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**Ann Hodgson:** This is Ann Hodgson with the Tampa Bay Oral History Project, and I’m here today with Skip Gandy. Skip, welcome to the project.

**George S. “Skip” Gandy:** Thank you very much.

AH: We’re very pleased to have you with us. Some of our viewers and listeners will recognize the Gandy name, and I’d like to start by asking you: Tell us how the Gandy family got to Florida and got to the Tampa Bay area. Can you go back in history a bit for us?

GS: My great-grandfather was born in 1851, so there’s a big note there on the Civil War. And, at the time, they were up in the New Jersey area, Seaside Heights. And they were all avid, he and his brother were both avid sailors. So what they did at the end of Barnagat Bay<sup>1</sup> —and I guess it wasn’t that populated—is, one of them formed a yacht club at one end of the bay and the other one formed it on the other. And in the wintertimes they would come down to St. Petersburg and they eventually started the St. Pete [St. Petersburg] Yacht Club<sup>2</sup>. I gather that was back in the ’20s. And then that has totally changed, it’s a different animal, but still retains the sailing.

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<sup>1</sup>Barnagat Bay is a brackish bay extending 42 miles along the coast of Ocean County, New Jersey.

My earliest recollection would be in the '40s, and my father was a photographer for the *Tampa Times*, and he had a job prior to that. We lived in Miami, and I was born in St. Petersburg. And, he was, then he got a better offer from the *Tampa Times* so we moved up and we lived on an absolutely stark part of a desert called Davis Island<sup>3</sup>. There were no trees. It was a blinding heat. There was no air conditioning back then. I used to have dreams about melting when I would take a nap. Davis Island had two types of people as far as kids growing up: one, we called them the Hilly Fords Gang. They lived in the center. And there were dredge mounds when they dredged up Davis Island in the '20s, in '26, I believe. And then I was of the Minnow Man qualifications. We lived on the seawall, eventually falling in every once in a while. So we carried a rope so we could get back out.

But, at a young age, looking at the seawall and looking at the detritus and the bunker sea oil<sup>4</sup> pumped by ships, my father taking pictures of it and everybody getting mad, this was Davis Island as we knew it, very, very ugly scenario much then. The air pollution was horrendous. There would be, ended up with two, three inches of phosphate dust on vehicles, on yards, you could write. The St. Augustine [grass] would be covered. And this is when they had radioactivity in the phosphate product, prior to them extracting it. And there was coal dust. It was just not a very pleasant, and it created a lot of aggravation with me to be somewhat of a spokesman and yell and scream about it.

AH: Well, could we sort of fill in the gap for our viewers and listeners? You mentioned the early formation of the St. Pete's [St. Petersburg] Yacht Club. That would've been, was it in the 1920s?

GG: I think it was, yes.

AH: Around the '20s—somewhere in the '20s?

GG: Somewhere in there.

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<sup>2</sup>The St. Petersburg Yacht Club was formed in 1909 as a social organization to support yachting in the St. Petersburg, Florida community.

<sup>3</sup>Davis Island is located in Hillsborough County, Florida. In the 1920s, Tampa land developer D.P. Davis created the island by building it atop two natural islands.

<sup>4</sup>Bunker sea oil is fuel used by ships to power engines.

AH: Could we fill in the gap? Right around that time, your great-grandfather came down to the St. Petersburg area.

GG: Um-hm.

AH: And did he eventually move to St. Petersburg from New Jersey?

GG: They did. And he used to get very aggravated about taking a sidewheel steamer<sup>5</sup>. That was the favorite, in a *H.B. Plant*<sup>6</sup>, and I believe another one. And that was the transportation around the bay area, was to—it was an all-day trip, so if you took four hours coming over from, say, Pass-A-Grille<sup>7</sup> to Tampa.

AH: Uh-huh.

GG: Either that or you got in an automobile and you drove around the head of the bay, which was nothing but a dirt road.

AH: So—

GG: So the idea was to build a bridge, and he formed a company, the Gandy Bridge Company<sup>8</sup>, and sold stock, common stock, and everybody invested in it. But then, and it was very successful, but it was a toll, and it was a 50-cent toll. And eventually it was taken over by the federal government at gunpoint and as a war necessity, because the people that worked in the shipyards of Tampa should've not had to pay the toll.

AH: So that was in what year approximately?

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<sup>5</sup>A sidewheel steamer is a type of steamboat where the paddle wheels are mounted to each side of the boat.

<sup>6</sup>The first *H.B. Plant* was a paddlewheel steamer built in 1882. It was destroyed by fire at Lake Beresford, Florida in 1890. The second *H.B. Plant* was a sidewheeled steamer built in 1899. It was destroyed by fire at the Tampa Pier in 1913.

<sup>7</sup>Pass-A-Grille is a US historic district located at the southernmost end of St. Petersburg Beach in Pinellas County, Florida.

<sup>8</sup>In 1917 George S. Gandy Sr. (1851-1946) formed the Gandy Bridge Company. In 1924, Gandy's company completed the Gandy Bridge, the first bridge to span from St. Petersburg to Tampa, Florida.

GG: That would've been probably in, I'm guessing, '38 to '41.

AH: World War II era.

GG: World War II.

AH: Before that era, your great-grandfather moved to St. Petersburg?

GG: They came down, and they started the Plaza Theater<sup>9</sup>—

AH: Okay.

GG: —over in St. Petersburg and several other ventures.

AH: And that would have been turn of the century?

GG: I think that was more '20s.

AH: Twenties. And then your grandfather was also associated with the [St. Petersburg] Yacht Club as well?

GG: Yes. I think they both were commodores<sup>10</sup>.

AH: At the yacht club?

GG: Yes.

AH: And what business was—

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<sup>9</sup>Located in St. Petersburg, Florida, the Plaza Theater (also known as La Plaza Theater) opened on March 8, 1913. The 1,800-seat theater became a movie house in 1920 and was demolished in 1957.

<sup>10</sup>In yacht club terminology, the commodore is the presiding officer or president of the yacht club.

GG: —two or three of them were, because my grandfather was also out of combat. But Dandros (?) wasn't a party place, it was pretty much just a sailing, and he started the Havana Race<sup>11</sup>.

AH: What was that?

GG: Big maxi boats<sup>12</sup> racing, big schooners, ketches<sup>13</sup>, racing from St. Pete to Havana Harbor [in Cuba]. So they made that trip many times. And that continued until things got pretty feisty with Castro and they changed it to St. Pete to Fort Lauderdale.

AH: So what business was your grandfather in, in the Tampa area? Or St. Pete area?

GG: My great-grandfather was, he was [in his] seventies when he started the bridge design and filling. And, by the way, that was the largest concrete bridge in the world that he, he conned [Florida] Portland Cement [Company]<sup>14</sup> into a pre-formed type of concrete. But, before that he had been, had started all of the electric train[s] or trolley cars in Philadelphia. So that's where he had a few shekels and then sold the stock.

AH: So then, your grandfather followed in his footsteps? Or what was your grandfather's business?

GG: Working for the Gandy Bridge Company.

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<sup>11</sup>The Havana Race was a 284-mile race from St. Petersburg, Florida to Havana, Cuba. Created in 1930 by Rafael Pooso of the Havana Yacht Club and George S. Gandy Jr. of the St. Petersburg Yacht Club, the race ended in 1959 after the overthrow of Fulgencio Batista's government in Cuba.

<sup>12</sup>A maxi boat, also known as a maxi yacht, is a racing sailboat of at least 70 feet.

<sup>13</sup>A ketch is a sailboat with two masts. The mizzenmast is located forward of the rudderpost and is shorter than main mast.

<sup>14</sup>On September 5, 1927 the Florida Portland Cement Company opened the first cement plant in the state of Florida. The plant was located on the east side of Tampa's Sparkman Channel and produced most of the cement used in Florida.

AH: Okay. So that brings us up into the early '30s, early '40s. You were born and lived on Davis Island. As I understand it, a lot of your time was spent on the bay, fishing. Can you tell us a little bit about what the conditions were in Tampa Bay at that point in time?

GG: Just one other little addendum to that, the original Gandy Bridge had a railroad track right down the center, and that was for high-speed transportation between downtown St. Pete [St. Petersburg] and Tampa. And the automobile was coming along, would be '29, '30, I guess, and so they were never used, but they were there till the end of the bridge life.

AH: Um-hm.

GG: Now, growing up and living on a seawall, we had crabs along the wall and shrimp along the wall. Lots of people would come out of Ybor City with a cane pole<sup>15</sup>, and they would dip shrimp<sup>16</sup>, and they would catch sheepshead and mangrove snapper. And then, the next day you would walk over there and it was—there were seagulls thrashing around in bunker sea oil and dying, obviously, tarpon rolling through the oil. And this didn't get much press because these were big companies that were owned by some of Tampa's elite, I suppose, and there were no regulations. People either did not care or were totally indifferent to it, the "it'll-go-away" attitude.

When it wasn't polluted, we used to catch drum<sup>17</sup> up to 35 pounds as eight-year-olds, and really make that rod and reel sing. And we would go with my uncle, who was a very good fisherman and an older—a survivor of World War II. We would get in his boat and go out where the spoil islands<sup>18</sup> are now and watch horrendous amount of baitfish, tarpon, mackerel, kingfish, just striking through the line. We were not the only one. The Colonnade [Restaurant<sup>19</sup>] had a wonderful boat called *The Nade*.

And they would go out and catch three or four, five tarpon a day. And now this is when, technically, the water was very filthy. It had every product known to man that goes down

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15A cane pole is a type of fishing pole that consists of a solid cane without a reel.

16To dip is to use a dip net to capture fish. A dip net is a net with a handle.

17Drums are a family of fish in the *Sciaenidae* family. They are called drums due to the repetitive drumming or croaking sounds they make.

18Spoil islands are manufactured islands, the result of dredge spoil materials from the construction of navigation channels. The Tampa Bay area has numerous spoil islands including Bird Island, Fantasy Island, Spoil Island 2D, Spoil Island 3D, and Sunken Island.

19Located in Tampa, Florida, the Colonnade seafood restaurant was opened in 1935.

a toilet because there were no sewers. Davis Island over to Bayshore [Boulevard]<sup>20</sup> was one huge septic and it reeked. And it reeked all the way up till, I guess, the last decade. It probably still does in points, but that was not cared for.

What we did see happen, when they started making it wonderfully, wonderful quality of water was, how do you do that? You dump chlorine in there, lots of it. It sure enough killed everything, including all of our blue crabs and shrimp that lived along the seawalls. And the Minnow Men did not think very highly of this. You could smell it. In fact, there was so much sewer gas and detritus that had packed down in the main channel along the east side of Davis Island, that the corps of engineers [The US Army Corps of Engineers<sup>21</sup>] brought a dredge in there. They hit a pocket of gas, of decayed matter. The explosion killed three people on the, I believe it was the Hyde<sup>22</sup>, the name of the corps of engineers' dredge. Enough said?

AH: That was certainly an era in Tampa Bay where the water quality was at an all-time low. And just to frame the time frame you're talking about, '60s, '70s, in that time frame?

GG: I'd say '50s to '70s. In the '70s there was still an occasional bad dumps. When the gypsum pile was, when I was flying after being in service and this was late '60s, I was flying down to Sarasota for a job and, as I passed by a big gypsum stack<sup>23</sup>, which, I think back then it was US Phosphoric<sup>24</sup>, it wasn't Mosaic. And I watched the dynamite go off and all of the sulfuric acid products come ripping out into the bay. This was typical. And down in Bishop's Harbor<sup>25</sup>, at the same time, which was a beautiful estuary, almost had the quality of up around Homosassa [Homosassa Springs] or down in The Keys [Florida Keys], loaded with fish, they took the dredge pipe, when Port Manatee was being created, and just dumped into Bishop's Harbor, which, it was very viscous; it was just a nasty product. It was not like sand, and it smothered all the grass flats, and that damage still is with us today.

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<sup>20</sup>Bayshore Boulevard is a road that runs along Hillsborough Bay in South Tampa, Florida.

<sup>21</sup>The US Army Corps of Engineers is a federal military agency responsible for building and maintaining America's infrastructure.

<sup>22</sup>The *Hyde* was a hopper dredge built in 1945 in Wilmington, Delaware. In 1988, the North Carolina Division of Marine Fisheries sank the *Hyde* to create an artificial reef.

<sup>23</sup>A gypsum stack is a mountainous accumulation of phosphogypsum and is the result of the processing of fertilizer from phosphate rock.

<sup>24</sup>US Phosphoric, a phosphate plant, was located at US 41 and Riverview Drive, north of the mouth of the Alafia River on Hillsborough Bay, Tampa. The Mosaic company currently operates the plant.

<sup>25</sup>Located in Manatee County, Florida, Bishop Harbor is located on the north portion of the Terra Ceia Aquatic Preserve.



AH: Um-hm. Well, you grew up in the '50s, early '60s, on Davis Island.

GG: Uh-hm.

AH: Where did you go to high school?

GG: I went to H.B. Plant [High School]<sup>26</sup>.

AH: Okay. And graduated what year?

GG: Nineteen sixty.

AH: Sixty. And then did you go on to college?

GG: I went on to Emory [University]<sup>27</sup>, and, well, I started at [University of] South Florida. And then I ended up transferring up to Emory [University]. And I was [in the] charter class over here when there were only four buildings on this campus.

AH: At USF.

GG: Yeah, at USF.

AH: Uh-huh.

GG: And, thinking back, I should've never left. But then along came the Vietnam era and it was time to do something, and I joined the [US] Coast Guard, went to Officer Candidate School in Yorktown, Virginia, and the rest is history.

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<sup>26</sup>Named after railroad tycoon and developer Henry B. Plant, Tampa Florida's H.B. Plant High School opened in 1927.

<sup>27</sup>Emory University, established in 1836, is located in Atlanta, Georgia.

AH: What did you do when you were in the [US] Coast Guard?

GG: I ran a vessel, ocean-going tug out of San Francisco, for the Pacific basin, a 143-foot. We made the cover of *Time* magazine several times for various and sundry good deeds, rescues. The Pacific is not a placid place, is all I can say.

AH: Well, we've taken a quick tour through your life growing up in Tampa Bay. What I'd like to do is drop back for a minute, and let's talk a little bit about some of your times in Hillsborough Bay, particularly. I know you and your dad and you and your uncle Bud did a lot of fishing. Can you and—at one point in time, you visited with Fred Schultz<sup>28</sup>, the Audubon warden.

GG: Uh-huh, we did.

AH: Can you tell us a little bit more about, just, what it was like on the bay and some of your recollections fishing and so forth at that time?

GG: Fred Schultz, I think my dad was doing a little story for the *Tampa Times*, which became the *Tampa Tribune*, and we went down there in a little outboard cruiser that he had and, of course, all I wanted to do was fish on the flats. And there was grass all over in that side of the bay.

AH: But, which kind, do you think?

GG: Hmm?

AH: Which kind of seagrass?

GG: Um, I think it was some, not inaudible (?), but long blade—

AH: Turtle grass?

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<sup>28</sup>From 1934-1962, Fred Schultz served as the Audubon Society's first warden for the Tampa Bay bird sanctuaries.

GG: Yeah.

AH: Okay.

GG: And this is a man who really risked his life for, I guess it was Audubon at the time, was it not? And defending all of the flat—plumage of the birds, who would get wiped out and sold up in the restaurants of Ybor City and all over Tampa. This was squab<sup>29</sup> and it was surprising. I caught cobia<sup>30</sup> where it's almost nothing but shell, rock bottom, along that shore. So it was dirty in one respect, but after they quit all that dosage of chlorine, I think it was really in amazing shape because it was filthy, but not the kind of filth that killed things, for example, the tarpon. It'd be all the way up into where Harbor Island is and the cruise ships are, but you don't see tarpon up there anymore. But they were there; then, during the dirty period.

One, I guess my biggest memory of a huge transition of what happened was, I guess I'd call it Red Hall's Hardware. Red Hall is an old Tampa name, and he had a hardware store at Platt Street, right off of Davis Island. So whenever I was building something, we would pedal our bikes up there. And he had a magnificent aquarium; it was probably eight feet long, very large. And in it were little tarpon. He had little snook, he had redbfish trout, and he would keep them in there for three or four days. And it generally wouldn't have feed very well, so he'd put them in a big bucket with an aerator, and he would take them back and release them where he got them, out there on, I believe it's Six Mile Creek<sup>31</sup>.

So we'd go out there and then we'd cast nets some more. And my dad allowed me to go, which I thought was just a wonderful adventure. And after I came back from the service<sup>31</sup> and flying around before I'd joined up with my dad, I looked down there one day and, where we caught all these little creatures, a nursery for all this side of the bay, probably, it was nothing but a concrete ditch. It had been done while I was in the service, four years of the military, and it ran all, as far as you could see, up to the east side of Tampa. And the guise was to solve the flooding on the Hillsborough River. Well, excuse me, if the wind came out of the southwest, the water's going to pack up the river and still flood it.

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29A squab is a young pigeon.

30Cobia is a Florida game fish that can commonly weigh between 20 to 50 pounds. The record in Florida is 130 pounds.

31Before its destruction by the Tampa Bypass Canal, Six Mile Creek was located six miles northeast of the Hillsborough River.

But it was a project, and it was not an ecologically sound project. But that just, that hurt so many people to see what a stroke of a pen could do.

AH: You're talking about the bypass canal, the Tampa Bypass Canal<sup>32</sup>?

GG: Um-hm. Yep.

AH: Tell us how you got out of the service, in what year? Do you remember?

GG: Sixty-nine, almost '70.

AH: And how did you decide to come back to Tampa?

GG: I looked around, having traveled all over the East Coast and West Coast, and had the opportunity to take command of some vessels and stuff, but my ex wanted to stay in Florida, and I enjoyed the out of doors. But when I came back, I started raising cane about what I saw.

AH: So what business did you get into, in Tampa, after the service?

GG: Well, yeah, I had a pilot's license. My dad had a little operation, and I said, he said, "Oh, it'll take you a long time to learn how to do this." And so I said, "Well, if I don't make my salary in two months, I quit." And we went on to double and triple the business in just that first year.

AH: And, tell us, for the viewers and listeners—

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<sup>32</sup>The Tampa Bypass Canal is a 14-mile flood bypass located in Hillsborough County, Florida. The purpose of the canal is to divert excess water from the Hillsborough River into the canal and down to McKay Bay.

GG: And this was aerial photography. Back then it was mostly oblique<sup>33</sup>. [I] had an old airplane that I used to go by myself or take him. And, unfortunately, he passed way too early, in '74, I believe. And so I just took on the business and been flying ever since. And ended up with a big Alaskan taildragger<sup>34</sup> Cessna 195, with a big radial engine, and we designed a vertical gyro [gyroscope]<sup>35</sup> mount that we could actually do mapping of a shoreline, a channel, and it would stay straight down and as straight as possible, and so we did that all these years. And then I finally had a little medical issue and a license problem. So I decided, having not bent the metal or injured anybody with thousands of hours, it was time to quit.

AH: So let's talk in a little bit more detail about that because, of course, you donated your collection of almost five hundred thousand negatives showing the progressive development—

GG: Uh-hm.

AH: —of the Tampa Bay, Central Florida area. Let's go back to those early days, when you first started flying the bay. You were flying what type of plane then?

GG: That old straighttail Cessna 170, and what I would do—I had two motives: if I saw a good grass flat anywhere in the bay, I would go ahead and photograph it so we could take a look at it and go fishing. Or, if I saw an insult, like a creek with an effluent of oil and gasoline and sludge coming out of it, I would come back and get on the telephone to see if anybody in power would take hold of it and run and try and fix it.

AH: And so, early on, what kind of clients did you have? You were—

GG: I didn't. I got a lot of rude phone calls back. That, some of the battles became very heated. I was asked by the State of Florida to testify against [Florida] Portland Cement [Company], who did a lot of ugly things over there in the east, east part of the harbor. And [I received threats] that my boys were going to, my sons were going to disappear. I

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<sup>33</sup>Oblique photography is a type of aerial photography where the camera is held at an angle between the horizontal plane of the ground and the vertical plane perpendicular to the ground.

<sup>34</sup>A taildragger is a type of airplane where the two main wheels are forward of the plane's center of gravity and a small wheel supports the tail.

<sup>35</sup>A gyroscope consists of a spinning disk or wheel mounted on a base that can turn in any direction so it maintains its orientation despite surrounding movement. A gyroscope is used to stabilize the camera in aerial photography.

would never see them again or the house would burn down at midnight. And I'd restored an old, little, old Dutch colonial up on the Hillsborough River where we lived. And we would watch every squall that came through, which still pervades today as the fact that every storm drain is going to make a big belch immediately into Hillsborough Bay.

And I tried to get them to get a little scour barge<sup>36</sup> that we could pick it up on, but the city didn't care. It was—Hillsborough Bay was labeled “Industrial Use Only” or “Chemical Industrial Use,” I can't remember the exact terms, but this was by the State of Florida, so if you addressed it as being— and you approached it as if it was industrial and agricultural use, then you didn't have to worry about it. This is how we dealt with pollution and, I think, a little bit today.

AH: So, when you were flying, you had your photography service from—

GG: Um-hm.

AH: —the early '70s.

GG: Um-hm.

AH: And then, if I remember correctly, retired in about 2005?

GG: Actually, I finished, I believe, it was about 2007.

AH: Okay.

GG: Um-hm.

AH: Tell me, what area did you fly? What area of service did you provide aerial photography?

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36A scour barge is a flat-bottomed boat used for the transportation of dredging spoils.

GG: We covered all the way from Alabama, Georgia. I did a lot up at Tyndall [Air Force base] and Eglin [Air Force Base] of the shorelines up there, all the way down into The [Florida] Keys, then towards the [Dry] Tortugas. But most of it was probably Fort Myers to Lake City, a lot along the coastal area and a lot where we're putting mobile homes and tract houses.

AH: So a lot of your clients in that era were local land developers?

GG: A lot.

AH: Or other commercial entities?

GG: A lot. Uh-hm.

AH: And then, as time went—

GG: And industry too.

AH: And industry.

GG: A lot of them would say they hate me, but they'd still hire us because we had this little niche of a product.

AH: You did quite a bit of highway work.

GG: Hmm.

AH: Tell us a little bit about that.

GG: When [Florida] DOT [Department of Transportation] would establish a new corridor, a roadway, we would go ahead and fly segments, depending on the size and width of the product [project]. They'd either cover eight hundred, twelve hundred, or

many of them would cover sixteen hundred feet in length. And this is the onset of the digital and, prior to that, we had built a vacuum back<sup>37</sup> that held the film flat to do it. So we would go ahead, for example, the Suncoast Parkway<sup>38</sup>. We flew the entire thing and, what is it, 50, 60 miles of it? And using references of a pond next to a very large oak tree because the surveyor had put all the survey marks underneath the trees. Because it was summertime, he didn't want to get hot out there.

So this played hell with trying to do it. But these were all projects that worked out very well, and they would use them for town meetings. And so, instead of arguing about something insane, you could look at it and say, Uh-oh, he's going to lose his fence line. And they would work it out that way, and it became very efficient to do it. But a lot of it, also, was wetland area and Tampa Bay Estuary Program<sup>39</sup>. For many, many years, we flew the entire perimeter of Old [Tampa Bay]<sup>40</sup> and Hillsborough Bay, and they could go back in and do comparative analysis of what the shape of the seagrass was.

AH: Well let's take a break for just a moment. We've been speaking with Skip Gandy. Skip's a long-term resident in Tampa Bay and the former owner of the Gandy Aerial Photography Service. We'll be back in just a moment. Thanks.

***pause in recording***

AH: This is Anne Hodgson with the Tampa Bay Oral History Project, and we're back with Skip Gandy. Skip, welcome back.

GG: Thank you.

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<sup>37</sup>A vacuum back holds film flat before each exposure by utilizing suction created by air drawn through a vacuum plate.

<sup>38</sup>Suncoast Parkway is a 42-mile toll road in Florida that extends north from the Veterans Expressway in Hillsborough County to US 98 in Hernando County.

<sup>39</sup>The Tampa Bay Estuary Program was initially established in 1991 as the Tampa Bay National Estuary Program. In 1998 it was renamed the Tampa Bay Estuary Program (TBEP). TBEP is a community partnership of counties (Hillsborough, Manatee and Pinellas), cities (Tampa, St. Petersburg and Clearwater) and agencies (Southwest Florida Water Management District, the Florida Department of Environmental Protection, and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency) dedicated to the protection and restoration of the bay.

<sup>40</sup>Separated from Hillsborough Bay by the Interbay Peninsula, Old Tampa Bay is 84-square miles of open water situated in northwest Tampa Bay.



AH: Skip's a long-term resident, long-time resident of the Tampa Bay area, grew up here in Tampa Bay and, for several decades, owned the Gandy Aerial Photography Service and Gandy Photography. We were talking, when we took our break, about some of the types of photography you used to do. And, just so we can paint the picture for our viewers and listeners, can you go back and tell us your first shop, your shop down on Davis Island, how did you locate down there?

GG: The airport was close and we rented a little spot. And the big, bad oil company says, We're going to help you out. [They] had an abandoned gas station and sold it to me, and I redid it with awnings around it—where the handy store is over there now. And we had a lot of fun to—big glass windows all the way around. We created a hall of shame. And this was, whatever disaster had happened for the week, whether it was the freighters colliding with the oil tanker where he had the leaker, the burner, and the sinker. And we had, we were CAPCOM<sup>41</sup> on that, for the attorneys, when that happened off of Egmont [Key]<sup>42</sup>, plus when the [Sunshine] Skyway [Bridge]<sup>43</sup> got knocked down and other fun things. But it was mainly inaudible (?) recycled oil spilling into the creek where the cows were grazing. You know, fun stuff like that.

And, at the same time, I found that, I guess it was just a challenge, but the flying got very routine and we became very good at it. So it was one run, put it in the can and we were done. I worked for a lot of the Hearst [Corporation]<sup>44</sup> magazines and the *Popular Mechanics* and the *Boatings* [magazines]. And, so my whole life has been an interface of water along the shorelines, whether it's high-speed performance boats, airplanes, aerial photography, but an awful lot of—nuclear submarines coming straight at me. It was always very enjoyable and exciting.

AH: Well, tell us a little bit about some of the boat shoots you used to go on.

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<sup>41</sup>Civilian Assistance Patrol and Civilization Operational Management.

<sup>42</sup>In 1993, three ships crashed in Egmont Key, Florida, spilling over three hundred thousand gallons of oil into Tampa Bay.

<sup>43</sup>In 1980 the freighter MV *Summit Venture* collided with the Sunshine Skyway Bridge during a thunderstorm, collapsing a portion of bridge and killing 35 individuals.

<sup>44</sup>William Randolph Hearst founded the Hearst Corporation in 1887. Since its inception, the Hearst Corporation has numerous newspapers, magazines and television holdings.

GG: Well, up to 137 miles an hour with Reggie Fountain<sup>45</sup> boats. But it was always—I pretty much pioneered one way of doing action and that is have whatever action it was coming straight at me, and it, because it was always more dramatic that way. But you also make sure you have a bailout pattern when everything went wrong.

AH: So you shot a lot of different kinds of action boats for different magazines?

GG: And for manufacturers.

AH: And for manufacturers.

GG: And interiors of them to make them look very spacious.

AH: And some of the clients were names we would recognize today?

GG: Regal, Chris Craft, Wellcraft,<sup>46</sup> *Popular Mechanics*, *Motorboat* and *Sailing*, on and on.

AH: So that was quite a large portfolio of boating work.

GG: Very much. And a lot that wasn't in the collection because some of those clients would always retain them so that they had them in their file.

AH: Um-hm.

GG: Because they had bad experiences before. So we charged them extra for it, and you can keep them. So I don't have a lot of those.

AH: Oh, I see. Okay.

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<sup>45</sup>Reggie Fountain was the founder of Fountain Powerboats. A champion speedboat racer, Fountain was CEO at Fountain Powerboats until shortly after its bankruptcy in 2010.

<sup>46</sup>Regal, Chris Craft, and Wellcraft are boat manufacturers.

GG: Or some of it had to go to the military, [US] Department of Navy, they had to check, make sure, and then they would release the right of this one and that one but, Uh-uh, can't show that. And it went over to the first Gulf War, when it was getting ready to kick off and did stories on the Patriot missiles and saw the secret towns that were built by our corps of engineers out in the middle of the desert, connected by railroad underground so that various leaders of various countries could escape, all around, if the nukes ever started flying. I've had a great career of information. It's been very interesting.

AH: Well, let's come back to Tampa Bay. Two other important collections that we have are the Bay Study Group<sup>47</sup>.

GG: Um-hm.

AH: And also some papers from Robin Lewis<sup>48</sup> who was a close associate of Ron Philips<sup>49</sup>, one of the early FWRI [Fish and Wildlife Research Institute]<sup>50</sup> seagrass researchers. Let's focus for a moment on the air photography that you did for the Tampa Bay Estuary Program and for the Bay Study Group. Can you tell us how you got started with that, and what was the purpose?

GG: I believe, in the beginning, I had a couple of very high obliques that were not vertical. You could not run a scale on them. But I think I showed them or we talked on the telephone. They needed an image that covered a creek or something. And that started it and everybody was bemoaning that, Oh no it doesn't look straight down so we can't put a scale on it and figure out what it is or have it all away across the image. So I got to work. That was the challenge for me. And I had the Cessna 195 that had a very large camera hole back there, so I started working on design, and I built a gyro-stabilized platform. And, when we'd run a flight line, I was able to see. I'd get up out of the pilot's position and walk back to the back, sort of half-down on my knees, and then I could see forward. And I had a linemen underneath the belly of the aircraft, and I would just talk on headsets

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<sup>47</sup>Formed in 1976 by the City of Tampa, the Bay Study Group monitored water quality in the bay until 2009.

<sup>48</sup>Roy "Robin" Lewis III was interviewed as part of the Tampa Bay Oral History Program on June 15, 2015. See DOI T43-00003.

<sup>49</sup>Ronald C. Phillips, PhD (1932-2005) was on the Florida State Board of Conservation from 1957-1961. A marine botanist, Dr. Phillips was an expert in seagrass biology, ecosystem analysis, field operations, and experimental design.

<sup>50</sup>The Fish and Wildlife Research Institute (FWRI) is part of the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission and is composed of five groups: Marine Fisheries Research, Freshwater Fisheries Research, Wildlife Research, Ecosystem Assessment and Restoration, and Information Science and Management.

to my copilot, which many times was Ralph Birds my partner in Tampa Flying Service<sup>51</sup> that we owned, and we'd just track right down the highway.

So I started doing that, experimenting on the water issue part of it. And the problem is, when you do aerial photography, you're straight down on a body of water. If the sun's too high, it flares right into the lens and you have nothing. And if it's got a ripple of breeze on it, each one of the wave front splashes reflected light like a mirror back at you. So it became—we had a rule: if it was blowing too damn hard and the sun was too high you don't go; all you're doing is wasting fuel.

But we would have an envelope of a week or so where, say for all of Tampa Bay and below the Skyway, Egmont, that type of thing. If we took off at 7:40 in the morning and we were back down on the ground having produced 70 or 80 images by 9:30 or 10:00, by 10:00 you'd have a little flare starting to sneak in on the edges, but that was acceptable. And that's how we did it.

AH: So, what did the [Tampa Bay] Estuary Program use these photos for?

GG: I gather they were having, or swiftmud<sup>52</sup> or some big agency was having, a photogrammetric which is a more of a sophisticated looking, straight-down type system. And they were having confusion as to whether they were seeing algae or whether they were showing seagrass. And we proved that we could come much closer with our tight parameters of verticals than they could with their overall. And so then it became, we did it every six months sometimes, sometimes once a year. And just a routine deal.

AH: And in that same era then you developed a pretty good relationship with Bay Study Group—

GG: Uh-hm.

AH: —the City of Tampa's Bay Study Group.

GG: Uh-hm.

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<sup>51</sup>Tampa Flying Service Inc., founded in 1965, was a flight school located at Peter O'Knight Airport in Tampa, Florida. Founded in 1965, Atlas Aviation took over the company in 2004.

<sup>52</sup>Southwest Florida Water Management District, known as commonly as swiftmud, is state agency responsible for water resource management in West Central Florida.

AH: Roger Johansson<sup>53</sup>—

GG: Uh-hm.

AH: —his team. And how did you work with them? What did you do for them?

GG: It was exactly the same that we did on both parts so that they would seamlessly fit together.

AH: Just, Roger was limited to a different geographic area or—

GG: Correct.

AH: Oh, I see. Which was Hillsborough Bay at that time, right?

GG: Yes, it was down to pretty much Hillsborough and down to, I guess, almost to Apollo Beach-type thing. And then the rest of it went all the way around the upper part of the bay, Safety Harbor, etcetera, around the airport, down to just about Big Bayou over in St. Petersburg.

AH: Now, when you were doing the photography, what were some of the things that you really noticed about the bay environment that spanned over several decades, '70s through the 2000s? Can we talk a little bit about, you know, your perceptions from the sky?

GG: Hillsborough Bay has always been a lot of suspended material floating in there and, I would guess, that it's because of heavily laden ships and tankers displacing water out of the channel. The bay is, in many places, eight, ten, twelve-feet deep and these things are drawing 40 in feet. So they have the channel if they stay in it, but what it does is sloshes all the mud that sits on the bottom, and you can follow a freighter ten miles later and just follow the mud trail and you'll know where he is. So I think that had a lot to do in Hillsborough Bay's problem. And the mud then smothers the seagrass because light can't

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53J. O. Roger Johansson, Supervisor of the City of Tampa Bay Studies Group for over 25 years, was also interviewed as part of the Tampa Bay Oral History Program, on June 29, 2015. See DOI T43-00006.

get to it because it has a coating of mud all over it. Now I, that's my theory, I can't expand on that the basics, but I think it's somewhat supported.

And Old Tampa Bay from north of about the downtown, south along that shore, is the only consistent grass flat that we have had in the bay. That grass flat, it was like it was impervious other than prop [propeller] scars through it. It's been there since I was a kid, and it still looks just about same. But there's a big flow of water, so maybe it's solution by dilution. The tide runs real well through there.

AH: Now, as you flew the bay, the early '70s were a transition time for the country as a whole because the Clean Water Act<sup>54</sup> was enacted.

GG: Uh-hm.

AH: The Clean Air Act was enacted.

GG: Right.

AH: Did you see any results from that, those new regulations over time?

GG: Let me just say that burning coal creates a very large signature in the atmosphere. I was doing a job 180 miles southwest out in the gulf on a seismic ship<sup>55</sup>. And we went, flew out there, landed on a deck that was—they'd spilled oil on and damn near lost the helicopter off the platform, but we got her tied down in time. And they said, Guess what? Our pump went out on our avgas.<sup>56</sup> So I said, "That's really sweet." So we did our job and we climb up to altitude, and I'm looking at, back then it was the LORAN<sup>57</sup> days in the '80s, and I'm looking back and I go, "Oh my lord, I can turn the LORAN off." And I figured that we had a tailwind at 4,500 feet so we'd just follow the plume. And we followed the plume from the coal-fired power plant 180 miles back, dead on it, and we still had an eighth of a tank of fuel.

AH: So that speaks to—

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<sup>54</sup>The Clean Water Act (CWA) is a key federal law in the United States governing water pollution.

<sup>55</sup>A seismic ship conducts surveys using surface-induced seismic pulses to visualize subsurface features.

<sup>56</sup>Avgas is aviation gasoline.

<sup>57</sup>LORAN, short for long-range navigation, is a radio navigation system.

GG: It—only in the last ten years have we really cleaned up a lot. And that’s because they’re going to a lot of alternate-type producers—jet engines.

AH: When you were flying routinely in Tampa Bay, what was the air quality like early on?

GG: Sometimes it was absolutely horrendous. I mean, you would go anywhere around Pinellas, Hillsborough, Pasco, down to Sarasota and you’d have three mile visibility, but it was smog. And yet you’d go out into the hinterlands<sup>58</sup>and, all of sudden, you had ten, twelve, fifteen miles. And that was very common. One time, my son, he was working on his multiengine rating, and he said, “Would you mind riding with me?” I said, “Sure, I’d love to.” So we went around. We did touch-and-goes [touch-and-go landings]<sup>59</sup>, we ran single-engine approaches, and finally we look at each other and say, We can’t stand this anymore. It was a beautiful blue day, but it smelled like acid and it burned all your sinuses. So we put the thing on the ground and the leading edge was bubbling with sulfuric acid.

It was, so I called, I got a hold of the old director, no names here, but I called him at home and I said, “You got to get out here and take samples, it will burn your tongue touching the leading edge.” And you can imagine what it does to a piece of metal, it just corrodes, it ruins it. You know, eventually, that airplane will be ruined. So this young man, fresh out of college, comes out and I had litmus paper there and showing him how it went off the scale.

And he says, “Oh my god, I’ve never seen such good evidence in my life.” And he says, “Oh yeah, this is great. You know, all the witnesses, this is where you’d been flying?” And he comes into my office about two weeks later because he was going to let me know and he says, “They wouldn’t go against the person that’s producing this.” He said, “They made me take the samples and throw them in the garbage can.” That was Tampa politics. That’s why it’s taken so long to get anything cleaned up.

AH: Well let’s talk about some of your ocean exploits, changing the subject. You did an awful lot of fishing in the Tampa Bay area.

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<sup>58</sup>Hinterlands are the remote areas beyond major population centers.

<sup>59</sup>A touch-and-go landing involves a plane landing on a runway and then taking off again without stopping.

GG: No, not enough. No.

AH: And you're pretty active in the conservation community.

GG: We tried to get the Tampa Tarpon Tournament<sup>60</sup> to become a [catch and] release tournament.

AH: So why don't you tell us, for the folks, our viewers and listeners, how did the Tampa Tarpon Tournament get started?

GG: I don't remember the inaudible (?) I remembered it all was in my lifetime and down on Bayshore [Boulevard] they had a rack, or gallows, whatever you want to call it, where they haul the poor devils up there and weigh them for weekly winners. And then they had a fish-off and then they won a Chevrolet. It was big prizes, outboard motors and all kind of goodies. But—

AH: When was the tournament held usually?

GG: Honestly can't remember, but I would say probably, easy 1950. And it went on till, till really there were no tarpon coming in there anymore.

AH: What time of year?

GG: Summertime, starting June. A friend told me the other day that last week he saw a rarity. He was jogging on Bayshore and he looks over there and he says, "There weren't hundreds of tarpon, there were thousands, and they were rolling between Davis Island and the Bayshore, in all sizes." So I thought, Wow, that's first time in 60 years that we've had that happen, that I know of, that's what they used to do. And feed, I think, on mantis shrimp and stuff down in the mud. Because, when you use a mantis shrimp or something like that, you usually had to inaudible (?).

AH: So—

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<sup>60</sup>Started in 1947, The Tampa Tarpon Tournament was suspended in the 1980s due to poor water quality and lack of tarpon.



GG: But most people were releasing them towards the end. And then that rack down there on Bayshore, across from Tampa General [Hospital] by the pirate ship<sup>61</sup>, you'll see colorful fish hanging from the cross arm up there and that's all that gets used for anymore.

AH: So that represented a big philosophical switch for the folks that were in—

GG: Yeah, pretty much.

AH: —the tarpon tournament?

GG: Pretty much.

AH: What do you think drove that?

GG: I think just, it's not the way it used to be. And you— go back to Red Hall's Hardware and the [Six Mile] Creek and the bypass canal, that was a producer of young— those tarpon we'd catch or cast them in a bait net and putting them in his tank, they were that big. So mama had just spawned somewhere up there. And I went up there a couple of times, looking around. And I didn't see the fish like it used to be but, there again, a 30, 40 foot deep canal is not the same as a place that gets sunlight and has grass growing and some protection, habitat—different world.

AH: Well, through the years as you think back on your experiences around Tampa Bay, what do you think the future holds for the bay?

GG: That's a very interesting question since we have seen articles recently about, Oh, we're not going to make the cruise world conform to the height of the [Bob Graham Sunshine] Skyway [Bridge], we're going to make it the other way around; we're going to dig a ditch all the way around through the highland area. The proposal was a possibility to go from say, Port Manatee, inland to the span of the [Bob Graham Sunshine] Skyway [Bridge] and then out into the bay and back on course. So I don't think that will help the

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<sup>61</sup>The *Jose Gasparilla* is a 165-foot long pirate ship built in 1954 for the Gasparilla Pirate Festival. It is docked at the Tarpon Weigh Station on Bayshore Boulevard in Tampa, Florida.

situation very highly, if you go digging anymore. I think digging days should be stopped, if we care about the environment, if we care about feeding people with seafood.

AH: Do you—as you look at the development of Tampa Bay, how do you think the public perceives the bay today?

GG: Well, all the reports are it's, Wow, in the last couple of years, you know, they're catching trout and it's much better and, I don't know. You know, when you guard the old stories and things, even when it was polluted, there was some horrendous—for example, the largest sawfish ever caught was in that same canal, the bypass, or somewhere real close up into McKay Bay.

AH: Uh-hm.

GG: World record tarpon was also caught up in that area. That area, though, now is right adjacent to the incinerator which, I believe, they admit to heavy metals just completely saturating that whole mud area. There isn't a trace of grass up in there. That's going to last unless—that one would be a good candidate to dredge it. But then, what do you do with it? And, I think, those practices have ended, I believe, that they're not doing it anymore, but all the lead from the cans and everything else got—oxides and stuff, got dumped out there. So—

AH: Well—

GG: —it's a better world going forward if we keep on the same track versus what our grandfathers did.

AH: Well we've been—

GG: That's all I know.

AH: We've been talking with Skip Gandy. Skip, I want to thank you so much for being with us here today in the oral history project. We really appreciate all of your insight into the past history of Tampa Bay.

GG: Well, I've enjoyed it and hopefully some of those images will help somebody in a project.

AH: Thank you so much.

GG: Thank you.

*End of interview*