, that's interesting. How did he meet 'Ding' Darling, do you know? Did he ever discuss that with you?"

Charles: "No, he never talked to me about his first meeting with him, but he was a favorite of 'Ding' Darling, and they were very close, and Tommy was highly respectful. I never heard him call the man 'Ding,' he always called him 'Mr. Darling'.

Now, whether one-on-one in the airplane, he called him 'Ding', I don't know. When I was around, I was with them both twice, it was 'Mr.'."

Paul: "Do you remember that famous drawing that 'Ding' Darling penned of Tommy Wood? It was a Christmas card."

Charles: "Yeah, Tommy gave that to me."

Paul: "Oh, okay."

Charles: "When he retired. I kept it in my living room for years. And one day Kip Koss ('Ding's grandson) came and made me an offer I couldn't refuse."

Paul: "Ha ha…So I know Kip Koss—."

Charles: "I did make a nice color enlargement of it—I don't have it on my walls here anywhere, but I have a nice copy."

Paul: "That's one of my favorites. It's ironic that that drawing of Tommy Wood by 'Ding' Darling is on the cover of this Oral History Guide that we use, it was one of the old Oral History Guides, but anyway I'm looking at it right now as I'm talking to you, it's just—yeah, he calls him 'The modern St. Francis of Sanibel Refuge.' Yeah."

Charles: "Yeah. All those depictions of birds. Yeah."

Paul: "So, you said he was from Key West?"

Charles: "No, he was born in Ozona up near Tarpon Springs and it gets really strange because Jack Watson was born in the same town. They didn't know each other, there's quite a bit of difference in their ages, I believe. But they both were born in Ozona. Now, Tommy went by Tommy, a nickname. (His full name was William Duane Wood.) His family was relatively wealthy and I think they—well they may have lived part-time in Illinois, and part time in Tarpon Springs (Ozona) here. His mother lived to be over 100, she lived in an enormous house in Tarpon Springs (Ozona).

Tommy was interested in airplanes, he soloed in 1927. When I was working on one of my books, I did a search for Tommy Wood, it was through Newspapers.com and I found—I found several stories about Tommy. He became a barn storming pilot, the wing walkers, the whole nine yards, and there was a story in one of them where he's in Illinois, somewhere in Illinois, and with three women, he flies I believe to L.A. He decided that they should go sight-seeing, and he flew down into Mexico—I don't know where in Mexico, but anyways, he was arrested for flying too low.

He got released and came back to the US. Then he went into the US Navy, during the war. He became a Lieutenant Commander in the Navy. He flew PBYs (Catalinas) around New Caledonia. After the war he came back and settled in Key West where he started the Wood Seaplane Service. Tommy was the first seaplane pilot that took fishing charters out of Key West. That was a very interesting story. Then I guess he got—somebody approached him to become a labor patrolman for the Service. He was responsible for Key West and Great White Heron National Wildlife Refuges.

Paul: "So, you met 'Ding' Darling when you were there at the Lighthouse office, correct?"

Charles: "Yes, I had a confrontation with a historian several years ago, when I was doing a program where I mentioned that I had met 'Ding' Darling twice. After the program she says, 'I don't understand how you could have met 'Ding' Darling, because he sold everything he owned on Captiva and he moved away in 1958.'

I was sort of taken aback by it and I said 'Well, I'm sorry, but I met the man twice.' So, I didn't have any verification of—that I did, I couldn't prove it. So, when Glen Bond was Refuge Manager, it was—he was the second one to follow—Bob Barber followed Tommy Wood and then Glen Bond.

Glen Bond, in one of his—I don't know, kind of decisions you would call it, but he decided to purge all the old files. Oh boy. So, I had actually been Refuge Manager at Sanibel for probably five years, between—if you talk to someone like John Edie, and he'll tell you.

So, Glen came in '71 or something (1973), John had told me to find somebody to help in the office, so I hired Ede (Edythe) Stokes, who stayed at the Refuge for—practically as long as I did, pretty close. So, we hired her, and Glen Bond told her to purge all the old files, and there were boxes and boxes of them, going to be burned up. Lo and behold, I started going through them, and I found a stack of Tommy Woods' weekly activity reports and I started going through them. I found some from November of 1959, where he talks about going to Captiva to visit with Mr. Darling. This is Thanksgiving of '59.

So there, I had the proof that I wanted that he was on Captiva. And then another one, the next week, I read where, 'Ding' Darling, on December 3rd, 1959, 'Ding' Darling called at the refuge and that's the day that I met 'Ding' Darling. I sat and talked to him and Tommy, drinking coffee and just listening to all the stuff he was interested in for two hours at the Lighthouse.

A few weeks later, Tommy and I did what he called a 'biological inspection' of Pine Island Sound. Early one morning we met at the seaplane, it was still at Tarpon Bay at that time. We flew up, over Pine Island Sound and we counted rafts of scaup and it was really tremendous in those days out on the Sound. We ended up landing on an oyster bar on the north side of Charlotte Harbor, and we got out of the airplane, he put an anchor out and spent—it was a dead low time—we spent about an hour oystering. We filled several gunny sacks full of beautiful oysters.

Then we got airborne again, and we went over and landed at Cabbage Key, he knew the owner of Cabbage Key. We went in there and had coffee. We traded the guy some oysters for coffee, chatted there for a while, and then we took off and we weren't airborne but for a few minutes and

we landed just north of Captiva Pass on the inside of this enormous flat. He took me stone crabbing for the first time. We got a sack of stone crab claws, by hooking them, NOT hooking them, but we would stick a rod down in the burrow and then they would grab hold and we would pull them up and snap off the claws. Those were the first stone crabs that I ever ate.

This was probably on a Saturday. I don't think we would have done this during the week. Back home, he went into his kitchen at the Lighthouse to cook the stone crabs and I went about my business. After a while, I heard a scream, and I ran either from my place or the office or somewhere into the kitchen where he was boiling the crab claws. This enormous claw had him by the index finger.

It was a muscular response by the dead crab claw. Tommy's blood was everywhere. Finally, we managed to pry it off. He would brag for days after that about this stone crab almost taking off his finger. So, at any rate, a few days later, we drove to Captiva with oysters and stone crabs. 'Ding' Darling was staying in the cottage at 'Tween Waters Inn. His wife Penny was gone shopping or something. We sat on the porch, put the crabs and the oysters on the table and Tommy pulled out a bottle of Early Times, I believe it was. 'Ding' put three glasses on the table, and we sat there, probably lunchtime, drinking Early Times, eating stone crabs and raw oysters.

In—well, I guess, a few months later I was conned into becoming president of the Sanibel-Captiva Audubon Society, something that Tommy pulled on me. I recall that he got a nice letter from 'Ding' Darling, it was written to me through him. Congratulating me for becoming president blah-blah-blah-blah, and I had that letter, but I have lost it over time."

Paul: "Well I recall you mentioned—."

Charles: "Can we have about a few minutes break?"

Paul: "Yeah, yeah."

Paul: "Okay, we're back. So, we were talking about your trip to get oysters and stone crab claws and have a little lunch with 'Ding' Darling on Captiva. You said that was in 1959. Did you say December 1959?"

Charles: "December?"

Paul: "Yeah."

Charles: "The day I first met him was December 3rd at the Lighthouse. And actually, it was in the morning and I was actually doing something like, I had the flag pole down, painting it or something, and this car drove in—back in those days, the road came in along the beach, the Gulf beach."

Paul: "What kind of car was he driving?"

Charles: "It was an older car, you know, I don't know what kind it was. I didn't really pay any attention. Of course, that was in '59 but it wasn't like a '59 car, it was a few years old. A pretty big car, but I don't have a clue as to what it was.

So, he came over to where I was standing, and he said something to introduce himself. He didn't give me his name at first, and he said something like, 'You must be the new man, Tommy told me that you'd be coming to work.' and then he introduced himself. Then he started talking about, 'I understand you like turtles and snakes.' And I said, 'Yes, sir.' And he said, 'On the way here I saw a big indigo snake cross the road near the community church.' And he told me that they didn't have a chance to make it on this island because of the traffic that was moving that day. And that was true. And that's about all that was said at that time.

Oh no, when he told me his name, I said, 'Yes, Mr. Darling, I remember you because I recall one of your cartoons, that really, really struck home with me. That was your cartoon of the Key deer being chased.' And, I don't know if you've seen that cartoon, I'm sure."

Paul: "Oh, yeah, it's famous."

Charles: "Anyway, it was done at the behest of the man that was Refuge Manager of South Florida back in those days, to raise public awareness for the plight of the Key deer, so they asked 'Ding' Darling to do the cartoon. Then he went upstairs, I told him Tommy was upstairs in the office. He must have gone up into the office and I lost track of them.

Shortly after that, I could see Tommy sitting in his kitchen, where he sat at the table. He could see outside and what was going on. He hollered out, 'Hey, Charles, come up and have a cup.' So, I went upstairs and sat at the table with them. At that time, they were talking mostly about ducks. 'Ding' Darling was very interested in how many ducks and what species and that kind of thing.

The subject of the conversation then got on sea turtles. He wanted to know how the last sea turtle season had been, as far as nesting success, and how many little babies and that kind of stuff. Tommy told him that I had an interest in sea turtles and I had done some work in Naples as a kid with sea turtles. Then he shifted to me. 'If you're interested in sea turtles, then you can do something to help them, and there are people on this island that will help you both physically and financially. We need to do something because those turtles don't have a chance in hell of making it.'

Tommy told him that I would—in the '60 season—that I would be doing things. So, that's how my sea turtle work on Sanibel started. Basically, at 'Ding' Darling's behest. But nobody was doing things with sea turtles in Florida in those days, it was a new science, you had to develop your own protocol and your own programs. So that's what I did. My program snowballed; mushrooming over time."

Paul: "What year did you start the sea turtle monitoring and research?"

Charles: "I started protecting nests in 1960—and in '59 I had done some things like use Chaperone dog repellent around turtle nests, trying to stop raccoons. I would get kerosene and spread it around the circumference of a turtle nest, just anything to try and get the damn raccoons from taking them—raccoon predation was tremendous."

Paul: "Right."

Charles: "And then we had turtle takers on the island too. I had a Federal Commission by 1960, and then I had a Florida Deputy Wildlife Officer Commission. Tommy and I both had those credentials, so we could enforce state laws which included sea turtle nests. So, I began patrolling the beach to harass turtle takers. They were out on the beach in those days. You couldn't go out on the beaches at night and not see two or three cars. Some of them were fishermen, but some were out there to take a turtle in the summertime.

So, I just drove them crazy by being out there, I guess. I know I saved a few turtles that way. And then in—I kept that up. And then in, I think it was '63, it may have been '64, I had started to tag loggerheads. Starting in about 1960, '61, I was doing an alligator study, capture, recapture on Sanibel, on my own. When I became president of the (Sanibel-Captiva) Audubon Society, they decided to fund part of that study. They paid for some Monel metal tags and some tag applicators. I would attach those tags, and they were the large size 49 tags to alligators. I attached them to the dorsal scutes on their tails. I used up most of those tags on alligators, but I had a few left so I decided in '63 or '64, I would start tagging loggerhead sea turtles.

It was a June night I think, I had my friend George Weymouth with me, and we tagged the first sea turtle on Sanibel. I used those tags until they were exhausted. In the early '60s I had been appointed to the American Alligator Council by the Fish and Wildlife Service. I was the Fish and Wildlife Service's representative on this group, and that's where I met Archie Carr. He was also on the Council. Later, I borrowed a Monel tag series from him. I think in '68 and I applied all of those in '68.

After turtle season in '68, I decided that this thing was getting too big for just me. So, I enlisted some people that liked turtles and we formed an organization and named it Caretta Research. We started raising funds, you know small donations. I continued tagging turtles and I had a hatchery at the Lighthouse and a 'nursery' with small wooden tanks that held live hatchlings at Tarpon Bay. For two years, we head-started little loggerheads at our 'Sea Turtle Farm.'"

Paul: "So, you and I both know what head start means, but for those who don't, could you explain it?"

Charles: "Oh, we took the eggs on the beach within 12 hours (after deposition)—within a 12-hour time frame, and transplanted the eggs into an enclosed hatchery at the Lighthouse to ostensibly prevent raccoons from getting them. Then after they hatched, I had built probably ten tanks down at Tarpon Bay in a fenced enclosure. The private owners of the Tarpon Bay Marina gave me permission to do this. And it's funny, it—that nursery—that nursery was located just about where the new (SCCF) Marine Lab is located.

So, it was our intention to take these little turtles that we hatched at the Lighthouse to our nursery. This was common practice in early sea turtle conservation. We would rear those turtles in captivity until they were close to a year old. At this time, they were thought to be potentially at a size large enough that they had a better chance of survival. This probably wasn't true if you look back, with what we know now. But it was being done all over the world, and then when they would get up to be about eight-ten inches in size, we would tag them with spaghetti tags,

plastic tags, and turn them loose. Whenever we had cold weather, we really had a problem with cold-related mortality in our tanks."

Paul: "Where did you turn them loose?"

Charles: "What?"

Paul: "Where did you release them?"

Charles: "Most of them we released at big public festivities at the Lighthouse. We would put out press releases and hundreds of people would come to the Lighthouse to watch the release. We did that with adult turtles too, if we had rescued them. I once rescued a male loggerhead that was entangled in a stone crab buoy line and took it to the Lighthouse. We measured it, took photos, tagged it, and then released it. The word got out in the community and people came to watch."

Paul: "Ha, yeah."

Charles: "At that time, in '68 when I formed this turtle project I was on the board of the Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation. They came up with an idea; they would like to sponsor us, so they accepted donations. They turned the money over to Caretta Research as grants. And that worked very well.

And then in '71 or so, I had all this data on Sanibel turtles, but I didn't know much about what Sanibel turtles were doing when they weren't on Sanibel. I decided that I was going to go ahead and expand the project. So, rather than depend on the Conservation Foundation for funding, we incorporated as a non-profit, tax-exempt foundation ourselves. By '73 we had 14 units of Caretta Research, Inc. on all major nesting beaches along the Gulf Coast, with volunteers doing the same thing there that we did on Sanibel.

That worked out fairly well, we sponsored the first sea turtle conference in Florida in 1972. We held it up in Orlando. To tell you how big the sea turtle community was in those days. It was Archie Carr, Ross Witham, Peter Pritchard, Frank Lund and I, there were six of us. We brainstormed how to improve the protection of sea turtles in Florida. When we split up each one went our different ways, doing things we had sort of committed to do. By '78, we had the loggerhead on the Endangered Species List."

Paul: "So you were also—you said you were tagging turtles and I understand that you had Permit No. 1 from the State of Florida, is that right?"

Charles: "Yeah. Up until '71-; '72, the State had a general permit. It wasn't specifically sea turtles. I was the only one who was really doing anything in those days. There was some part-time stuff, universities hadn't started doing anything, there were a few individuals on the East Coast, one guy down in the Keys, one person that did some—kept some in captivity out near Tallahassee in Apalachicola—but nobody was really doing anything.

So, that's when we really got started. Did I detour from your question on that one?"

Paul: "No, no, it was—."

Charles: "Oh, my permit. So, in 1972, they issued sea turtle permits. I was issued a sea turtle—back then I was STP-001 and I kept that for 40 years. Finally, I wasn't doing anything anymore, so, I didn't renew it. It had to be renewed on an annual basis. I know Kip Frohlich, the guy that was in charge of the permits. He once worked for the State on Sanibel for a while on manatees, and he was head of the department of FWC that issued permits. I asked him to retire my permit, and he told me he couldn't do it.

I said, 'Well, that's alright.' I still have it, I got it on my license tag, and on my stationary, 'That's all right, thank you, Kip.'"

Paul: "Was that Kip Frohlich?"

Charles: "Yeah. Kip Frohlich."

Paul: "Yeah, you mentioned Peter Pritchard, he passed away not too long ago."

Charles: "Right, I was sad to hear that. Last time I saw Peter, was five or six years ago at an expo at Daytona Beach. I had a booth there, a book booth. He came up and he acted strange. You know, I knew he just wasn't right. I knew that he had just lost one of his sons to suicide, so I figured maybe that was it. Then I said to him, I said, 'Peter, how's Sibille?' There was a long pause, like he didn't know how to answer me, and then finally he said, 'Oh, she's doing fine.' We were real close friends in the '60s and '70s. They came to Sanibel often and stayed at the Lighthouse with us many times.

Paul: "Yeah, he—he was a pretty world-famous herpetologist."

Charles: "Did you ever get to his turtle place up in Oviedo?"

Paul: "I never did, I met—."

Charles: "Oh, that was something else to see if you're interested in turtles, it was unbelievable."

Paul: "Yeah, I don't know if Sibille is maintaining it or not." (She has since given the collection to a California-based sea turtle group.)

Charles: "I think they were trying to find somebody to take it over, I don't know."

Paul: "But yeah, it's—."

Charles: "It was incredible."

Paul: "It's what I've heard. But you did some work over on the East Coast as well with—."

Charles: "Yeah, that's what I was saying, we knew about Sanibel turtles, but we didn't know about their activity after they left the nesting beach. So, we began to enlarge our scope, we had 14 units on the Gulf Coast. And then in '73, we went over to Sebastian Inlet. We cut a deal with the State Park Service. They gave us free camping at the park. I put that project in charge of Ed Phillips. I believe he rented a motor home and he stayed there at the park the first few years.

He strictly was tagging turtles. That was all that he was doing. And then I don't know how many years we did Sebastian, but then, I applied—I think I applied for Melbourne Beach south to

Sebastian Inlet, I believe. Then we started renting houses on Melbourne Beach. But they don't have individual rentals anymore there.

Ed would bring down, he was a schoolteacher, and he'd bring down students from Massachusetts. We got a grant from a prominent foundation in Massachusetts to fund the travel of these kids to Florida. They worked two weeks and then another crew came in for another two weeks. Ed was there for a month, and began tagging loggerheads, and greens. He tagged one leatherback on Sebastian Inlet Beach.

Then he got a job, through my permit. He got a consulting job on nest relocation on John's Island, which I think is south of Sebastian. They were putting in these massive bags for erosion control. He had to dig and relocate any eggs in front of those bags.

But we stayed there for several years, and then Llew Ehrhart, I think he was drooling to get there, and there was a confrontation where one of these school kids mouthed off to some people or something—I never got the full story. That caused a problem. So, we began to back off, and then some guy in the Fish and Wildlife Service was in charge of turtles in those days. I forgot his name. He called me on the phone one day, 'well, I got some bad news for you', he says 'we're not going to let you go back to Melbourne Beach.' I said to him… you know who it is, he was the Fish and Wildlife Service's sea turtle guy for several years back in the late '80s, mid-'80s.

Anyway, he said 'we're going to stop the State from approving your permit,' or something to that effect. That got my hair standing up—of course I had to be nice—Earl, Earl Possardt."

Paul: "Earl Possardt?"

Charles: "Earl Possardt. I said, 'well Earl, you've done me a great favor, because I'm tired of going to the East Coast.' And that was the last of that."

Paul: "What year was that?"

Charles: "Oh my Lord. That was probably, '85, '84-'85, somewhere in there."

Paul: "Okay."

Charles: "Then of course, Llew Ehrhart swept in, but I think it was just—they wanted him in there, is what it was. We weren't doing anything for them, we were collecting the data, I was sharing the data but—through reports, papers."

Paul: "You were sharing the data with Archie Carr, weren't you?"

Charles: "Some of it I did—."

Paul: "You were getting—."

Charles: "Some of it I did on tags, but not too much. Probably because I think I sided on the side of those school kids that caused the problem. I learned more when I met with Llew Ehrhart. We had a one-on-one conversation (over dinner) in '85, or '86. Archie was sick at that time."

Paul: "Yeah, I think he passed away in '89, was it'89? Or maybe—"

Charles: "Yeah, that's probably about right."

Paul: "Or maybe it was—I'll have to look it up, I can't remember. '87 perhaps. (It was 1987). Anyway, Ed Phillips, how did you get to know him?"

Charles: "He was married to my wife's sister."

Paul: "Oh, okay."

Charles: "He was her brother-in-law."

Paul: "Okay. And you said that he tagged a leatherback on the East Coast?"

Charles: "He tagged a leatherback in 1975."

Paul: "Was that the first leatherback tagged? They were pretty rare back then."

Charles: "It was a Monel tag."

Paul: "I'm wondering if that might have been the first one tagged. I mean they're pretty rare."

Charles: "I don't know. Ed published a couple papers based on that leatherback. Let me tell you some of the deals we pulled over there, that you don't know about, and probably no one else does. I don't know how much time you have."

Paul: "As much time as you need."

Charles: "Your recorder isn't full yet?"

Paul: "Ha-ha no, no. I got lots, go ahead."

Charles: "Now, I don't think there's any statute of limitation on this, so, I'll tell you a couple things we did. Let me see…okay, in '75 Ed found this leatherback turtle. I was not there, so I didn't get to see it. I've never seen an adult leatherback. They tagged it in '75, I believe the tag number was CR-1976—no, SI, for Sebastian Inlet, 1976, was the tag number. And unbeknownst to me, Ed grabbed four of those leatherback eggs. He took them back to Massachusetts, and then he fessed up and told me when they hatched, all four hatched.

He put them in an aquarium, and he was the first person who ever raised leatherback turtles in a household aquarium. Three of them survived to come back to Sanibel, and he published a paper on that in the *British Journal of Herpetology*, so it wasn't something we were trying to hide or anything.

So, in '76 he brought these little turtles back—I have some pictures in one of my books—and I want to say they were like a foot long. They looked like little footballs the way their carapace and plastrons were extended. And we turned two loose at the Lighthouse, in '76, and we turned one loose on Bonita Beach. One had died, and I was talking with Kelly Sloan, not long ago, and Ed always claimed that when leatherbacks started nesting on Sanibel, whenever they did, I forgot what year, he always claimed—he's still alive, he's 92 years old. (Ed died 10/4/20)

He claimed that they were his leatherbacks. I told Kelly Sloan that, so I guess she's tied in with somebody doing DNA work on leatherbacks. I think on these last few leatherbacks that nested they had collected samples. I don't know if that will eventually roll out. I've always had a problem with this, one out of 1,000 survivability. To me, that's a crock. Because I don't think anything else can account for the sudden increase in nesting sea turtles here, unless the survivability has increased, commensurate with conservation work over the last 50 years. But that's my two cents worth.

So, here's another little story that I was more involved in. When Ed Philips was working for John's Island under my permit, I applied to the State to give us authority to relocate ten clutches of green turtle eggs to Sanibel. And I think (Edwin) Joyce was the Director at the time. He was a good honest guy; he told me he was going to have to send that one off for peer review. I said, 'Well, will you please send me the responses?' He said, 'I'll do that.'

So, time went on, and I got these two responses, recommending that this permit proposal be denied. One of them was from Archie Carr. Now, you know the history of Archie Carr, he took green turtles from the Caribbean, and moved them all over the southeast. This included both eggs and hatchlings, just whimsically. The original intent was to increase the food source for people. It was no great conservation effort; it was for (human) food enhancement.

Then he switched gears, as he did, coming from freshwater turtles to sea turtles. He switched gears and became a conservationist. Then he spent the rest of his life on that high road. Carr wrote that our request should be denied. To this day, I cannot understand what seemed like double-talk in his letter to support denial. It just blew me away. And the other one, the other suggested denial, was from a guy by the name of Frank Lund, who ran a sea turtle project on—a good sea turtle project, on Jupiter Island, for years and years and years. He was in with Nat Reed and Reed pushed him along a little bit. Lund wrote my proposal should be denied, too. Now, the reason he did that, now get this, 'because the dune systems of Sanibel Island do not have a high enough profile to support green turtle nesting.'"

Paul: "Okay."

Charles: "I nearly crack up every time I think of that."

Paul: "Did he come out and measure them?"

Charles: "The reason this has happened may go back to when we were getting green turtles from the State. I had only head-started loggerheads, but when I closed down the sea turtle farm on Tarpon Bay, I made arrangements with Esperanza Woodring, Ralph's mother. She had that enormous bait shrimp tank at her house. She'd take several clutches of loggerheads every year, to head-start them under my permit. Ross Witham, of the State Department of Natural Resources would bring me several clutches of green turtles, every summer."

Paul: "From where?"

Charles: "From mostly Hutchinson Island."

Paul: "Okay, so you were getting East Coast green turtles."

Charles: "Yeah. Well, this gets better. So, Esperanza would raise the green turtles until I thought that they were large to get that chance, and we'd release them—so this has all been forgotten. I recently gave a gal at SCCF this information, I guess she passed it on to this DNA guy, he really got excited, so there's going to be some work to explore that.

Now, after my permit extension was denied, I gave Ed Phillips under cover orders, I told him—let me get a drink of coffee—I told him that when and if he found a green turtle nest and without question it was going to be inundated at the John's Island site, it was going to be washed out because it's in front of those enormous bags, I wanted him to collect the eggs and bring them to Sanibel.

So, he had that standing order. A couple of years later, I guess it was '76, I was sitting in a city council meeting and I saw Ed Phillips at the door—City Hall was at Periwinkle Place in those days, upstairs, and he waved to me. I asked for a brief recess. I go out there and he said, 'I've got two clutches of green turtle eggs.' I said, 'Okay, we're going to break for lunch shortly, and we'll handle it.' Well, what had happened, he had found these two clutches and he put them in buckets. Ed was a pilot, he rented an airplane at Melbourne Airport, and he flew to the Sanibel Airstrip—I don't know how he got to City Hall. I guess he must have buzzed the Lighthouse and my wife went and picked him up or something, I don't know. But he got a ride somehow."

Paul: "Was that Airstrip still there off of West Gulf?"

Charles: "Yeah, Casa Ybel."

Paul: "Casa Ybel, yeah."

Charles: "It closed down in '78-'79."

Paul: "Okay."

Charles: "So I went, and I tried to figure out what I was going to do with these eggs? My thoughts were of Frank Lund's denial, so I said gee whiz, I better find a high-profile beach. So, we went up to Chateaux Sur Mer, and Anina Glaize lived there. She was on the board of Caretta. So, I went out there on the highest part of her beach and I buried both clutches within about ten feet of each other. We just forgot about it and didn't tell anyone."

Paul: "Did you mark it?"

Charles: "Oh yeah, there were marked. So, when it came time for them to hatch, every night I was on patrol anyways, we'd stop, and we'd look. We never caught them hatching, but we dug the nest after. I have forgotten the exact number. I got it. I think I got it in one of my books. There were close to 200 little green turtles that made it to the Gulf of Mexico."

Paul: "Between the two nests?"

Charles: "Between the two nests. So, that was done, I guess to prove a point. It could have been done openly, if it was done properly. Same for the eggs, it was a good beach for the hatchlings, to get a start. And I also passed that on to what's-her-name with this DNA guy. They were looking at getting green turtle DNA, it might give them something."

Paul: "Well it's a shame you weren't able to write a paper on it."

Charles: "Yeah, I wrote it in—I think I wrote it in my book, *Sanybel Light*. I wrote it, just an account of it. And then in my memoir I was writing—I never published it in a journal. No, but we would have probably gotten in trouble, no question about it."

Paul: "Yeah."

Charles: "Earl Possardt would have gotten our tails, even though it was a valid study—a valid action. That's my opinion."

Paul: "So, now in the year 2020, you know we're experiencing—or the last several years I should say, an increase in green turtles, significantly. And even leatherbacks, we've had more than one leatherback nest I think for the first time, and so that's maybe part of your legacy, Sanibel is no longer a one sea turtle species beach."

Charles: "Yeah, I never thought it would mean so much. I mean I worked, and worked, and worked, for what 30 years, 32 years, and I never had the chance to look at anything but a loggerhead turtle. I turned it over to SCCF in '92, and I don't know what happened. I think the first strange turtle nest was a Kemp's ridley. And then that same summer, I think a green nested, and I forget what year it was, it was the early '90s."

Paul: "But you never saw—go ahead."

Charles: "I expect the hawksbill next year."

Paul: "Hahaha. Well yeah, we've had an occasional Kemp's ridley nest as well. But I was going to ask you if, during all the years that you were surveying the beach and tagging turtles and protecting nests, and all of that, did you see any other species besides loggerheads?"

Charles: "I saw in October of '59, a green turtle at the Lighthouse."

Paul: "Oh, okay."

Charles: "It was in the daytime and some shellers had found it. It wasn't too far west of the Lighthouse, but it was way up in the dune vegetation. A guy claimed the turtle, who owned a shell shop on the island. He took the turtle, nothing I could do about it, perfectly legal, they were only protected during May, June, July, and August, while on the nesting beach. They weren't protected in October.

So, that turtle was taken and probably eaten. It was a guy who had a shell shop on the eastern end of Sanibel, he's deceased. Then one night I found a freshly butchered green turtle an adult. Her four flippers were all removed—it had been done surgically you could see where they used a knife. And that was down at Bowman's (Beach). Never saw any other species. Other than small green turtles that Ralph Woodring would catch and I'd tag, and small ridleys that guys I knew over on Pine Island caught in gill nets that I'd occasionally tag."

Paul: "Yeah, it's interesting, there seems to be a pretty good population of juvenile Kemp's ridleys in the Charlotte Harbor, Caloosahatchee estuary, it would be interesting to get more research on that, as well as—."

Charles: "There is, up around Burgess Bay (NKA, Little Bokeelia Bay—at Pine Island). I had a deal with the Organized Fishermen of Florida. They were primarily mullet net fishermen. Their members gave me frozen catfish to grind up for turtle food when I had the nursery. And there was this one guy, Floyd 'Tootsie' Barnes, a great man. He would save catfish and I'd go out and get them frozen on Pine Island. He would catch a lot of little ridleys, little—16-, 18-inch carapaces, up in Pine Island Sound. Now there's an interesting point. When I first started collecting stranding records of sea turtles, I never found a Kemp's ridley until 1971. At the Lighthouse, we had a part-time worker, he was picking up trash or something and he found one on the Gulf beach of the Lighthouse.

We had to split it up, he wanted the shell and I wanted the skull. So, I ended up with the skull. The carapace was like one millimeter under the largest Kemp's ridley ever recorded over in Rancho Nuevo (Mexico). I still have the skull. That's the first one.

And then in—by the late '80s or mid-'80s, when all the stuff was starting on the TEDs, and these shrimp boats, I don't know if they were doing it to antagonize people on Sanibel. They came trawling right into the beach, off of Sundial Condo. Over the next few days there would be lots of little ridleys stranded.

My official sea turtle—that's a strange thing, my official Fish and Wildlife Service Sea Turtle work—the early Refuge Managers, Tommy, and Bob Barber, they supported what I was doing. The Regional Office sent out a memo that Refuge Mangers could cooperate with my organization.

Everything was going along smooth. The Fish and Wildlife Service would send me—pay all my costs to go to sea turtle meetings and symposiums. They paid my per-diem to travel up to the big Washington meeting in 1979, and they sent me to Costa Rica in '83. I could never understand why. I mean, why? Because they liked me? I don't know. I wasn't doing sea turtles officially, but they covered the cost of sending me to these meetings.

And there was something else, I don't know, but I've forgotten what I was going to say."

Paul: "Well you were—."

Charles: "Oh, yes, and then they—the refuge managers at Sanibel, mostly all of them, let me be the representative of the Sea Turtle Stranding Network for Sanibel. The Regional Office gave their blessings for me to go here there and yonder for the sea turtles stuff. The refuge managers authorized me to do the sea turtle strandings, and one-time Ron Hight let me have an hour to take the refuge boat and go turn a two-year-old loggerhead loose."

Paul: "But there was a—the change in how you were doing the sea turtle work from when you started, wasn't there—I mean you were doing it under the auspices of your refuge work, but then at some point, I guess you weren't able to do it as part of your refuge duties and—."

Charles: "Yeah, I don't know. I still had law enforcement authority until they did away with the dual commission in the late '70s, early '80s. I still had that State commission, so I was still—I used the refuge Jeep up until, and fuel, up until, I guess it was Glen Bond—and the Regional Office had spent hundreds of dollars on plaques talking about sea turtle conservation that I had out on the beach and at the hatchery.

There was no official duty connection, but they were doing it, sending me to turtle meetings which I really enjoyed and I appreciated. But then, Glen Bond said something one day and I thanked the man upstairs I hadn't really connected Caretta Research to the refuge, because all that work and blood, sweat and tears that I had put in. I wasn't about to have someone like him tell me what to do related to my personal time and sea turtles. I came to terms, and I was very happy that I went the way I went."

Paul: "So you started the Caretta Research group? What was the official name?"

Charles: "Well we had incorporated in '73 as Caretta Research, Incorporated."

Paul: "Okay. And then you ran that on your own time basically, is that right?"

Charles: "Yeah I did it all on my own time."

Paul: "Until when?"

Charles: "Until I retired further in '92."

Paul: "And then you at that point, turned it over to SCCF?"

Charles: "SCCF, yeah."

Paul: "Okay."

Charles: "I wanted to turn it over to Eve Haverfield, because she was going great guns with turtles and she knew, she was really important to Caretta Research. She started her own project in '88 or so, over on Fort Myers Beach, but she was still deeply involved in our program over on Sanibel. I offered it to her first, and she wouldn't take it. She probably couldn't have done it; it would have been too big for her."

Paul: "She does Fort Myers Beach and the beaches south, Bonita Beach."

Charles: "Yeah, Bonita Beach."

Paul: "Is that—that's Turtle Time?"

Charles: "Yup. So then, I planned to do it after I retired from the refuge. I had planned to do it for the rest of my life. You know, that was my intention, but then because I had the freedom, I decided there's other things to do too."

Paul: "Yeah."

Charles: "I chose to do other things."

Paul: "So did you approach Erick Lindblad, or did he approach you about it?"

Charles: "No, I approached him. I approached him—I was on the board again, the elected people put me back on the board, I think. So, we brought it up. I had talked to Erick, and he was very interested in it. As far as the board meeting, the deal was they would get a brand-new Jeep, all the equipment, and money. You know the assets. Some dude, who I have forgotten his name, was on the board—'Hold on a minute—. Hold on a minute.'"

Paul: "Okay. I'll pause.

Paul: "That's okay, we're back. So, we were talking about SCCF taking it over in '92, is that right?"

Charles: "Yeah in '92, at the end of the season, and this one guy on the board, he wasn't really into it. He thought it was going to be a lot of extra work, and cost a lot of extra money. So, I told him, what I told them, 'the offer is straightforward, if I could do it, you can do it.' And Erick was for it and they voted and agreed to take it over. They've done a good job."

Paul: "Yeah. When you were—I'm trying to tie up the other parts of the story with regard to the head-start program and—when did the head-start program sunset? I mean that was before you handed it off to SCCF I presume?"

Charles: "Yeah, it was '69-'70. We closed down our facility at Tarpon Bay, but there was continued head-starting small scale at Woodring's in the early '80s."

Paul: "Okay, so, Tarpon Bay was only the head-start program was at Tarpon Bay—."

Charles: "Oh, hold on a minute."

Paul: "Okay, we're back. So, we were just talking about the head-start program at Tarpon Bay, you said was in '69-'70, is that right?"

Charles: "Yeah, '69 and '70, and then it went small scale up until the early '80s in Woodring's shrimp tank."

Paul: "Okay, so from '70 until the early '80s you had a partnership with the Woodring's using their bait shrimp tank for that purpose."

Charles: "Right."

Paul: "Okay, so at Tarpon Bay, that wasn't part of the Refuge yet, was it? In '69 and '70?"

Charles: "No."

Paul: "That was still a marina?"

Charles: "Yup, it was Tarpon Bay Marina."

Paul: "Yeah. Did you meet—did you know Randy Wayne White?"

Charles: "I knew him when he first started as a fishing guide and I read his articles in the *News-Press* that he wrote. But I had never been—we had known each other, but I've never been that familiar with him."

Paul: "Oh, okay, I didn't know if you had run into him when he was working there, and you were down there with the sea turtles or whatnot."

Charles: "No, I think he came there after the sea turtles."

Paul: "Oh, okay. Go ahead."

Charles: "I think he may have come there when Matt Hamby had the lease on the place, just before we bought it up."

Paul: "Okay. One question going back to the earlier days of sea turtle work, when you were commissioned and you were working night patrol, I presume, to protect the nesting turtles from poachers, did you have any encounters with poachers? Did you make any arrests? Did you have any good stories?"

Charles: "I faithfully patrolled the beaches. I had encounters with people I knew, who were out there to get turtles, trying to get a turtle. I only caught one group with a turtle. And it was under almost comical circumstances. I had my wife and daughter, and some friends in the Jeep and we were taking a ride on the beach, looking for turtles. I came on these people, there were two people outside of the vehicle—driving on the beach was permitted in those days—the County didn't close it until 1963. People went out there fishing, turtling, camping, whatever. I recognized the two people and I saw a third person who I was pretty sure I knew who it was running up into the bushes.

And what it was, it was my neighbor, and his wife, the closest neighbor to the Lighthouse. Both were drunk out of their tree. They could barely stand up and they had a line, a brand-new half-inch nylon line tied to the back of their station wagon. At the other end out close to the water was a turned loggerhead turtle with this rope around her flipper. I thought about it, these idiots don't know what they're doing. They're drunk, so I'm just going to fix it by doing this, and I took out my pocket knife, and I cut the turtle loose and turned her over. I then cut this brand-new rope up into three-foot lengths, threw it in the back of the station wagon, and I told them to go home.

That's all I was going to do. Well one of the people with me, was a woman, who was a reporter for the paper—that's why she was there—*The Islander*, when it first started. She was a drinking buddy of Tommy Wood, so I guess the next night, she told Tommy at the bar. I hadn't told him, because I thought that it turned out a big joke. He had come back home from the bar, he had had a few, and he was a little testy, I guess. He asked me why I didn't tell him, and I explained to him that I took care of it…the turtle wasn't harmed, and I couldn't have taken them to jail if I wanted to. It was dropped. You had to see it to believe it.

On top of this, this neighbor was a victim of polio and he couldn't walk well to begin with, but when he was drunk, he was worse. He was an alcoholic, really, really bad. It was something to see. But that's the only person that I ever caught. I never caught anyone digging a nest. But I

chased people off the beach, I warned people in Jeeps driving on the beach, I had no authority to do that. I passed out flyers, those typical things. But I can't think of any other…

Did you read my book, *Sanybel Light*?"

Paul: "Yeah."

Charles: "I tell the story about the big hole dug by a contractor digging fill on the beach. I made a (fake) crawl myself into the water, and these three guys got out of a Model A Ford cutdown and went into the water, hunting for the turtle."

Paul: "Haha Haha."

Charles: "But that's about it, I can't think of any other turtle related—."

Paul: "How about alligators, you did a lot of work with alligators."

Charles: "I did, I never—one night, we were just talking about this the other night. Jean went off to ride with me and the kids. The kids would be asleep in the car. We had no air conditioning, so it was the way to keep them cool. I would go to these different spots at night and look and listen. One night, off of Casa Ybel Road, I could hear there were some people back in there on the river.

I was going to go back in there, but Jean raised such a fuss that I didn't. So, I quit doing that, and took a male friend with me usually to use as a companion. I used to ride with the deputy sheriff, and I've caught fishermen and written them up, and stopped them and stuff like that too. No turtles."

Paul: "So talk a little bit about some of the research work you were doing with alligators and what was the population of alligators like when you first started and how did that change over time?"

Charles: "Okay. When I lived in Naples and worked for the Red Tide Lab in '56 I got a permit from the Game and Fresh Water Fish Commission to tag, measure, and release—I believe was the language—American alligators in Collier County. From '66 until '68, just in the Big Cypress Basin, we caught and tagged—we formed the Collier County Herpetological Society to give us some formal title, and it was just a bunch of young guys. They wanted something exciting to do, so they joined in, and we'd go alligator hunting two or three nights a week.

And we tagged, and measured, we marked the scutes on the tail, we did all sorts of things. We did a little bit of stomach content work."

Paul: "Just for clarification, when you say, 'alligator hunting' that means you're searching for alligators for research purposes."

Charles: "Right, haha."

Paul: "Just wanted to make that clear, haha. Okay, go ahead."

Charles: "For the Herpetological Society with the intent to capture them."

Paul: "Right."

Charles: "We caught and handled about 1,500 alligators over two years."

Paul: "Wow."

Charles: "And these things were probably disappearing, as fast as we could tag them—because people were killing them. So, I came to Sanibel. Tommy knew that I was into alligators. That's another funny story, he says, 'I don't want you playing with alligators as part of your official duties.' I said, 'okay, that's no problem', so I didn't mess with alligators.

The next thing you know, two weeks later, he's got me in a canoe in the Bailey Tract, and the Bailey Tract was all flooded naturally then, 'I need an alligator for the Shell Fair,' and here I am in the bow of the canoe, and he's paddling me and I'm grabbing these little gators, 'what about this one?' 'No, it's too big, throw it back.'

So then, later, I started again on my own time, an alligator, uh, what was the term, a nuisance alligator responder—someone complained about an alligator in their yard and I'd go catch them. They were relocated in some part of the refuge. I did that until '71, when I had a pretty good alligator bite, I swore off it. I only caught a few after that."

Paul: "What were the alligator populations like in the refuge, particularly along the impoundments? Because I understand that the impoundments, before they were reconnected, were somewhat fresh, and perhaps—."

Charles: "They were fresh."

Paul: "Yeah."

Charles: "Yeah, they were fresh, especially the West Impoundment. I took salinities there monthly. I have forgotten what the range was. I remember, I was gator hunting and we went out to do a sweep out there. We never hunted there with any regularity because it was so big an area, and we just didn't do it. Small areas in the refuge, I could do, but not the impoundments.

But anyway, that night that impoundment, the West Impoundment, was full of juvenile pig frogs. I could not believe it. Everywhere you looked there were eyes shining, pig frogs. Their eyes were probably an inch apart. And I've never seen anything like it, and then I don't know what happened, we started—the water control structures weren't put in until the first ones in '79. I don't know if we had a hurricane that dumped saltwater in there or not.

We did have a hurricane that cut the dike. A tropical storm cut the dike in two different parts."

Paul: "Do you remember where?"

Charles: "Yeah, right at the entrance, just inside the entrance and on the straight away after the entrance. It was before the first curve about halfway up. Then another storm cut it again. I want to say, if you left the tower, and you're coming around and, on the left, in the impoundment there's a couple of small mangrove islands. We killed all those mangroves in there (from flooding). Those couple of islands are coming back, I think. Right along in there, I believe."

Paul: "And when was that breached? What year, do you know?"

Charles: "It had to be in the '70s because we had just been given a backhoe, a Ford backhoe, a tractor backhoe, and I think we may have borrowed Loxahatchee's dump truck. I have forgotten…I don't know. Right along in there, there was just a tropical storm. But it basically emptied both impoundments and filled them with saltwater, however way you want to look at it."

Paul: "So was that when alligator populations or presence there in the impoundments changed?"

Charles: "Oh, it changed after we put the water control structures in."

Paul: "Okay, that was—."

Charles: "And the impoundments were changed. Let me see, they had no functionality, I don't think we—I don't remember if we used boards in them at first. I think we used boards in them later and we kept them closed. Since I left, they started tidal flushing completely all the time there. Are they doing that all the time?"

Paul: "They are, yes."

Charles: "Yeah. But that West Impoundment was definitely fresh water, and it had more alligators than it does now. West Government Pond, that's a little mangrove-lined pond that's in the refuge. Its east of the power station right-of-way."

Paul: "Okay."

Charles: "One of the last things I did with Tommy Wood was fun. He had always seen that pond and flew over it regularly. He'd take me flying over it to check for alligators. We'd also fly around looking for the first turtle crawls in the spring. Tommy never got to get into Government Pond, it was just a battle to get into—until BLM did a survey, put a survey line right to it. I took a canoe in there and left it for a while. I began tagging in there, exploring it. It was a tremendous place, we tagged—in one night we tagged 35 alligators, there between four and seven feet, we put a max of seven feet. We didn't want to handle anything bigger."

Paul: "Yeah."

Charles: "I was talking to Jean the other night that I wish I had a good camera in those days, because Paul—there were enormous gator caves in there up under those mangroves. They were five- almost six feet in diameter (the entrance.). Unbelievable, I mean enormous gators that lived in there, and then they must have left there, seasonally, and went into the bay or the sound or something. It was fantastic, but the point is, Tommy Wood had never been there.

So, after the (Electric) Co-op, put in the right-of-way, one day I said, 'Come on Tommy, we're going to do something.' So, I got a little handsaw, some water, loaded the canoe in the vehicle, a pickup truck I guess it was at the time, and then we drove down the right-of-way. I put the canoe in where that body of water is that leads into West Government Pond. We hacked and cut and got into the pond. So, he finally made it, and that was just before he left, it was something I wanted him to do.

I imagine the trees are still scarred where we had cut them off, and it's probably so solid with new growth now. Last time I was in there I walked in there and took Del Pierce who wanted to

see it. Donna Stanek, who was an employee and at the time was overweight, and (I think) he forced her to go with us. We walked all over in it, and I don't know how the girl made it, but she did."

Paul: "So, the impoundments were built in the '60s correct? The Wildlife Drive—?"

Charles: "It was started, I believe in '65, and two machines started, but only one machine made it to the first bend, and they pulled one off, and that was—what '65?—yeah, '65. Colon (Moore) finished the slough, and then he came over and started on the impoundment. The other guy was called off and I think he was put where the Dunes Golf Course is now. They ditched all that back in there, but Colon, went out one side, tied into the end of Wulfert Road, and then came back up the other side and finished it."

Paul: "You said that he was working, did you say the Bailey Tract before that?"

Charles: "No, he never worked in the Bailey Tract, he didn't start with them until they crossed Rabbit Road, I think that is when he started. But he did all the stuff west of Rabbit Road or north of Rabbit Road."

Paul: "Okay, but then he did most of the work in building the levee which is now Wildlife Drive."

Charles: "Right."

Paul: "And at that time it was called, was it 'Ding' Darling Memorial Drive? Or something different?"

Charles: "It might have been, pre-SCCF—it was the 'Ding' Darling Memorial Committee—they had used that term for it—Memorial—they used the term 'sanctuary' a lot. Finally, they were told to stop using it, I don't know if I told them that or someone else did. But it used to really aggravate me.

So, the name was, I think they called it—you may see it on some Chamber of Commerce maps is that 'Memorial Sanctuary' name."

Paul: "Oh, okay.

Charles: "That was never our terminology.

Paul: "Okay. I thought I saw that somewhere. Anyway, can you describe what that project was like? So, Colon was he an employee of the Mosquito Control District?"

Charles: "Yeah, he was a Lee County Mosquito Control District employee."

Paul: "And so how did that—how was that arrangement made to—."

Charles: "Colon finished channelizing the Sanibel Slough, and Wayne Miller wanted to keep the machine operating and busy. He'd only lay him off if there was no additional work. So, Miller got with Tommy and they developed a plan. The 'Ding' Darling Memorial Committee appointed Tommy, he was a member of the committee, as their 'chief engineer.' Tommy took that task to

heart and decided he would send Miller's draglines into those mangroves. It was State land at that time under lease. They would build a large mosquito control impoundment. Doing so, he would give the area public access—that was basically it. I don't think there was any other long-range planning. The project kept mosquito control people working, and accomplished a way for the public to get into the mangrove system."

Paul: "So—."

Charles: "Originally, it was supposed to come in and make a circle—it was supposed to—after it got to Dinkins Bayou that's where the bridge is, it was supposed to circle back and connect to the main drive."

Paul: "Where Indigo Trail is now?"

Charles: "Well that came a little later. It was supposed to connect—yeah, it would have done that, but Indigo Trail wasn't there. So, it was supposed to loop and head back to where Indigo Trail is now."

Paul: "Right."

Charles: "But, some land-owner started raising hell that mosquito control was digging on his property, unauthorized. I don't believe there were ever any authorizations. It was just a go from Wayne Miller and his people went and got the job done. I don't think they had any deeded access to properties. Miller saw it as his mandate from the State of Florida to control mosquitoes. And he did a good job, for sure. So, when they were nearly connected then Colon was told to—he couldn't go across Dinkins Bayou to go straight to Sanibel Captiva Road because the bayou was too deep. So, then they decided to take the dike out at Wulfert Point.

So then, after that connection was made, Colon backtracked and dug the other side of the dike. When he finished, he started digging what is now the Indigo Trail. He got way out where it ends, and another property squabble started. So, the work was shut down. Otherwise, it would have connected to the northern end of the first dike. Wildlife Drive would have been loop instead of like it is now."

Paul: "Right. So where—he had to stop and redirect, that's where Colon's Point is now?"

Charles: "No, no, Colon's Point is in Hardworking Bayou. He had to stop the main dike way out past the Shell Mound Trail, where it loops around where that bridge is."

Paul: "Right."

Charles: "You put a water control structure in there."

Paul: "Right, it's called Alligator—."

Charles: "So that was—."

Paul: "Alligator Curve—."

Charles: "That was going to go—Alligator Curve, somebody named it one time, yeah, and it was going to go straight down that section line along Caloosa Shores subdivision. It was originally going to go straight out that line to Sanibel-Captiva Road. But it was so deep, he couldn't get across that. So, then they decided they were going to go ahead and loop it, about where that water control structure is, probably a little bit west of that, they were going to start digging back toward the dike down near the entrance where the toll booth is."

Paul: "Okay."

Charles: "But then another property lawsuit got started, and they didn't do it. Otherwise, that would have been a loop."

Paul: "So that must have been—."

Charles: "We had not acquired all those tracts of land in there, and they were all under litigation problems at that time, or close to it. But it hadn't been settled. We had to take the land anyway. We bought a few and took some."

Paul: "So—."

Charles: "Excuse me I'm going to have to run again."

Paul: "Okay, we'll pause."

Charles: "Break."

Paul: "Yup, go ahead.

Paul: "Okay we're back and so we were talking about the configuration of Wildlife Drive, as the dike was being constructed and some of the issues in terms of not being able to complete the loop because of complaints from landowners and potential litigation and what not.

I want to just ask you if you had any personal recollections of seeing the work being done in progress, any funny stories, or challenges. The one thing that I know about Colon's Point is that that's where, I guess, you started running into deep water as you said, Hardworking Bayou and was—had to redirect, but did you have any recollections of the work that was being done? Any controversy besides what you've already discussed?"

Charles: "Yeah, there's two points I want to bring up. On the dike, the—when it started—well, let's take this one first. When it was completely encircled and there was no tidal flow into the estuary from those impoundments, no tidal flushing, a conservation group from the mainland was going to sue us and have us knock the dike down.

That almost came to be. I don't remember what stopped it, I believe—I think they took us to court or it may have just been an agreement that we would put in water control structures and get interchange between the impoundments and the estuary. So, there was a lot of pressure from a large—they were called the Lee County Conservation Association. I think the leader, who was a great guy, but he was against that dike, I think he just passed away.

Now, another thing—."

Paul: "Do you remember his name?"

Charles: "Mellor, M-E-L-L-O-R. Last name."

Paul: "Okay."

Charles: "Lee County Conservation Association, I believe. Now, another thing that happened is when the Co-op pulled a slick one on that powerline right-of-way. They went to the property owner, the guy who owned the land, where the current Shell Mound Trail is. Unbeknownst to us, they worked out an easement, to put in that powerline, we didn't know a thing about that when we took title to the land.

Paul: "Wow.

Charles: "And then suddenly they're tearing up the refuge. So, I don't know how they found out about it, but Larry Givens the Refuge Supervisor did. He called me and told me to get with the Army Corps of Engineers and who else, there was somebody else involved...Lee County Electric Co-op manager and the Army Corps of Engineers, and we had a meeting and discussed that right-of-way.

So, we had a meeting—we had a meeting right there underneath the powerlines—I forgot the names of the people that were at the meeting—there were three of us, and I told them that we had an objection to the right-of-way and the powerlines crossing the refuge. We wanted them to move it to the section line—to the west. That would have moved their easement over to run along Caloosa Shores subdivision, where they should have been in the first place. Or we should have—as the current property owner—we should have been notified that there was an easement given. It was for 100 years. It's probably at least 50 years into it now, I guess.

But I hope that when it comes time to renew that easement, that if anybody in the Fish and Wildlife Service has any—you know what—they deny that easement, shut it down, make them move. It was a bad, bad move for them to do that to us without any notification.

So, I brought that up and the guy from the Lee County Electric Co-op started stammering and stuttering, 'we can't do that, we've spent too much money.' And the guy from the Corps of Engineers looked at me and he said, 'If the Fish and Wildlife Service persists in making them move these powerlines, we're going to make you remove this dike.'"

Paul: "Okay."

Charles: "And that was said in all seriousness, this guy might have been a Colonel in the Corps, I don't know. So I went back to the Lighthouse, and I called Givens. I told him what happened and we just dropped it, we didn't do anything.

Yes, I watched that dike being built. I'd be out there every day practically, you know, and either one of us, either Tommy or I would be out there to carry Colon a (cold) six pack of Busch beer. It seemed like a six pack of Busch beer a day (but probably just on Fridays). No refuge funds were expended. Mostly Tommy's and his. Tommy and Colon were good friends, good beer drinking buddies.

I watched the whole thing. Tommy would fly Colon in the refuge seaplane, and they'd pick a spot from where he was to where he would go. Tommy picked the outer edge of the mangroves at Hardworking Bayou on the west side of the opening, for him to head. He'd point out where he wanted to have a little bit of road and dike—where people could see out through the mangroves and over the mangroves to the sound. Sort of like we have now at the powerline."

Paul: "Yeah."

Charles: "Colon started digging and he hit coquina rock that was pretty hard, and then got into deeper water. I think he was more afraid of tipping than anything else, or the sudden loss of soil under his mats. He didn't want to fall off into deep water. One dragline did turn over out there. Not out there, it turned over at the Dunes, I think. Bad operator, I guess he hit something wrong and turned the machine on its side.

And that's about all I can remember."

Paul: "Can you talk a little bit about the dredge work that was done at the Bailey Tract? Actually, before we talk about that, a little bit of history on the Bailey Tract, so that was owned by Frank Bailey, and the property was acquired with the interest of creating some waterfowl habitat, is that right?"

Charles: "Right. Now, it's my understanding that 'Ding' Darling purchased an acre first of the Bailey Tract, where he could put his well, so he went ahead and bought the acre, paid for the well, flowing well—."

Paul: "So that's—that's where the kiosk is now? Right behind the kiosk?"

Charles: "Yeah, right near the kiosk. And then the Refuge System bought the Bailey Tract after that. I don't know if 'Ding' Darling ever got reimbursed or anything. Probably not."

Paul: "Do you know if the purchase was done with Migratory Bird funding? Duck Stamp funds?"

Charles: "You know, I want to say that it was, but I don't have any evidence of that. I believe it was."

Paul: "Okay, so then, who came up with the plans for creating the ponds and?"

Charles: "The first thing they did, after they acquired it, they came over and—Gerald Baker, he was the manager in South Florida back in those days—he came over with the crew, and not only a tractor, 600 and something sticks of dynamite, caps, and you name it. They went into the Bailey Tract, it was dead, dry season. They pushed up the Spartina grass, created little dikes, nothing more than Spartina grass, there wasn't much topsoil in it. So, they made all these little compartments, and then they took the dynamite in several places, notably around the mangrove head and blasted potholes.

So, that was the first aspect of management. Once it flooded, I believe Tommy planted millet, and rice, and things like that, trying to improve it for waterfowl habitat. Then they put in a

second well, I tried to show you guys where it was, that time we were in there, and I couldn't quite find it."

Paul: "Right."

Charles: "That well must have been put in, in like '56 or so. When I came over in '58 to decide whether I wanted to take the position there was a well driller and another well, and I asked you to send me a photograph of Tommy and that well. Then he put that third one in. Those things put out just a trickle of water, there was water right at the wellhead. There was always a little pool of water, but they had great intentions of flooding these compartments, but it didn't work.

And years, and years, and years later, Larry Givens, while on an inspection pushed for an electric pump at the seaplane base to pump water from the Seaplane Canal into these compartments and flood them with that, but that never went through.

Back then the mangrove head was a fantastic bird rookery when I went there. Thousands of egrets and herons and anhingas roosted there every night and also nested there. And slowly eutrophication from all the vegetation caused it to dry. It was never successful as a rookery once it went dry, the raccoons and everything else got in there.

So, about that same time, Captiva Road was washing away, in front of 'Tween Waters. I mean it was almost all washed out, and Lee County needed a source of fill. I forget who was manager, but Tommy Wood most likely was still on duty. I want to say Bob Barber was there during some of the negotiations with Lee County. Bob's on the island you know—part of the time. They bought a condo."

Paul: "Oh, he's come by and visited the refuge."

Charles: "Yeah, he bought a condo over at Nutmeg Village."

Paul: "Oh, okay,"

Charles: "I know he was still here, last time I saw him was a couple years ago. I saw him at—he was at Porter Goss' 80th birthday party, last time I saw him. That's been three years ago.

So, Lee County needed fill, they were hauling it from the mainland to Captiva. They had to go out to Alva and stuff. It was costing them a fortune. So, I think it was Bob who negotiated a cooperative agreement where they would dig water bodies for us, and have the fill, and at the northwest corner of the Bailey Tract, where that pond is, and that big old grass area, is where they stockpiled their fill. They moved it, when they needed it, to Captiva to fill and support the road.

They dug in the Bailey Tract, they did the Ani Pond, they did that long slough that runs to Tarpon Bay Road, I think that's all they did at that time. And then when the new office and maintenance center were going in, that contractor needed fill. Del Pierce let them go into the Bailey Tract and they dug that long water system to the west of the mangrove head. Those two long water depressions that run east and west, south of that stockpile site, they were dug by Fish

and Wildlife Service contractors. Those two areas that are long, they are probably all grown up now.

Paul: "And so the area that was used for fortifying Captiva Road, that was where Smith Pond is now? or?"

Charles: "Yeah, (Refuge Planner) Chris Zajicek named that 'Roaring Smith Pond.'"

Paul: "Why is that?" (A farmer named Smith homesteaded there.)

Charles: "That's where the stockpile was and all of the dirt from that pond, and all of the dirt from the mangrove head, Ani Pond, that long slough, that all went to Captiva."

Paul: "Okay. Well, if you want to use this as a good breaking point, you can."

Charles: "Alright, that will work for me."

[PART 2]

Paul: "This is the continuation of the oral history with Charles LeBuff on August 21, 2020. We're doing this oral history via telephone due to the Covid-19 pandemic. And Charles is speaking from his home in Fort Myers. And I'm speaking from my home on Sanibel at J.N. 'Ding' Darling National Wildlife Refuge.

So, Charles, before we pick up where we left off, I think you wanted to revisit something that we covered that you didn't have all of the information for. But you do now?"

Charles: "Yes. I couldn't think of, early on, but I couldn't think of the herpetologist at Harvard and it just didn't come to mind, didn't fit in place at the time. But that was Arthur Loveridge."

Paul: "How do you spell that?"

Charles: "He was not a PhD. He was an English man that specialized primarily in African herps, I believe, but he was there at Harvard for about 20 years."

Paul: "Do you know how to spell Loveridge?"

Charles: "Yes, it's L-O-V-E-R-I-D-G-E, Loveridge."

Paul: "Okay, thank you. And he was the Curator, you said, of Herpetology at Harvard—."

Charles: "Yes, Curator of Herpetology, at the Museum of Comparative Zoology at Harvard."

Paul: "It's a very fine museum they have there."

Charles: "It's beautiful. I haven't been there in 60 years. But when I was a kid, I'd go through there every chance that I had."

Paul: "I was fortunate to visit a few years ago and get a backstage tour, so to speak, of their collections and ornithology, which was really quite impressive, including some extinct species. But I'm sure their herp collection was equally impressive.

Charles: "It was, especially for a 14, 15-year-old."

Paul: "So that was somewhat of an inspiration then."

Charles: "It was, it certainly was."

Paul: "I can see why. I believe we left off talking about the Bailey Tract and the improvements that were being done in terms of wetland creation and also some of the ancillary benefits from that to the local community in terms of restoring roadways and building up roads and even, I guess, providing fill for the new office. Is that right?"

Charles: "Yeah, initially it was a cooperative agreement between the Service and Lee County. Captiva Road was eroding away at a terrible pace and they were hauling fill to stabilize it from the mainland. And they came to us and we worked out this deal that they would dig spoil from the Bailey Tract, stockpile it in the northwest corner, and then, when needed, they would haul it to Captiva.

And then we also induced them to haul fill and put us a new road in at the Lighthouse and elevate some of that land. And then later, in the early '80s, when the new maintenance center and office were being built, a contractor was allowed to dig additional fill to raise that construction level from the Bailey Tract. It was not quite as deep as the county went, it was just basically scarifying off the topsoil, getting it down to good shell and sand, and hauling it for fill."

Paul: "So that was—that resulted in the creation of Smith Pond and the pond where the mangrove head is and then also Ani Pond, is that right?"

Charles: "Ani Pond and the mangrove head itself. There's a long waterway that runs east of the mangrove head, they were all included and then, of course, so called Smith Pond, in the northwest corner, they were all part of that county fill operation. And then the spoil, surplus spoil, was piled just to the east of the existing pond where that middle area is just grass."

Paul: "The area between Tarpon Bay Road and the mangrove head?"

Charles: "Well, along Island Inn Road."

Paul: "Oh, okay."

Charles: "Smith Pond, being on the northwestern boundary of the Bailey Tract, and just east of that, at that large clearing is where the spoil was stockpiled."

Paul: "Gotcha."

Charles: "You know, there was a tremendous pile there. I don't know why we never got any photographs of it. I've never seen any, but it was probably 30 to 40 feet high. But the county dug—they didn't use a dragline, they used pans to excavate it and haul it to the storage site and in doing so, they also raised the elevation and widened some of the trails or dikes."

Paul: "Right."

Charles: "It was effective, and really, I guess you'd say improved the Bailey Tract for public access, and for availability of permanent freshwater.

And then of course, the Seaplane Canal, on the southern end of the Bailey Tract, that was dug by Mosquito Control, and the spoil piles, left by that, on each side, we let the county go in there and dig, remove most of those spoil piles, to level it off. There may still be a few spoil piles there, I forget.

Paul: "And that was dug when? Do you know or do you remember?"

Charles: "This whole thing was dug like between '71 and '76, back in that era."

Paul: "Okay. And the canal that connects the Sanibel River or Slough to the Seaplane Canal, that was also dug by Mosquito Control?"

Charles: "Yeah, well the Sanibel Slough itself wasn't dug by Mosquito Control through the Bailey Tract. It was the waterway—was diverted and became the Seaplane Canal. The slough, if they had dug the actual slough as they had done everywhere else, they would have gone in and followed it through the Bailey Tract and tied in its lower water bodies.

But it was—they weren't allowed to dig in the Bailey Tract. They were convinced that they should dig the Seaplane Canal."

Paul: "But the canal that forms the western boundary of the Bailey Tract, that was dug by Mosquito Control?"

Charles: "Yes, that was Mosquito Control and that ditch runs all the way to the water control structure on Tarpon Bay. It's almost a straight line."

Paul: "Right. And that was also to redirect the flow of what, I guess, direction was to Tarpon Bay through the weir."

Charles: "It was to provide a continuous water system where water could flow in that part of Sanibel, reach Tarpon Bay to run off."

Paul: "The construction of the weir, was that around the same time, in the early '70s?"

Charles: "The first weir was built sort of separate. It was dedicated in 1959. I went to the dedication with Tommy Wood, and then they went back over it into the slough and continued digging in the slough and connecting it up. They put in metal culverts under Sanibel Captiva Road. Back then, it was known as Captiva Road."

Paul: "And the newer weir, do you remember when that was put in?"

Charles: "Oh, geez, no I don't. I believe it was done after I retired, I believe it was 20-25 years ago, but don't hold me to that.

Paul: "Okay."

Charles: "And then what happened, Mosquito Control was holding the water high and yards were flooding. People had to wade around in their yards to get to their houses. And eastern Sanibel, especially around the trailer park, would flood every summer.

And the fellows there at the trailer park, would sneak in and remove some boards so the water could run off. But back in those days, they kept the water level in the slough pretty close to where it should be. Based on the early studies of Maurice Provost with the Florida State Board of Health Sanibel mosquito studies.

And then in '74 when the city incorporated, consulting engineers convinced the city that the elevation should be lowered to reduce homesite flooding. And I don't remember exactly how much it was reduced, but it was reduced enough to let vegetation growth take off in the slough and grow, plants that were never there, at least in any density."

Paul: "What was the wildlife like on the Bailey Tract at that time? Did—was there much in the way of waterfowl ever that came to the Bailey Tract? I know you mentioned, I think out in the Pine Island Sound, San Carlos Bay area, there were rafts of scaup, I believe you may have mentioned."

Charles: "In the late summer, early winter, when the migrants were here, those pools in the Bailey Tract had a lot of ducks, they were mostly pintail, Florida ducks, blue-winged teal. I can't, off the top of my head, think of anything else that was there, in any numbers. Probably wigeon.

But the mangrove head in the Bailey Tract, which is sort of centrally located, that was a natural stand of red mangroves that had grown in there over time and it had a—sort of a moat around it most of the year that prevented raccoons from getting over to this island that it formed and it was a spectacular night roost for ibis, herons, egrets.

I've spent many evenings there watching them come in by the thousands and slowly over time, cattails, of course, took over and it went dry in the very driest part of the year. That's where they did the blasting, back in the early '50s, trying to create potholes.

And even during all that work, the birds were still nesting in there seasonally. And I don't know what year they actually suddenly left.

It was in the early '70s, but the alligators that were in that system were killed. There was a lot of illegal alligator take on the island for the size of the alligator population. And then raccoons and things got in there and then the mangroves changed because the birds weren't there, they were modified. You know, they extended their foliage and they didn't provide any good nesting sites anymore.

And, after we had the county build a new moat around it, we sort of hoped that these colonial birds would come back in. But as far as I know, they never have. The configuration of the mangrove head was just too dense, and I guess not acceptable for them. No, I haven't been there for 10 years, I don't know, there could be nests and young growing up."

Paul: "Not in those numbers, but there's something—I don't know, did you have a black-necked stilts nesting back then?"

Charles: "Yeah, we had black-necked stilts, quite a few of them. And I remember in '61, I think it was, I became president of the (Sanibel-Captiva) Audubon Society and about '63, '64, somewhere in there, we had quite a few stilt nests just to the south of where the observation tower was located, where the kiosk is now, that water body is all grown up now, but back then, it was open during the high-water season, and when it would dry up, the stilts would get in there and nest. And we had about five or six nests just in that one small area, then it started to rain.

So, a friend of mine and I, Marshall Tabacchi, he was just an island resident, run a motel. We built these little platforms, they had four stakes, and we put a hardware cloth platform on them and we went out, we put them near the nest. We put a shovel full of muck from the bottom of the slough on top of that, then we shoveled the nest and put it up on top and those eggs hatched. So, it was a pretty good deal on that one. Otherwise, they would have drowned out."

Paul: "Do you recall what other types of wildlife was common?"

Charles: "Well, we had a few otters, this was just about the time when with all of this new fresh water, permanent fresh water coming in, the otter population started to increase on the island because before of that. And there were very, very few of them. Of course, we have raccoons, and marsh rabbits. There were no bobcats on the island during those years.

Alligators, no crocodiles, snakes, there were indigo snakes just about everywhere on the uplands, I could go out almost any day I wanted to and catch an indigo snake. There were open areas in the uplands where gopher tortoises reigned, so indigos were quite common."

Paul: "Was this on the Bailey Tract?"

Charles: "Pardon?"

Paul: "On the Bailey Tract or elsewhere in the refuge?"

Charles: "No gophers on the Bailey Tract in those days, there have been gophers there in recent years, especially along the Seaplane Canal."

Paul: "Where that old spoil pile is."

Charles: "Yeah, where the old spoil pile is."

Paul: "How about rice rats?"

Charles: "Yeah, there were rice rats, something you never saw, but you'd see one dead on the road, on Tarpon Bay Road occasionally.

We stocked Sanibel, Fish and Wildlife Service, Welaka National Fish Hatchery, we stocked Sanibel with largemouth bass, and bream, and there were probably a few other panfish mixed in, in the early '60s, I want to say '61.

But before that, there were no freshwater fish other than garfish. Garfish were found there. And of course, small minnows, mollies, gambusia and those kinds of things, killifish. And I recall one time in an open body of water, I mentioned where the stilt nests were, we relocated them, but

that had gone completely dry, in May, probably May of ’59, I’d say because I know that this was early on, after I arrived, and I found a dead freshwater eel in the Bailey Tract, only one, one time.

And there were no—the only frogs that were in the Bailey Tract prior to about 1951, were leopard frogs, green tree frogs, squirrel tree frogs, on the uplands there were a few southern toads, there was no known gopher frogs on the island. And then in ’51, Tommy Wood brought 49 pig frogs from Loxahatchee and turned them loose in the Bailey Tract. And of course, they established very well and they're everywhere in the wetlands.”

Paul: “To this day.”

Charles: “To this day, yeah.”

Paul: “So you mentioned indigo snakes, I know that you and Chris Lechowicz had done a book on Sanibel’s herps, and one of the interesting things that was discussed was the indigo snake and how, as far as we know, they've been extirpated from Sanibel Island, yet they're still present on some of the other outlying islands, North Captiva. You could probably say better than I could where they are.

But, did you see much in the way of mortality? I know Chris had talked about roadkill as being a major factor. I was also curious is whether since they were popular in the pet trade if illegal take was also a factor.”

Charles: “Oh, I'm sure there was illegal take, because they were, the right conditions and the right time of year, they were very easy to find. I mean, there was a population at the Lighthouse back in those early years. And my kids were always catching indigo snakes and putting them around their neck and that kind of thing.”

The last indigo snake that I saw was a dead hatchling. It was located right there at the 4-way stop sign of Palm Ridge, San Cap and Tarpon Bay Road. That was in the late, late ‘80s. I think the last indigo—known indigo on Sanibel, was killed on the refuge, on the Indigo Trail, that’s how it got its name, I think a bicyclist ran over it and killed it.

I don't—I can't remember great numbers of indigos being dead on the road. I don't recall ever seeing too many. But I'm sure there were many hit by cars that crawled off the road. Anything on the road was struck, I’ve seen people purposely strike gopher tortoises, and box turtles on the road through the years.

There was a couple of places I thought where there might be indigos left on this island, and I told Chris about that. I don’t know if he ever checked it or not.”

Paul: “I hope so.”

Charles: “Because their territory is so large. That once they get to the boundaries of their established territory, they’re going to have to cross the road somewhere along the line.”

Paul: “You mentioned at that time in the, I believe, the ‘60s and ‘70s, correct me if I'm wrong, there weren't any bobcats on the island?

Charles: “Right, there weren't any bobcats on Sanibel. There were bobcats way back in the early ‘20s, apparently based on just casual information provided number one, by Francis Bailey. And then in ‘26, when the white-tailed deer that where there, that were supposedly all drowned, bobcats must have been drowned too, because we didn't have any bobcats when I moved to Sanibel. And that’s been confirmed by, Ralph Woodring. He supports that. If anybody knew what was on this island, Ralph Woodring certainly did. (Sanibel bobcats survived Hurricane Ian, in 2022.)

And then in the early 1970's, C.R.O.W. had a bobcat or two, and their operation was not up to snuff, and they released bobcats. They may deny that, but that's basically a known fact among us on the Refuge. In fact, we came close, because of those kinds of things, we came close in the ‘80s, the special agents wanted to pull their permit, but Ron Hight, I think, sort of helped C.R.O.W. save their tail.”

Paul: “You also mentioned crocodiles and of course, there was a very famous crocodile on Sanibel for a number of years until about 10 years ago, or so.”

Charles: “Yeah, 2010.”

Paul: “Yeah. Ten years ago.”

Charles: “There was a crocodile caught in McIntyre Creek on the Refuge back in 1936 by commercial fisherman, mullet fisherman. And there have been reports of crocodiles over the years.

But this one that took up residence, first showed up in 1979 and later she began to build nests and deposit infertile eggs. None ever hatched. The air temperature or water temperatures got down into the 30s in 2010, she was found dead on the bank of the Sanibel River.

Oh, that's something here, I don’t know if it’s applicable or not, but presently there are two crocodiles on Sanibel. One was a release, brought down, as you know Paul, from up around Englewood.”

Paul: “Right.”

Charles: “The other one moved in naturally, it was originally a nuisance crocodile at Naples, but it was caught and released in the Ten Thousand Islands and found its way to Sanibel. I'm happy to say, I was sworn to secrecy on this back in March.

But I think the word is now out, on July 2nd of this year—July 1st of this year, a biologist at Rookery Bay, a friend of mine, collected 16 young crocodiles that originated from a nest near Goodland about 60 miles north of the normal nesting range of the American crocodile.

And when they went out to check it, they also found three yearling crocodiles, so apparently the nest had been viable in the past. They're in the process of writing that up, so, I was sworn to secrecy on it, but for the time being that can be included it I suppose.”

Paul: “Well, that's good to know.”

Charles: "Yeah, it's just a matter of time and I wrote such in my crocodile book, it's only a matter of time. And I'm just hoping that the two that are on Sanibel, I believe are females, I'm just hoping some male that's around there, will catch the odor and do the job."

Paul: "Can you describe what it was like when the crocodile was discovered in 1979?"

Charles: "Yeah, a young kid from Pennsylvania photographed it out at the far end of the drive. It's called Alligator Curve, near where that last water control structure is. And George Campbell, he's deceased, he wrote an article on it and published it in *The Island Reporter*. And that crocodile moved back and forth between Sanibel and Pine Island and it became a nuisance on Pine Island.

The State Game Commission in those days caught it, took it down to Collier-Seminole State Park and released it and within a few months it was back permanently, apparently, pretty much permanently on Sanibel. It was the largest female American crocodile ever known from Florida. And you and I saw it that day in that person's yard, that was really, really fascinating for me because I hadn't seen it too much.

The first day I saw it, I was out on the refuge. We were—each staff member would take turns giving tours to the public on the refuge, and I was out probably pretty close to Colon's Point, and Ede Stokes radioed me and told me that George Weymouth had seen the crocodile. So, very cordially and quickly I ended my tour. I raced out to where George was. And he told me where he had seen it and he had to leave. And I stayed there for over an hour with the refuge camera and I never did see it until suddenly what looked like a knot of buttonwood had a glaring eye alongside of it.

So, I got a shot of the top of the crocodile's skull, its head. I think I took 14 shots. And then the crocodile moved over into a little pond, Lime Tree subdivision near where 'Bird' Westall lived, and it took up residence there, and that's where it started nesting. And one day, Ron wanted to, I guess Ron wanted to see the crocodile."

Paul: "Ron Hight?"

Charles: "Ron Hight, yeah. And we took one of 'Bird' Westall's canoes and the three of us paddled out into this pond and we saw the crocodile. But she was very timid at that time, we couldn't get very close to her. But over time she acclimated to people, and she would try to bask along the dike. And she was really quite a sight for years."

Paul: "So are there any recollections of roseate spoonbills nesting in the Refuge?

We've known them to be present most of the year round, foraging and in the impoundments, but I don't know of any nesting except for in Tampa Bay and in Florida Bay. They seem to be the two populations that the birds that forage here are from. I was just wondering if you had any knowledge of spoonbill breeding activity or was it always that way that you recall?"

Charles: "I recall that they were mostly—in those early years, mostly seasonal. We didn't have the drive then, of course. We surveyed by flying over. We'd see them on the flats at low tide. But

there was a little pond, a little round pond that was called Government Pond, and it was located near the end of the, I guess what, Indigo Trail now.

You could walk from the end of Indigo Trail, you'd have to break off through the mangroves, and you could walk to the pond, and they were often loafing there when we were doing a bird survey. And then once the drive was put in, you could get out there. They were seasonal, they weren't there in the early part of the year. And then by winter, they would be seen fairly commonly, and of course, everybody would get excited about the spoonbills. One time, I did a survey, I was out there at the West Impoundment at the right time and I don't know what year it was, it was probably in the late '70s. And I counted 343, and that was the largest count we had ever recorded. As far as nesting goes, historically, there was nesting on the south side of Charlotte Harbor, a place called Little Patricio. I think it's '39, that was in '39, but I think it's eroded away. Like you say, in Tampa Bay and the Florida Keys.

But I heard somewhere or read somewhere that there has been some spoonbills nesting, maybe in the Caloosahatchee, one of the rookeries close to Fort Myers. But I'm not sure. I didn't really pay that much attention. But there was an article in the *News Press*, and they mentioned roseate spoonbills. But I of course, I don't get out in the field like I used to, so I never followed up on it."

Paul: "Are there any other recollections of wildlife from your time working at the Refuge that may differ from what you know today?"

Charles: "Of course, there's more diversity now with coyotes, bobcats, a black bear recently, of all things, raccoons were overly abundant and one of the major scourges of Sanibel in the early era was feral cats.

Feral cats were everywhere, you could drive, going to the beach at night, drive down Tarpon Bay Road and there would be cat eyes and cats running across the road. It was unbelievable, there were so many cats. Prior to their peaking, I guess they peaked during the late '50s, early '60s, we had meadowlarks nesting on eastern Sanibel. There were bobwhite quail. Some quail had been introduced by a private individual, but they never survived because of the feral cats.

And then once the bobcats started in the '70s, I guess they started eating those feral cats and the city had a policy to trap and neuter the cats. And there probably are no longer any feral cats on the island."

Paul: "That's amazing that the Sanibel Island rice rat survived if the feral cats were that prevalent."

Charles: "Well, you know, the rice rat's habitat probably wasn't frequented that much by the cats. But that's my thought."

Paul: "Yeah, that's a good point."

Charles: "I think when that slough flooded, the rats could survive. But the cats didn't, didn't enter it, I would guess."

Paul: "Thinking back on the Bailey Tract, I remember some old photographs of a tower there was that tower built before you started, or did you help build it?"

Charles: "No, it was built before I started. I think it was built in, I want to say '51, '52 somewhere in there. And we tore it down in 1976.

But I could stand on that tower and in '59 and Sanibel was still a panorama of grass. I could see, there were a few Australian pine trees along the Gulf because up until '60 there was a road that was south of what is now Gulf Drive, and there were Australian pines planted along that road and they weren't thick so you could see the Gulf of Mexico.

You could even see the Lighthouse from that tower, that's almost five miles away. It was just clear, clear habitat. And then slowly, those pines did their thing, especially after Hurricane Donna. Donna distributed the seeds everywhere, especially along the Gulf Beach."

Paul: "The tower was torn down for safety reasons in '76?"

Charles: "Yeah, myself, I rebuilt the stairs on it a couple of times, replaced railings, and then when Glen Bond was Manager, he decided to do away with it."

Paul: "Was it an attractive nuisance in terms of people going out there at night?"

Charles: "Yeah, I saw a note on Facebook the other night, there's a photograph of the tower on Facebook with some people standing up on it. One of the kids I know that grew up on Sanibel said that that tower, was not used exclusively for birdwatching. It was a popular place after dark. Of course, I'd go in there occasionally after dark looking for alligators or something.

We didn't know it was going on there all the time. And then the Alice O'Brien tower probably had the same reputation before we started closing up the drive and dike."

Paul: "That's the tower on Wildlife Drive?"

Charles: "Right."

Paul: "Can you talk about Alice O'Brien? She was…wasn't she a friend of 'Ding' Darling's?"

Charles: "Yeah, I don't know that I ever met Alice. I may have when I was at Audubon. I met a lot of people. She was an old maid. she was the heiress of a huge lumber fortune. And she had a yacht called, I think it was called *Woe Be Gone*. And each winter she would come from, I think, Minneapolis down the Mississippi River to Captiva and spend the winter on Captiva, very close to the Darlings. And then in the spring, her captain would take her back to Minneapolis.

And after 'Ding' Darling had died, I believe she was going from Minneapolis to Des Moines on her boat to make a contribution to the 'Ding' Darling Foundation. And she had a heart attack or stroke and passed away.

And then her nephew, Terry O'Brien, Terrence O'Brien, he saw that that grant came to the 'Ding' Darling Memorial Committee, which later became SCCF, and then they funded with that money, they built the Alice O'Brian Tower, they paid for the floating canoe launch docks that I built out

there on the refuge. They paid for signage; they did the first mangrove overlook with that money just to show the public and their supporters they were getting something done.

And this was all allowed just under causal agreement between the committee and Tommy Wood."

Paul: "There was also an effort around that time to expand the refuge, is that right?"

Charles: "Yeah, after…when they decided to change the name, (Secretary of the Interior) Udall finally decided to sign off on it. He didn't want to name a refuge after human beings, but he finally gave in and about the time he signed off on it, we had to come up with an acquisition boundary and Dick Thompson was manager of South Florida back in those days. And he came over and he and I established what became the acquisition boundary and that went before the Lee County Commission. It had to be approved by them.

They were a bunch of anti-conservationists, they were pro-development, but they voted for it. And then the acquisition program started, I guess, in the '70s, late '60s and early '70s."

Paul: "So when they voted for it, that was in the late '60s?"

Charles: "Yeah, I think it was, I think there was an acquisition boundary map that's dated—a little hand-out map that was dated in 1967. And it has the refuge boundary in a dark line.

Paul: "So, in the early '70s, there was a concern that Lee County, which had jurisdiction over Sanibel Island before incorporation, was going to allow rampant development. Can you talk a little bit about that and how you became part of the first city council?"

Charles: "Oh boy. Okay. By the time the causeway came in, the first causeway in 1963, Lee County Planning and Zoning Department had devised a developmental plan, or a maximum density plan for Sanibel and Captiva for 90,000 people. And I've seen it myself, the Chairman of the Lee County Commission had a map in his office. I would be the one who would take the Refuge Revenue Sharing money to the commissioners.

And he had a map on his wall that showed bridges connecting Captiva with Upper Captiva with LaCosta, across Boca Grande, all the way up. And a wide bridge that came off the Sanibel Causeway at the curve. As you're coming to Sanibel the curve swings to the left, and they were going to run another bridge from there to Pine Island. These were all grand plans for developing the barrier islands to increase their tax base. That, of course, never happened.

The people on Sanibel…well, the bridge—the first time I heard about a bridge was the day that I sat in Tommy's kitchen with 'Ding' Darling and him, talking about turtles. I think I mentioned that earlier and something was said about a bridge. 'Ding' Darling got all excited, 'Oh they'll never build a bridge over to these islands.' That was one of his opinions, and I've often thought of that since.

So, just a few years after that they had approval for a bridge causeway from Punta Rassa to Sanibel. And I was President of the (Sanibel-Captiva) Audubon Society at the time, and River Basin Studies over in Vero Beach was directed to come over to Pine Island Sound and do an

ecological study of the Sound and that was headed up by Art Marshall. And I worked with Art, doing salinity collections and sampling mollusks in the sound and those kinds of things."

Paul: "Including scallops?"

Charles: "Scallops, yeah. And that report had to go the Corps of Engineers who would give the final permits, and Fish and Wildlife Service recommended in that report, recommended that the bridge be raised for a continuous crossing, three-mile crossing across San Carlos Bay.

But at a meeting, I guess, in Jacksonville, Lee County poor-mouthed they couldn't afford it, it would be too expensive, and the Corps of Engineers issued the permit and construction started and that opened up on May 26, 1963.

That began to change things right away, 24/7 traffic and things were just slowly changing. And then by 1965, Island Water Association put in an island-wide potable water system. And that's what made dramatic changes to the island, people discovered their paradise, here they came. Real estate sales boomed, three golf courses. I guess we have three golf courses, counting Captiva. (Actually four, both islands included.) Yeah, so, it really changed things.

So, just before the causeway was built, 'Ding' Darling passed away, and the committee was formed, the boundary was approved, and land acquisition started.

And I don't know if I've missed a point on your question or not, but I think you had something else you wanted included."

Paul: "Well, your role in the formation of the city council."

Charles: "Okay, in 1971-'72, there was rumblings for incorporating Sanibel/Captiva that would pull them away from the control of the Lee County government. Bob Barber was manager, he followed Tommy Wood, and he became active in some of those early planning committee meetings on incorporation for the city.

And then he transferred to Atlanta and Glen Bond came in, and I don't think Glen was too interested in the incorporation issue. But in 1974, Sanibel voted, 80 percent of the voters turned out, and we voted to incorporate and become the City of Sanibel.

And during that summer, at the end of every summer, I was living at the Lighthouse then, I had all of these sea turtle volunteers, and I would host what we called a 'cooter convention'. And Caretta Research would fund a large picnic for up to 100 people at the Lighthouse, all of the volunteers from all over the project, along the coast.

And someone there, I've even forgotten who it was, told me, 'You should run for City Council.' Well, I hadn't been active then and not really active in the incorporation debate, I was for it and people knew I was for it but I didn't get involved too much in the actual mechanics of it. And I thought about that. And I finally said, what the heck?

So, I talked with Glen Bond, Refuge Manager, and he surprised me, he probably thought I wasn't going anywhere with it. And he said, 'we'll have to get the Regional Office approval'.

So, he talked to his supervisor who then was Rudy Rudolph, and since the election was non-partisan, the Hatch Act had no bearing on it, so I was free to run for the City Council and I did. And I think I surprised everybody, I was the fourth highest vote getter and I served—and the Fish and Wildlife Service was really prominent, and they gave me a—I forget the term, discontinuous tour of duty or something where on council meeting days, I would take the day off and trade that day for a Saturday and work on a Saturday.

So, it worked out well. I lost a lot of, the (number of) meetings were tremendous, I lost a lot of annual leave and that's the only regret that I have. If I had it to do over again, I never would have done it because my family was suffering because I was bound to all of these meetings. But I served two terms, I served six years from ’74 until 1980. I didn't personally get a lot of things done. I got an alligator ordinance passed.

And I got some examination of live shelling. Formed/promulgated the Vegetation Committee, worked on the protection of turtles. And I was just another yes vote with five other people that were intent on saving Sanibel. Captiva had a straw vote and they decided not to do anything with incorporation. So, Captiva is still under Lee County jurisdiction.”

Paul: “So, you also served with Francis Bailey, what was your relationship with Francis Bailey like?”

Charles: “My relationship with Francis was always good because I shopped in his store, and I never had—never in my life did I have a cross word with Francis Bailey. I had some disagreements with some of the others on some personnel things, things like that.

And then, of course, Porter Goss was elected, and he was the highest vote-getter and we elected him our first mayor. I could never serve as mayor because I couldn't commit to the time constraints that were required to do it. But I did serve one year as vice mayor.

Like I said, I was in charge of Sanibel vice back in those days. And believe me there was lots of it.”

Paul: “What was it like working with Porter Goss? He, of course, went on to serve as (a Lee County Commissioner, then) the congressman for our district and then Director of the CIA. So, he had a political career after that. But as the first mayor of Sanibel, do you feel that it was consequential in terms of setting Sanibel on the right path? One of the—”

Charles: “Well—.”

Paul: “Go ahead.”

Charles: “I had known Porter prior to the election, sometime in the early ‘70s, I was building my own home on Fitzhugh Street on Sanibel, a little house I built for rental, originally. He came to visit me one day and asked me if I'd be interested in taking a part, becoming a member of this committee.

I forgot the name of the committee and I was just so busy after hours after work, trying to build the house, chase turtles, paint signs, anything to make a buck in those days and so, I had to turn

that down. And he was very important to the incorporation aspect of the Island. I always looked at Porter as a genuinely honest person, very intelligent.

Sometimes he liked to talk too much, and he would drag meetings on quite a bit, but he was an excellent person. And the council of Sanibel, there is no strong mayor, the mayor is just elected from the council for ceremonial purposes and being chairman of meetings. But he did an excellent job. And then he went to Washington, Mr. Goss goes to Washington."

Paul: "So, were you involved in the drafting of the Sanibel Plan?"

Charles: "Oh, yeah. we were all involved. Well, the Sanibel Plan was done by (John) Clark with Nature Conservancy. Was that called the Sanibel Plan? We spent most of our time in these endless meetings and developing the Sanibel Comprehensive Land Use Plan, and we passed that in 1976.

But there was a report—maybe it was called the Sanibel Report by Clark, but I was involved in all aspects of that, yeah, I was."

Paul: "And there was also a wildlife committee that was formed. Were you part of that?"

Charles: "Yeah, I wrote the ordinance, I believe I wrote the ordinance forming the Wildlife Committee. Actually, that was one battle I had with Francis Bailey. When Francis was elected, he was also a member of the Lee County Mosquito Control District Board. That was an elected position and he failed to resign that before he won election for City Council.

And there was some controversy whether, a guy by the name of Duane White, who also ran, should be given the position. I don't know if it went to court, but it was resolved and Francis resigned from the Mosquito Control Board and took the City Council position. So, Francis was really deep in mosquito control, especially what the Lee County Mosquito Control District did.

So, when I formed the—when I wrote the ordinance for the Wildlife Committee, I made a suggested list of members for the board. Well, the one I selected for chairman was George Campbell, who I think I mentioned earlier?"

Paul: "Yes."

Charles: "Campbell was anti-, anti-mosquito control. He was 100 percent against any kind of chemical control. And he would debate—I've gone over to, used to be Edison College, and listen to him debate the Director of the Mosquito Control. He could stand right up to him and go toe to toe and make his arguments. He was very knowledgeable. And when Francis Bailey saw George Campbell's name on the list, he went ballistic. 'No way am I going to vote for him.' That was just a—It was not an antagonistic confrontation, it was just, I guess political."

Paul: "You mentioned painting signs, you also constructed or created signs, and did you have a side business doing that?"

Charles: "When I was a kid, I used to——I think I mentioned earlier, when I was a kid in the northern schools before we moved south, I was a 'Commercial Art' major and I was probably headed for something in commercial art.

So, when our family finally ended up in Naples, I started doing a little bit of odds and ends sign jobs. I'd repaint mailboxes, names, just picking up—just a kid, picking up some change and I got pretty good at it. And when I moved to Sanibel, one of the first things, my first assignment was to repaint the refuge signs.

We had a headquarters sign as you approached the lighthouse. As you came onto Sanibel, at the ferry landing, we had 'Welcome to Sanibel National Wildlife Refuge.' These were all very shallow routed signs. And then up on Captiva, we had—when you came across the Captiva bridge, we had a refuge sign, because back in those days, we included all of Sanibel as part of the refuge. I guess it was based on the closure order in 1947. So, we looked—all of our wildlife surveys, were all—included basically all of Sanibel.

So, I started painting these signs and people that I really didn't know would see me paint signs. And we didn't have uniforms in those early days, they thought I was a sign painter, and I had people stop while I was working on a sign, tell me they needed their sign repainted. And so, I said, I'll get with, you know, Saturday. So, I started picking up some sign jobs.

As time went on, that turned into, I guess a little hobby type business. And then in 1965 I said, what the heck, I'm going to go into this a little bit deeper. So, I rented a garage on Fitzhugh Street next to where I eventually built a house, and I formed a company called *Sanibel Sign Services*. I operated in that little shed from '65 until I started Caretta Research in '68 and something had to go. So, I gave up signs and other than what I had to do on refuge of course, we were buying these fancy routed signs that had to be refinished and painted. And so, I kept a finger in the pie that way.

And then when I was on the City Council, people would come in, we put a moratorium on construction, and people would come in for sign permits. And I sat there among the council members, and I'd hear these prices of signs, that people were paying to have signs made, and I couldn't believe it. So, when I was out of the council, the first thing I did, I went and took my test. I got my sign contractor's license and went back in business. I got that business going until I retired, fully retired in 2004, but it was good to us."

Paul: "So I wanted to ask you about some of the people that you worked with. You mentioned a couple of the managers. Tommy Wood, of course, being the first, Bob Barber, Glen Bond, Ron Hight. I think you mentioned Edythe Stokes, the administrative officer who the administrative building is now named after. Didn't you share an office with her?"

Charles: "Yeah, Del Pierce was between Glen Bond and Ron Hight. Yeah, when Ede started work, we were still at the Lighthouse and one of the front rooms, she had that office all to herself, it was where she would meet the public. In the next room, my office was in there, in one of the other bedrooms, I think Bob Barber and I shared an office and Glen Bond and I shared an office.

But then when Glen Bond came, we had had a girl by the name of Charlotte Shea, an outdoor recreation planner. And we turned the office building into part offices and part living quarters for her. But after she left, Del Pierce came in and we turned her end of the building into an office for

him. So that was the way that worked. So then when the new office was completed, I guess that was in '82. Yeah, Ede and I shared an office then until I retired."

Paul: "So what was it like transitioning from the Lighthouse to the new headquarters building where it stands now? Also, that was prior to the Visitor Education Center. So that headquarters building, administrative building was also serving as a visitor contact station of sorts, wasn't it?"

Charles: "Right. Well, what happened, we had a revokable permit from the Coast Guard for the Lighthouse property, and that property was in the process of being transferred to the Fish and Wildlife Service. And you may want to edit some of this out, it's okay. I might as well say it.

I don't think, well—some of the managers didn't see the big picture, and during Bond's administration, he came up with the idea that the Lighthouse Point was not compatible with refuge objectives. So, he sold that to the Regional Office, and plans were made to move to the new site up on Sanibel Captiva Road in '82 I guess. I had left the Lighthouse quarters in '79. I moved into another Refuge house on Tarpon Bay. So over time, the application for transfer was withdrawn that was in the works with the Coast Guard and BLM.

So, the land was going to be turned loose by us. So, when I knew this was coming, I went to the city manager at the time, his name—and that's going to escape me now too, Bernie Murphy. I told him, 'Bernie, the Fish and Wildlife Service is going to leave the Lighthouse Point in a year or two, and you really ought to get involved and try to get to the Coast Guard and negotiate a way for the city to take over the property as a park.' So, he did that. And over time, the federal government sold the Lighthouse Point to the city for 700 and something dollars, fantastic.

But when I look back from my viewpoint, when it was decided that the Lighthouse was incompatible with refuge objectives, and then I watched a program on YouTube from the Florida Lighthouse Association. I heard about all the money St. Marks Refuge dumped into that lighthouse. I hear of all these other refuges along the southeast that have lighthouses and work to restore them and incorporate them in their message. And we turned the Sanibel lighthouse loose and that still disgusts me."

Paul: "Well, it is a unique, not only historic property, but, you know, there is a case to be made for the wildlife value, not only on the beaches there that you used to do a lot of sea turtle work, but also in in the forest that seems to, to this day, be an important migratory bird stopover for neotropical migratory birds. That's one of the best places on Sanibel Island during migration to see a lot of these songbirds migrating through at Lighthouse Point."

Charles: "At any rate, that's my two cents worth and such. Can we take about a three-minute break?"

Paul: "Yes."

Charles: "Okay."

Paul: "Okay, so picking up where we left off and moving from the Lighthouse, you notified the city to negotiate with the Coast Guard to acquire that, which they eventually did, actually wasn't

until you—can't remember what year, but it was fairly recently. And I guess that was to formalize the fee title transfer. Maybe they had a lease with the Coast Guard until then—."

Charles: "They had a use agreement."

Paul: "I remember Sam Bailey and Francis Bailey, were quite happy about that at the dedication ceremony, about formalizing—."

Charles: "I heard Sam was really happy about it."

Paul: "So moving to the new building, can you describe what that was like in relation to—."

Charles: "May I interject a little story of my career?"

Paul: "Please."

Charles: "Okay, I just thought of something. When I went to Sanibel and fell in love with it, I swore I'd never leave there and a couple times they wanted me to move. And because of family health issues and things I managed to stay. But when Del Pierce came into the picture, Del was always trying to get someone to transfer for their career benefits. He talked to Ede Stokes one time into putting in for a position in the Aleutian Islands, and she did it. Thank God for Ede, it wasn't approved.

So, we—back in those days we were responsible for Tampa Bay Refuges, Pinellas, Egmont Key, Passage Key. So, Del came up with this idea that he wanted me to transfer to St. Petersburg and take over responsibility for those refuges.

And I thought it over and I said 'yeah' because I was the guy that went there most of the time anyways. And so, we talked about it and he actually sent us on a house hunting trip. And, Jean and I went up, found a beautiful house in St. Petersburg, I had the sailboat at the time, and the place was on a deepwater canal. We were all ready to make the move.

But then back in those days, we had an Area Manager. If it would have still been under the Regional Office with the people that knew me. I think it would have been a shoo-in, but the Area Manager, I don't know what his hang up was, but he wouldn't approve it. So, there I lost probably my best chance to make a GS-9."

Paul: "You were a GS-7 at the time?"

Charles: "I was an 8."

Paul: "GS-8."

Charles: "I was the highest graded technician east of the Mississippi. And I knew there was a GS-9 technician up in the north somewhere—the Dakotas or somewhere.

And I kept after Ron to get me an increase. And Del had actually done some things on it and increased my supervision over the maintenance staff. And then one of the maintenance men went and married my wife's sister and I lost that supervisory aspect at work.

So, I had it. I wanted out at that point. And I got out, I don't know if you know that story or not."

Paul: "No."

Charles: "Do we want to go into it or—?"

Paul: "Sure, if you're comfortable with it."

Charles: "Oh, yeah, there's nothing wrong with it. I guess, I came up with the idea that if I could get my position abolished, I could retire. And so, one day I got Ron alone and I said, 'Look Ron,' I said 'you can get rid of me,' because I was an (GS-)8, (Step)10, I was making good money.

And I said, 'you can get rid of me and get a young assistant in here. And you'd make out better financially.' But he laughed and scoffed it off. So, then once a month, I'd hit him up, 'Have you talked to the Regional Office yet?' and he'd laugh.

And then just before a Christmas party, he came to me and he says, 'are you serious?' And I said, 'I'm dead serious.' I was only 52 years old at the time. He says, 'how do you know you're going to like it?' So, I had already—when I was getting burned out, I had already taken six weeks leave. Worked in my sign shop and knew that I could make it without working at the refuge.

So, finally, he agreed to it and it was done, and I was turned loose and retired. I was, actually it was on my 53rd birthday that I retired after 32 years, which was a pretty good deal.

Had I been given a (GS-)9, I would have stayed there 'til I was 70, because I liked going to work every day, but it was just the point they would not—they would dead end me, and just leave me hanging like that. And I had done a lot of good for them.

Paul: "You sure have. It's pretty obvious from everything you've shared. Is there anything else, any other recollections that you want to share from your career, people that you worked with, any of any humorous adventures, anything like that?"

Charles: "I have a couple of humorous things, but they're not really directly tied to my job. There's one story that I always like to tell people. You ever heard the name Red Giddens?"

Paul: "Who?"

Charles: "Red Giddens."

Paul: "No, can't say I have."

Charles: "He was at St. Mark's; he was a biologist at St. Mark's for years and years and years. In 1964, when we had our first formal law enforcement training, in Deland, in '64 or '65, I roomed with Red Giddens. And he was a character, he was a really likable guy.

So, we became pretty friendly. And then years later, I had to go to Eufaula, and pick up a car and I stopped at St. Mark's and visited. Always had great times. So, somewhere in the 1970s, I picked up an alligator snapping turtle, a live alligator snaping turtle, someone had given it to me, and I had it in my backyard in a large tank, and it was up to about 70 pounds. And I got feeling sorry for it, poor thing penned up like that.

So, I was headed up shortly to go to a law enforcement refresher in Tallahassee. And when I knew I was going; I built a big crate, plywood crate, and I called up Red, and I said, 'Hey, would you help me out? I've got this alligator snapper I would like for him to be turned loose. If I bring it up, will you do that?' 'Oh, yeah.' So, I got some help when I loaded the crate in the back of the government pickup, I forget who rode with me. Maybe it was Ralph Lloyd or somebody. Maybe Ron, I don't know.

We get out to the motel in Tallahassee and Red shows up, of course, Red knew everyone. So, we're going from room to room and everyone's giving us drinks, and beers and it started to get pretty late. Red decided he should get the turtle and go home.

So, we load up the turtle in the back of the—he wanted to see the turtle, so that was an issue. I popped the lid and showed it to him and Red loaded it in his truck. Apparently on his way back home, he stopped at a watering hole. And he showed the people in the bar this turtle that he had, and I guess he didn't secure the top.

Well, he went home and somehow, he was afraid to leave it in the truck, so he dragged it into his house. And during the night, that alligator snapper sprung free, and trashed, literally trashed the inside of his house."

Paul: "Oh, no."

Charles: "To me that's one of the funniest stories."

Paul: "Well, we, of course, don't have alligator snapping turtles in Southwest Florida, but we do have common snapping turtles, don't we?"

Charles: "Oh, yeah, we do. Yeah, alligator snappers only come down to the Suwannee River. And they range up to Louisiana, I think they get into Oklahoma and up into the maybe as far as Southern Iowa, I don't know I forgot."

Paul: "I wanted to ask you about Ede Stokes, she—didn't she have somebody, relation that also worked for the Refuge as a patrolman?"

Charles: "Yeah, her father-in-law Jake Stokes, worked as a—the first Fish and Wildlife Service stationed on Sanibel, labor-patrolman, back in 1946, '47."

Paul: "He was stationed here?"

Charles: "Yeah, he lived here, he was a fishing guide, fisherman, who lived on Sanibel."

Paul: "So was he essentially was the first employee of the Refuge?"

Charles: "You know, I don't think——Bill Lehman was a patrolman, but he was with the Everglades Refuge. Yeah, I think Jake was probably the first employee."

Paul: "At least the first—."

Charles: "Pardon?"

Paul: "I was going to ask you at least the first employee that lived here on Sanibel?"

Charles: "Yeah. That would be a true statement"

Paul: "Okay. Anything else you want to share about your career?"

Charles: "I'll think of a million things."

Paul: "Ha-ha ha-ha. We can always do an addendum."

Charles: "I can't think—I'm trying to think of any others. Well, we had that little cottage at the Lighthouse. Didn't I mention that being like a little motel?"

Paul: "Yes, you did."

Charles: "We often had these higher echelons of Fish and Wildlife Service people who come there and stayed. I befriended them. I think of Ross Leffler, who was the Assistant Secretary of the Interior, he stayed there. Jim Silver, one of the Regional Directors, and I knew all of the Regional Directors from him until (Jim) Pulliam.

And some of those Supervisors and Regional Directors knew me personally. So, that's where I had missed the boat, because they had all retired by the time I wanted to move and the guy in Jacksonville didn't really know me.

Oh, then what they pulled on me, when I moved from the Lighthouse to the house on Tarpon Bay. Don Hankla was the Area Manager, and he suddenly decided that I could move into that house, but I could only stay in there, two years, there was a two-year limit.

So, I agreed to that, because I had my boat, and they told me I could keep my boat up at the docks, things were good. So, I had built this little house on Fitzhugh Street and I had finished it all on my own.

I did everything in the house except the air conditioning, and I had it leased out and I had good income coming from it and then we thought it over, and said we have two years, we're going to have to move out our tenants. Let's go ahead and remodel our house and get ready to live in it.

So, I gave the tenants a little more time, then moved them out when I started to remodel the house. I was about three quarters done remodeling the house and the house phone rang one afternoon, must have been after work, and it was John Oberheu, Assistant Area Manager. He knew me.

And he—in fact, I was assigned during the oil spill days, I had a title; Field Response Coordinator and I held the same position as GS-12s. I did the same work, had the same responsibility. I wrote a response plan that was the best that anyone had written.

So, he knew me. So, he calls me up (he later almost cried at my retirement party). He was a good guy. And he said, 'Charles, I got some news for you. You won't have to move.' And I said, 'I really appreciate that John,' but I said 'our mind's made up.'

So, it was really a good deal because my little house I own free and clear. I didn't owe a dime on it. I built it as I went along and my rent at Tarpon Bay at the time was like 300 a month. So, I got a 300 dollar a month raise moving into my own house."

Paul: "How did you like living at Tarpon Bay?"

Charles: "I liked it, at the time, the sand flies were hard to cope with."

Paul: "Yeah."

Charles: "But it was much more peaceful and quieter than the Lighthouse was, the Lighthouse became a terror, an invasion of privacy. I had mixed emotions about leaving there, I didn't want to, but then I wanted to. It was—it's in the past now.

I enjoy—I lived there for close to 22 years at the Lighthouse, I had some adventures there, some experiences that I'll never forget."

Paul: "So, did you end up moving from Tarpon Bay after two years?"

Charles: "Yup, I moved and then—it was funny, Del Pierce was there, Don Hankla was the Area Manager, and Don sent a black guy, to be an employee at 'Ding' Darling. And this black guy was an A-1 racist. I had never seen anything like it, I hadn't been around that many, working with them at least.

And so, when I moved out of the Lighthouse, he moved into the Lighthouse. Him and his wife and they had a little boy. And when I left Tarpon Bay, they moved into Tarpon Bay. Well, one day, I wasn't home, but he came to my house for something, he wanted to ask me something or borrow something and my wife saw him at the door and she reacted and she said, 'Now, Larry, this is one place you're not going to live.'

It was funny, but he was unhappy, because the few blacks that were on Sanibel at the time, he was well educated, he had his master's, he was an educated person. But he had a chip on his shoulder. And he came to me one day, we had moved to the new building, and he says, 'I can't take it anymore, I need another job, can you help me find a job?'

So, I thought a minute, I gave him a name, found a number, gave him the number, and I says, 'Call this man and tell him that I recommend you.' He did. And it was the Director of the Lee County Mosquito Control District, and he hired him. And he left, but I think he came back to the Service years later out in Texas I heard, I don't know.

I've lost track of most of the people. I did this—I just finished this video on the Sanibel River, and one of the people—it was shot back in '73, and one of the people was Charlotte Shea, she was the girl that moved into the Lighthouse, as the outdoor recreation planner.

And her and Glenn Carowan, who was Assistant Manager, they were in the film, so I was trying to track them down. I tracked her down, but Glenn, he retired from the Service, and went up to Maryland to one of those Maryland refuges. And he went to work for the State of Maryland, and I called the number I found online, but he never called me back."

Paul: "I think he went to Blackwater."

Charles: "Blackwater, yeah."

Paul: "So, you retired in what year?"

Charles: "1990."

Paul: "1990."

Charles: "30 years ago.

Paul: "Mm hmm. And since then, I know that you've been busy writing books, and I think you've also been doing some wildlife art. Is that right?"

Charles: "Well, I published 16 books, most of them have a wildlife or an island theme. I just finished this DVD on the Sanibel River, and I do some carving. I replicate Indian, Calusa Indian items and I carve sea turtles. That's about it. Right now, I'm sort of backing off—right now, there's a video, it's on a disk. I copied it from a VHS to disc of my retirement party. And I've been trying to copy that to disc. I want to put it on YouTube for the family. I'll let you know, if I manage to do it (It's on YouTube.). I'll let you know when it's on there. But that was a wild night."

Paul: "So, who else was at your retirement party? You said John Oberheu was there."

Charles: "John Oberheu represented the Regional Office."

Paul: "Okay."

Charles: "He was telling a story about this roseate spoonbill—I think it flew into the powerline at the refuge. And, his son or he and his son picked it up and brought it to show me or something. He was telling a little story like that and he nearly started to cry.

Porter Goss and his wife were there. All the volunteers we had in those days. Most of my family and all my longtime friends.

Paul: "I know what I forgot to ask you was the transition to the new office. I mentioned that it was also serving as a visitor contact station. Can you describe that? And also, the formation of the friends' group, the 'Ding' Darling Wildlife Society?"

Charles: "The Wildlife Society actually started before we left the Lighthouse. They started—I'm not sure that they incorporated as a Society at that time, they were being formed. We sort of tried to keep our distance you know. I really didn't pay attention to what was going on. I think they got their roots when we had the office at the Lighthouse.

But when the building was opened what then we called the visitor center at the time, they would, their people would man the information desk, not all the time, because we rotated, too, because there weren't that many volunteers, so we served and rotated around, serving on the desk.

And then at the exit, where the exit stairway is, they put in a little bookstore and that really took off. They did well selling books. I want to think they later had it sort of against the wall by where the restrooms are, they had a bookshop.

I think that's where it actually started. And then they moved it to that vestibule at the back stairs, I guess and that's where they built it up. And they eventually took over all of the public contact as they built their number, and got more volunteers.

They manned the desk. And then we did some remodeling on the counter, things like that, to make it easier. I don't recall when, but that was the way it was until I quit. And then they raised all the funds and built the new education center.

Oh, and we added office space underneath the office. Yeah. And they moved their facility, their offices and storage area underneath the office visitor center. And then we started the fee, the entrance fee."

Paul: "So when that started, that was the old Iron Ranger that was where people would just drop in—."

Charles: "Yeah and they'd take an envelope—a little blue envelope out of a dispenser and put their money in it, and then drop it into the slot. And then later on, it just became a flat fee, I think it was like a dollar and just dropped the money into that pipe configuration."

Paul: "And then the fee booth? Did that come along after you retired or?"

Charles: "No, that came along after I retired."

Paul: "Okay. A couple of species I wanted to ask you about, ospreys are very prevalent on Sanibel Island today. Was the increase in the population a result of a lot of the work that folks like 'Bird' Westall was doing in terms of building nesting platforms? Can you talk a little bit about any changes in osprey populations as well as bald eagle presence?"

Charles: "Bald eagles, when I came to Sanibel, there were three bald eagle nests on the island and I think only one was active. One was located on Periwinkle (Way), right next to Dairy Queen, not behind it—like the nest is now I guess, but it had become inactive.

And there was one on Wulfert Point, right along Wulfert Road. And then a pair of eagles started building a nest off of Dixie Beach Boulevard, in a tall mangrove tree, down in Ladyfinger Lakes, you could see it from the road. And ospreys drove them out of it.

And then we had an eagle nest—the first active eagle nest that was really active, was out on Captiva, in an Australian pine. And then on Wulfert property, later on, there was an active eagle nest. That's another whole story too about Wulfert Point."

Paul: "Yeah, can you talk about that?"

Charles: "The Wulfert Point is another story too, about the refuge. I mean, ospreys are much more common now than they were then, like 60 years ago. And after Hurricane Donna in 1960, there were very, very few active osprey nests. They were all blown to pieces.

And all the good trees for nesting were pretty torn up too. So, there really weren't that many ospreys. I think there was one ranging—nesting on one of the range lights over at Punta Rassa, which was taken out years later.

We had one at the Lighthouse about a year before I came here, there was one on the chimney of Quarters 2. I think there's one near there now."

Paul: "There is."

Charles: "Yeah."

Paul: "So—oh go ahead."

Charles: "I think George Campbell and 'Bird' Westall teamed up to start the osprey nesting program. I can't think of anyone else that was involved. There just weren't that many people of that caliber to do things back in those days. There were a lot of you know, supporting conservationists, but very few of them did any work. They gave money, and no labor."

Paul: "Right. So, you mentioned Wulfert Point."

Charles: "Wulfert Point, Wulfert Point was included in the approved boundary. But when the acquisition program was coming to an end, we—someone was pushing to acquire Wulfert Point as part of the refuge. And the only reason it didn't initially, if I remember correctly, is because of that Calusa Shores Subdivision at the present refuge boundary would have been costly I guess to acquire initially.

That's how the story went. So, by—let's see, I guess it must have been the late '70s, I put the date in my Sanibel Lighthouse history, that the Regional Office was interested in acquiring Wulfert Point. They sent down Bob Bridges, who was the ascertainment biologist for land acquisition. He came down from Atlanta and I got assigned to go with him and what he did—a biological ascertainment, to see if the land was—could justifiably be included in the refuge.

Well, I was on the city council, so it had to be in the late '70s, and the property owners at Wulfert Point, a Chicago group, wanted to put 1,500 dwelling units or something at Wulfert Point and the city, under our new plan, we wouldn't allow them to do that. So, they sued the city.

So, this lawyer, this Chicago lawyer of theirs, he was a typical Chicago lawyer, he was a real dude. A young guy, thought his pants were on fire. And he came down to do the inspection and Bob and I drove up to meet them and I started to get out of the car, and this lawyer was there, the caretaker was there and one of the owners, property owners was there. and oh, he saw me, and it hit the fan. He wasn't about to let me on the property.

Del Peirce and I had already snuck on the property to locate the bald eagle nest. We did that under the excuse of doing it under the Endangered Species Act. So, we did it. And this guy wasn't going to let me on. I said, 'Bob, I can come back and pick you up at whatever time. This is no problem for me, rules are rules.' And Bob says, 'No, we're not doing this without you.'

So, he talked to the guy, pretty strongly and told him that I was there and that it was important that I be there. So, we had to sign release forms to go on the property. So, we did. So, things were moving along to acquire Wulfert Point.

And then the Area Manager came down, I guess to make a determination. Again, had it been some of those old timers, that worked like the dickens to build the refuge, been in charge, things would have been much different. I remember him saying, 'I don't think the people of Sanibel Island are going to like this, but we're not going to buy this property.'

That's basically his words. So, but I think the real reason was we didn't proceed was because it was in litigation and we couldn't find a way in, because of the court lawsuit. So, we missed it. But the city beat them down, and it turned into a much better development then it would have if they built 1,500 units."

Paul: "But, you know, the county just recently, a year ago, acquired the 69 acres that was slated for development. I think it's where the bald eagle nest was located as well. And so, the county is going to enter into a management agreement with the refuge. So that will be managed as part of the refuge."

Charles: "Good. Some of the biggest indigo snakes I have ever seen were up at Wulfert Point. I remember Erick Lindblad had a shed skin of one. You know when a snake molts, the skin stretches, and taking that into consideration, it had to be enormous.

And I remember one day, one of the last adult indigos I saw, I was walking down, what's now the Calusa Shell Mound trail and there was a large—it was a cabbage tree covered with night-blooming cereus, and this enormous indigo came across the trail, and got into that cereus, and I wanted to catch it, it was so big. I wanted to measure it. And that was the last adult I ever saw.

And all through that country, at Wulfert, used to be—-some of those groves were pretty well maintained when I first went there, there were so many gopher tortoises—it was a perfect habitat for indigos.

Paul: "Well, there's still gopher tortoises there. And maybe there's a chance for the indigos, some day."

Charles: "Here's something I'm going to ask you, when I moved to Sanibel, the only willow – the black willow, I guess it is, the native willow—the only clumps of that were up at Wulfert, in a little wetlands and down at the corner of Tarpon Bay Road, what's now West Gulf Drive. But I think the last time I drove up San Cap Road, did I see clumps of willow on the refuge? In that Spartina?"

Paul: "Where exactly?"

Charles: "Okay, I'm going up San Cap Road, I've passed the Legion, the Sanibel Slough extension is off to the right, running up to the power lines, where you all burned and the grass looks great out in there, are there some clumps of willow coming up in there?"

Paul: "I believe so."

Charles: "You say you do believe so?"

Paul: "I think so. I'll have to double check on that."

Charles: "Well I'd get rid of them; they're going to take over that whole wetland. I've seen it happen down at Corkscrew."

Paul: "Yeah, well, we've been trying to keep the woody vegetation knocked back in the—what we call the Botanical Site, so that's an ongoing—."

Charles: "All it needs is a dike pumping system, get the water high, and that'll take care of that problem."

Paul: "Like with Brazilian pepper."

Charles: "Now that's off the record. Shut your recorder off."

Paul: "Alright. So, I also wanted to—you mentioned flooding to control willows, thinking back about the diking of the impoundments, that was constructed by Mosquito Control because they were intending to flood those impoundments to prevent the salt marsh mosquito from breeding. Is that right?"

Charles: "That's correct. Water over those sand flats—see back behind where the Indigo Trail ends, back in there, used to be sand flats in there, these wide-open sand flats without any vegetation. And that's where mosquito eggs would hatch.

They wanted to get these impoundments to keep the water high enough that they could flood not only the land within the impoundments but get high water back into those sand flats to keep mosquitoes from reproducing or to have fish to eat the larva."

Paul: "So you mentioned, I think, earlier that the Indigo Trail was put in before the dike, which is now Wildlife Drive. Is that right?"

Charles: "No, no, it was put in, it was put in after."

Paul: "After. Okay."

Charles: "After Colon (Moore) came back (on the other side of the dike), then we started digging that, and the plan originally was to connect to the part of Wildlife Drive or the dike that was already done to make it a circular drive. But these property owners, I think they scared off Mosquito Control with the threat of [law]suits."

Paul: "Right."

Charles: "And then we later took that property. We—the property that impacted that, it was a federal case and it was heard in Fort Myers, and I had to come over with a federal forester and try to age some of the oak trees on that ridge. And we—I think it may have been a negotiated purchase, but it came pretty close to condemnation, I think."

Paul: "So, when did Mosquito Control abandon their management of the impoundments for flooding to prevent salt marsh mosquito breeding?"

Charles: "Well, they sort of turned it over to us and we tried to put in two pipes underneath to get interchange between the tidal side and the impoundment side.

But unbeknownst to us, I remember, we went out there one time, and Mosquito Control had put bags of cement in the tubes, so the water couldn't run out. They never even told us about it, just did it. So, I don't know if there was some oral agreement on it, but there could have been."

Paul: "I know on the East Coast, they employ what they call a rotational impoundment management, where they're flooding the impoundments during mosquito breeding season, but then allowing tidal interaction the rest of the year. Was that method tried here?"

Charles: No, see that impoundment was closed up in—oh, I want to say '64. It wasn't completed, but it was a closed system."

Paul: "Mm-hmm."

Charles: "And I forgot the main point I wanted to make, and that was the only water that could get into impoundments was rainwater, and they would dry up in the summer. And everything in there would die and the island would have a stench, unbelievable stench around it.

You could be on the Gulf beach with the wind in the right direction and smell that. It was terrible. And that's when that Lee County Conservation Association, I think, really got upset. But the first control structures weren't put in until '79, first permanent ones.

So, that thing went dry. Then we put in the cross dike in about, '72, '73, between the main drive and the indigo trail, where the restrooms are now, there was a water control structure in there that was totally useless, it was never used.

And then one-time when Del Peirce was here. He bought a Crisafulli pump and our plan was to pump the western impoundment dry just before the rain started. So, we could get it full of fresh water. And we pumped and pumped and pumped and we got that thing dry.

We pumped it across where the cross dike is, into the tidal side. But the rains were late that year, and he just said, to heck with it, we never did it. I told you earlier that was fresh, I mean they were catching bass and bream, pig frogs, everything."

Paul: "I remember you said the alligators were common in there as well."

Charles: "Yeah."

Paul: "I also wanted to ask you about prescribed burning. When did the prescribed burning start on the refuge and what role did you play?"

Charles: "We never had any prescribed burning in the early years. There would be a wildfire that would burn the heck out of the slough. I remember one time, one got into the Bailey Tract, it almost—I was away for the weekend, and I heard it on the news or something. The tower of the Bailey Tract was threatened. And also, our gas tank was above ground for the plane, Tommy was gone with the plane for the weekend, but nothing was destroyed.

The fire department put them all out, and one time, I knew that fire was important, that it needed a good hot fire, and one time, the Superintendent of Mosquito Control became a good friend of mine, and we stood in the tower with wooden matches, tossing lit matches out into the grass.

And about where that kiosk is now, before the Ani Pond, we had a pretty good blaze going. So, we were in his Mosquito Control Jeep, so we get in the Jeep, and we haul all the way down Tarpon Bay Road, and down West Gulf Drive, and down Rabbit Road, and back around Tarpon

Bay Road and the Bailey Tract was probably about one third burned, really going great, and the volunteer fire department was there to put it out.

So, anyways, formal controlled burns started in about ’75, ’76. And I was in a few of the burns, I worked on a few of them.”

Paul: “Was that mostly at the Bailey Tract?”

Charles: “Yeah, I think the Bailey Tract, I worked the drip torch, I don’t think I have a burn—I don’t think we burned anything north of Sanibel-Captiva Road, I think we were concentrating on the Bailey Tract.

And then later, I think it was after I retired, SCCF started burning, and then I was there one time, the fire crew was there, but I don’t think I was on fire duty at that time. I had a health issue about that time, and I didn’t—my doctor wouldn’t let me do the Step Test to qualify for a fire fighter.

But I remember a crew came and they had these little pellets to start the fire, and I believe they burned across from the Legion Curve that year. That was in the late ‘70s. No, pardon me, that was in the ‘80s.”

Paul: “Oh, okay. You mentioned doing some surveys with the ascertainment biologists for land acquisition. Did you ever go out with Bill Ashe? I think he was the realty specialist for the region around that time. And he visited ‘Ding’ Darling or maybe it was Sanibel Refuge before—.”

Charles: “You mean Bill Ashe?”

Paul: “Yeah, Bill Ashe.”

Charles: “Bill Ashe, I knew him very well, I worked with him. Before him, his supervisor used to come and stay in the cottage. I’ve forgotten his name, real nice guy. I think Bill Ashe may have come and stayed in the cottage too, a time or two.

I worked with Bill, we trudged along, looked at properties, Bob Lines, that was Bill’s supervisor—I think he was one of the first to begin working on acquisition.”

Paul: “I know another person that you may have crossed paths with was the biologist for the South Florida Refuge's, Walt Stieglitz. Did you ever—?”

Charles: “Oh yeah, I knew Walt very well. He was assistant manager at Loxahatchee, I think at first, before he got the biologist position. I might have that mixed up. But anyways he came over to Sanibel to look things over, you know—and he wanted to go fishing and we had fresh water, we had stocked Palm Lake and Sanibel Slough with, I think I mentioned bass and bream. I took him to Palm Lake, there was only one or two houses on it at the time.

He tossed a lure out there, and on the first or second cast he caught this enormous bass. I couldn’t believe how big they had grown. Another Walt Stieglitz story. There was a guy from Atlanta, I don’t know what his position was, his name was Tad Lane, real nice guy. And him and his family used to come to the cottage and stay for a week.

So, one day we took—the only boats we had in those days we had a 28-foot patrol boat that was about to rot apart and that was kept over at Port Comfort, and we had a 12-foot aluminum boat. That was our fleet. So, we took the aluminum boat, went to Tarpon Bay. They wanted to go fishing, so I took them over to Shallow Mouth, I think it was, on the inside, and we're catching trout and all of a sudden, Tad Lane, he cast a MirrOlure, and that MirrOlure caught me in the side of the face.

I mean one hook went completely through my upper lip, one was embedded in my cheek, and one was just barely getting inside higher up. So, we went in and I had to go the hospital and get that thing removed, and that was the last time I went group fishing. Yeah, Walt was a nice guy, he eventually went to Alaska, didn't he?"

Paul: "Yeah."

Charles: "Is he still alive?"

Paul: "He is, he's living over on the east coast of Florida."

Charles: "Oh, okay."

Paul: "I think he's still in the Melbourne area."

Charles: "Okay."

Paul: "If I'm not mistaken."

Charles: "Yeah, I liked him."

Paul: "He was active with the Pelican Island Friends Group when I was there. He was very helpful. Yeah, go ahead."

Charles: "Another one I'm still in touch with pretty regularly is Dick Thompson, he was as I said Manager of South Florida. Him and I developed the boundary for the refuge. He's still living, he became the Florida Management Biologist, and after Walt, he left Loxahatchee, John Edie took over and Dick went into the Biologist position.

And then there was something done, I never got the full story but an Area Manager, one of my favorite people, he moved Dick into the Department of Agriculture as a rat choker. And Dick's still alive, he lives in Havana, Florida. We're in touch once a week probably by emails. He's a good guy."

Paul: "I would like to get his contact information if you don't think he would object. I don't know if he's done one of these interviews."

Charles: "If you get him on the telephone, sit down in something comfortable, because that man will talk."

Paul: "Hahahaha."

Charles: "He used to come over to Sanibel on an inspection, and one of my rooms over at the lighthouse was a transient room, where I had to let him stay, and he'd stay in that bedroom, and

I've actually—he'd go out and buy some beer, come back, and be sitting in my living room—I've actually fallen dead asleep, with him still talking.

I would never call him before I got this toll-free calling, because it would cost a fortune. He loves to talk, and he's got some good stories about the planning for the refuge for Sanibel, he remembers a lot of that stuff. He was telling me, Givens, he was Regional Supervisor for Refuges, and he called him up and told him to go to Sanibel and make plans and of course the boundary, and he wanted it in 30 days.

So, he's got stories like that. And he knows some Jack Watson stories too."

Paul: "Hmm, well I'll get that from you later."

Charles: "Okay."

Paul: "You mentioned John Edie. Did you did you know John Edie well?"

Charles: "Well, he was the Project Leader for South Florida and he would come to Sanibel and do the inspection thing, and we would have to go there for administrative things. So, I used to go there quite a bit when John was there.

John was good at making equipment available, he got us air conditioning, he got us a radio system, he bought us our first camera. John was good to Sanibel."

Paul: "Sounds like it."

Charles: "I just got something from him on Facebook yesterday. Something I put on that he liked or something."

Paul: "Any other notable folks that you want to share a story about?"

Charles: "I don't know, I guess all the managers are still alive. Bob Barber, I don't know about Glen Bond, unless—I used to send out Christmas greetings, but they were unanswered, he never answered me. He didn't like me, and I didn't like him, so. So, it's complicated.

Del Pierce's daughter was still living here, he came here occasionally. I haven't seen him since Ede retired. He came down for her retirement. Ron, I think Ron is mad at me too, it's alright. And I didn't know the others, the other one, the one that—oh who came after Ron? The guy from New Jersey."

Paul: "Lou Hinds?"

Charles: "Lou Hinds, I knew him, just through conversation. But the one that followed him, I only met him accidently one time. And that was at one of Ralph Woodring's things. He was there, and he heard my name, he walked up to me and said, 'I want to talk to you.' And that's the only time he ever talked to me."

Paul: "Ha ha ha, never followed up huh?"

Charles: "You're the only one who ever actually looked me up."

Paul: "What about Ralph Woodring."

Charles: "Well Bob Barber looked me up when he came back to the island, very nice people."

Paul: "You mentioned Ralph Woodring I think a couple of times he's a legend, so to speak, on Sanibel Island, long time family, one of the original, I guess, homesteaders, his family here on Sanibel."

Charles: "His grandfather was the first homesteader."

Paul: "Right."

Charles: "And I know Ralph well, Ralph and I went to high school together. I spent a couple of mornings with him within the past month. He's different."

Paul: He's a colorful character. It's good to know that you're keeping in touch with all these folks."

Charles: "I had a real, real strange one, this is—I guess it's refuge related. When I was at the Lighthouse, the first couple of years I had a collection of live turtles, and one wing of the house that used to be the kitchen, I had all these tanks set up and I had turtles from all over the world.

I had 82 different species at one time. And this guy from Fort Myers was a turtle freak and he used to come and visit me, and his folks had a grocery store in Fort Myers, and sometime in the late '60's he came and told me that he was—he had gone off to college, and he had come home occasionally, he went to the University of Florida.

And he came and told me that he was leaving and that he was going to Canada. You know he was getting away from the Vietnam War. So, I supported him, I wasn't—I didn't look at it either way and I supported him, I said 'I wish you good luck.' And two days ago, on Facebook, I get this message, this strange name, and it's him, 60 years later."

Paul: "Wow."

Charles: "And he went to Canada, he claims to have joint US and Canadian citizenship. He wrote me an email later with more detail. He got married in Canada and had a daughter, got divorced, he went to San Francisco and married a Japanese woman, and moved to Japan. He's been in Japan for 30 years, and he's an editor. He takes Japanese documents and converts them into English. I can't believe he's learned this.

But out of the blue, after 60 years, we connect. Life is strange."

Paul: "Yeah, well, it's a smaller world with how social media has made it easier to get in touch with folks."

Charles: "Right."

Paul: "And reconnect. So that's pretty neat."

Charles: "Old guys I knew, but none of the old girlfriends reached out to me. Thank God."

Paul: "Hahahaha there might be a reason."

Charles: "Yeah, there probably is. I can't think of any—do you want me to send you an email with Dick's phone number and stuff?"

Paul: "Please if you don't think he would mind. I'd like to -."

Charles: "Oh no, no."

Paul: "I'd like to reach out to him."

Charles: "No, he's a—he probably has some Tommy Wood, and some Jack Watson stories. He wasn't there that long, he took over when——he came in fresh; I think he had started out in Savannah, and then they moved him down to Loxahatchee when (Bill) Julian left. And then he left and took the biologist job when John Edie took over.

There was a lot of in-fighting at Loxahatchee before Julian, and I don't know—I just heard bits and pieces, I don't know anything about it. Personnel conflicts and all kinds of problems. I don't know of anybody left alive who would know that. Probably no one.

All the guys I knew at Loxahatchee are gone except for Dick and John."

Paul: "When did Burkett Neely start there? Were you still working then?"

Charles: "Yeah, I was—Yeah, I don't know what the heck year that was. I'm pretty sure I was still working. I went to a workshop, a one-day workshop, a sea turtle workshop, over there someplace. I stopped, it was out of my way, but I drove down to Loxahatchee. And I think he was there then, and two of the guys that I knew—and one of the best friends I ever had in the Service was still there."

Paul: "Who was that?"

Charles: "His name was Even Rude. He was a maintenance man, a mechanic, an airboat mechanic. We just touched it off. He's dead. He came to see me a couple of weeks before he died, and I didn't know he was dying. It was terrible. And I called him or something and his wife told me he had passed away. Still resent it to this day that I didn't know."

Paul: "Well, how would you?"

Charles: "Yeah, I know, he didn't tell me."

Paul: "Yeah."

Charles: I know he had been sick, he had had prostate cancer, and went through treatment and he was alright, and I guess it must have come back. And he wasn't telling anyone. But he liked me, so he wanted to come see me I guess before he went. And that's the way it goes."

Paul: "Yeah. You mentioned St. Mark's earlier; did you know Joe White?"

Charles: "Yeah, you know, I met him, but I didn't know him very well. Tommy Wood knew him a lot better."

Paul: "Okay, because I've got an interview scheduled with him coming up, so, I'll be sure to ask him about Tommy."

Charles: "Yeah, he might know some good stories. Especially with—if Tommy spent the night there. He knows some stories. Anyplace Tommy spent the night, there were stories."

Paul: "Well I remember you shared a story with me earlier, not on this interview, but about an accident Tommy had, I guess the car got stuck in the woods or something."

Charles: "Yeah, I never told anyone that story until after he was gone. About 1 o'clock in the morning there was some beat beats on my door at the Lighthouse, I get out of bed and I go to the door, and it's Tommy and blood is running down his face. 'What happened to you?'

And he said, 'I spun in.' Excuse me, an aircraft term. I said, 'you need to go to the hospital.' 'No, no I'm alright, but I need help.' So, I go down and we get in the refuge Jeep and we go out to near the end of Ferry Road, to where Tommy was making a right turn. The road from the Lighthouse was diagonal, it's much different than it is now. He had a beautiful Dodge sedan it was a collector's item.

He had hit a cabbage tree dead on. And smashed that thing, the front end was all crunched in, the tires were all crunched in. So, I hooked a real short chain on it, and we dragged it back to the Lighthouse, put it back behind the shop.

And next morning, he was 'alrighty.' He had band-aids on him, and he wouldn't admit he was hurt, probably if he was. And that car stayed there for years. We had a '49 Chevrolet, the refuge car that we had surveyed, and we were supposed to dispose of it. Nobody would buy it. So, we had to dispose of it.

So, at the time the county was putting in the fill, for the new road along the bay and to the Lighthouse, we had them dig a hole, and we shoved both cars in that hole and covered them up and they're still there."

Paul: "Hahahaha."

Charles: "Cold case."

Paul: "Yeah, there's no telling what's buried around these parts."

Charles: "Right? I never told that before, I wouldn't embarrass him."

Paul: "Yeah, well—."

Charles: "There was other things that happened on the refuge."

Paul: "Go ahead."

Charles: "Nah, I don't want—I'll tell you sometime."

Paul: "Okay."

Charles: "Something that tears me up."

Paul: "Okay. Alright."

Charles: "I swore I wouldn't—when it happened."

Paul: "You don't have to share it if you don't want to."

Charles: "Oh, I'll share it, it's a long story, personal, when you have time someday."

Paul: "Okay. There was one other wildlife question I forgot to ask, and that was swallow-tailed kites, which are nesting on Sanibel Island now—."

Charles: "Oh, really?"

Paul: "Yeah, I thought they were a more recent breeding presence, but I wanted to ask you if you had seen any swallow-tailed kites."

Charles: "I saw swallow-tailed kites occasionally. I never considered them a nesting species, but back in those early days, Sanibel was much wilder, and you couldn't get into some areas, and it's possible they did, and no one knew."

Paul: "Of course there wasn't much of a tree canopy back then either, right?"

Charles: "No, there never was. Australian pine and that was it."

Paul: "Yeah."

Charles: "Or I mean strangler figs and sea grapes. That was it before pine trees."

Paul: "Well, is there anything else you want to share, Charles?"

Charles: "I can't think of anything, Paul. It's been fun. I thank you for the opportunity to talk to you about it. I love to talk about the old days, it's all I've got to do anymore. We have a—there's a group of us that get together, every December 13th down at Bonta Springs and we talk about the old days back in the '50s. Every once in a while, somebody who's never said it before will tell a fresh story and it's a lot of fun.

But we're dwindling, we're dwindling. One just passed away a month ago, so."

Paul: "Well, I really appreciate you taking the time to share your story and I really enjoyed talking with you again, and if there is anything that you think of, that you want to include but forgot, feel free to call me and we can add it, or we'll just have a private conversation."

Charles: "Alright."

Paul: "Well, thank you very much Charles. Again, I greatly appreciate it."

Charles: "You're welcome, good luck, I'm looking forward to reading it."

Paul: "Hopefully we can get it transcribed fairly soon. I know there's a backlog, but we'll try to expedite it."

Charles: "Okay. Who have you done recently?"

Paul: “Well I mentioned I’ve got Joe White scheduled, and let’s see, I haven’t done one in a while with the—yeah.”

Charles: “When you do Joe White, ask him if he ever heard about Red Giddens and the alligator snapper.”

Paul: “I will, I was thinking about that.”

Charles: “Let me know what he says.”

Paul: “Well you know Joe is also an author, I don’t know if you knew that.”

Charles: “I heard he was writing, yeah. Someone told me.”

Paul: “Yeah, so he’s written some books on his career, so I’ve got to read up on that. But anyway. Again, thank you very much Charles, it’s been a pleasure talking to you.”

Charles: “Okay, good luck to you. Stay safe.”

Paul: “Alright, you too, take care.”

Charles: “Yup, bye-bye.”

Paul: “Bye. This concludes the Oral History with Charles LeBuff.”