SARASOTA COUNTY WATER ATLAS
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
NEW COLLEGE OF FLORIDA — FALL 2011

Interviewee: Richard Braren
Interviewer: Andrew Hess
Location: Richard Braren's garage, the Uplands, Sarasota, FL

First Interview
Date: October 26, 2011

Braren: (beginning with discussion of the Uplands landscape): The dense vegetation has always been an outflow for this sinkhole which was artesian fed ever since prehistory. Going back a few hundred years, the Native Americans, the Myakka people as I like to call them, would use this, and so would the animals so there was bird and game all the time around. The artesian flow was very profuse, so much so that when the Ringlings wanted to develop this area they thought they were gonna be able to dig a boat entrance and actually have where this lake is a boat basin. No real thought went into the fact that the water level at low tide is gonna be 8 feet below the surface level out here or more. At the same time, when the Ringlings began developing their own house, the area that they would settle in to the south of that you will notice a curve, and this was built in to make a boat basin at Sapphire Shores. And they have North Shore and South Shore drives and a couple of other drives in between it. The boat basin was to serve to hold boats for their friends in the Chicago area to come visit and the houses in there were to be winter cottages. And you will see from time to time some Mediterranean revival houses in there, and that's what they envisioned was a bunch of their friends having those and that they would also act as developers. And that was all the area south of the Caples mansion.

So you went Caples, Ringling, and you probably already know that the North house is a surname, not that it lies north of the other houses, and then the house that sits on the end of uplands is the ol' Lancaster house, and those three are the mansions that formed the New College campus they expected to have. You're familiar with the Crosley Estate that's already up here? That was already a part of the attraction of the area, and they were gonna do this through various developing people as Valentine Manor. And they were gonna be "manors," and of course that is puffery by real estate people—they set out to be nice good size homes and then north of that Whitfield Estates—once again puffery. And across the street from Whitfield Estates is the still really nice Sarabay Country Club.

And the north border of much of that is called Bowley's Creek, named after one of the settlers in the area. There are a lot of water resources that I have only observed, never got any information about, which are worth thinking about too. That was the dividing line between a Sarasota address and a Bradenton address. And still is the case, you'll be in Manatee county on your side of the street but you'll still have a Sarasota address.

That's true even out on University and a couple subdivision on the North side of University are going to have a Sarasota address.

And now comes the Uplands. The Uplands geologically were the nicest land out here, but we were to be the working class people who helped everybody else. And we might be the kitchen help and whatever they might need in the area. And that's what the Uplands were supposed to be. But it's got this real nice lake here. Now comes developers up and down, booms and busts.

This lake was a water hole that was full of weeds, growth, etc. not a nice open lake like it is now. And it was an abundantly flowing artesian well that sometimes had sulfur water and had long streams of white-ish, silver-ish sulfur deposits coming out of it. And at some time—and I don't know, probably by searching the Manatee County records you could find out—it was draglined, and I think I explained to you what a dragline was. You dredge by a unit that throws a bucket out and has a chain on it and drags it back and lifts it up and dumps it and it pulled along the sides. And they surrounded the area with coconut palms which grew to be a nice size, and of course that developer went bankrupt and others went bankrupt.

And at the same time they 'officialized' the artesian spring head which was up near lane road by putting in piping and a control valve that was probably 10 inches, maybe even a foot in diameter with a huge wheel control on it and some of that was… The airport was built for WW II. Before that, there was so much wetland out there it would flow so much that it would flood on down. So they felt for the subdivision they could control that by having this lake. Then you could see a dam at the end of this lake.

Then there's a glorified ditch and then another dam then another ditch, continuous. Then you have the lily pond or the… this was called the lake and that called the pond. Of course, this is not big enough to really be classified a lake. It's really a pond. They also decorated it with other vegetation. Had a split rail fence where you have a little 'x' with the smaller unit at the top and put a rail in between it, and it went around the lake. And that's how it was for ages… Now do you want to know about the artifacts I found out here?

We moved in 1950. Dad built this house, and built a lot of the houses that professors and a lot of other people have had around here. The first house he built on his own is the house that Glenn Cuomo lives in. That's the first house daddy built on his own. That was actually built for the Zinn family. Z-I-N-N. And the older, who we call Grandpa Zinn, started Zinn's Restaurant, which was a neat art deco landmark right there when the trail was just a two lane road. And it was one of the places all the way up into the 80s. And his

son is who he built that for, and they're old enough to have died and passed on and their children are my age. Well, a little younger than I am. And they lived in Glenn's house.

But this lake also was prolific with bass and brim. You would catch them, and the water was clean. And it was deep if you watch most of the time, well deeper than it is now. You'll see wading birds can go almost anywhere, and a little further between the banks and the islands maybe you don't see them going there, but every now and then, especially in the summer, just before the rains come you'll see a cormant or a duck go down, look for something, and as they swim while they're down where the water just gets thicker until it's just like a milkshake and then it gets to be like mud and muck or muck and mud, whatever. And you'll see the bird has swum through after something and up at the surface you can see the particulate come up. Um, but it wasn't like that. It's never been real clear it's been very tannic. But at times it was clear, a lot clearer than it is now. And you could actually jump in it and… Well, you always washed yourself off if there's some reason to jump in it. But my sister's son and the president of our homeowners' association, Chris Miller, actually would put a pram in it and flip it over and you could be underneath the pram and not touch the bottom. So that's six feet, approximately, five, six feet of water. It's not that deep anymore. It probably was never that deep when it was natural either.

But I would find as I gardened over here... My dad, brother and I were doing most of the gardening. Some where they dredged up especially up to… Not quite up this distance to the house, was real rich soil because it was the bottom of that. And you would find bones of animals. Not really well fossilized, but they hadn't really rotted away either. And up a little further you would find arrowheads, nice arrowheads (my brother still has most the ones that were found). And you could… We found stone that obviously had been worked by man close enough to the fashion, where it's reasonable to say that was either a woodworking instrument or an ax or so. Something that would be used for hollowing out softer logs; it wasn't something that really would cut much of anything. But it had obviously been made for some kind of hatchet-like, but not real good, use. Um, pottery shards all over the place out there. Small.

Hess: Any distinctive colorings?

Braren: Just blah. Red clay. Gray clay. Mud pottery. Not a lot of shells

I mentioned the airport. When the airport was made-now that you've paved and drained so much of the wetland—the head pressure for the artesian affect to this is greatly reduced so we would notice a difference, but it would still run even during the dry season. But it would just be a trickle down there. But it might be most of the time enough to keep that lake up. Now in dry time the lake drops a good deal. The dam has had erosion along each side and some of that erosion was deliberately made by people who want water to flow through, and some it was made by somebody else. At any rate, one of the unique things, the water that would come through was sulfur and sometimes fresher. And so it had more than one source of it. Whether it was a seam of percolating groundwater that brought one or it was more artesian deeper, aquifer. And you know, we give classes that say this that and the other about the aquifer. But we really don't know

that much about the deepest part of our aquifer here. The part that would be deeply connected with Appalachians, the ones mainly responsible for our big flowing springs.

Hess: Ah, I did not know that.

Braren: They don't either. They may say this, that and the other. There is a point they—they meaning geologists and other people—but I haven't seen any studies where they're like "Ok, where does Rainbow Springs, where does Silver Springs, where does all that actually start? Where do all the springs in the Suwanee and the Ichetucknee and all those things really start?" Because that's all… Where's the spring in Zephyrhills really get its water, because apparently it's much deeper and even our little Warm Mineral Springs and others which are different much different from… Well they're near something with core heating to it. At any rate, wanna ask me any questions? I have kind of held forth.

Hess: Yes, and sorry I've been silent through most of this. It's just nice to only get mostly you on tape. I don't hear myself on this thing, that's for sure. But, would you like to talk about how the Bayfront has come into play in your life, growing up in here so close to it?

Braren: Well after the various busts and booms. Oh, pardon me. The real estate editor for the Herald-Tribune is named Harold Bubel—and I don't know that he grew up here but he's getting more and more a handle on things—now he lives south of the hospital in an area called Desoto Park. And he makes a good point. There's currently an article on the Internet or what-have-you that he just wrote and maybe was published in the Sunday paper. I picked it up off the Internet, and it mentions the fact that the post-War World II boom never ended. So you have all these booms and busts, booms and busts, but it was such a nice steady growth from maybe the people in the Air Force, deployed over here, and then they came back to Sarasota and then from all the different… And had a nice steady growth. And for a long time house prices were pretty steady. Now eventually they skyrocketed and so forth. Dad started building houses around that time. He built houses all over: Longboat Key, Siesta Key, Southgate. And he had essentially three companies. One built houses like this: too little, not quite as big as this, your nice middle class and upper-middle class houses are going to be. And that was Southgate and so forth. Did you know Southgate was an orange grove up until the late 1950s?

Hess: No.

Braren: You drove right down where Southgate Shopping Center was—it was Snow Crop Grove - then it was bought by one of the companies that eventually Coca-Cola bought out. That was for a long time… At any rate, the Southgate Community is a really neat old community built in former orange groves. And then Daddy built bigger houses in Siesta and around, and he built smaller houses in Palmetto to Fort Myers out to Arcadia that were three bedroom, one bath, living room, small kitchen, tiny little dining area and it could be added on to. And it was a really neat design by FHA for it that was used also for slum clearance, lower-middle class and lower-lower class - all kinds of stuff - and much of our 'black areas' are built with nice houses and all that.

Daddy built 'em all out in Arcadia, and four hurricanes criss-crossed them, and this was 50 some years later and nothing but cosmetic damage. So Daddy was using hurricane ties before they were required. So at any rate, growing up in this house, I learned how to put plaster on right around the corner. From here at the Breezeway, right around the corner I'd sit there with Mr. Carnes and so forth. My eventual track coach built the fireplace that is inside this house, and every tree was my exercise equipment.

So I ran, played, rode my bicycle all over the place. And my brother and sister and so forth who would often go down there to the bay, and at that time the fence and ditch were not there. The wall with chains on it on this side, that's a later adaptation. And the house that's just past this one was owned by a man named Augustus Thierry. He was actually a developer. And the house over yonder was owned by a Mr. Thielen, and he was the, kind-of, financier of things. And Daddy did all the building all over this area. He wasn't just confined to the Uplands. At a point when development in this area had kind-of stalled, the trail had been widened and the big open area that New College owns was the Circus Hall of Fame. Did you know that?

Hess: No.

Braren: And you can kind-of see a pad on the Northeast corner of it that was the main entrance, and it was all glass, modern building. In there they had the most famous circus wagon called the Hemisphere Wagon, which on each side shows the hemisphere, and it took like four dozen Clydesdale horses to drag it around. Look up sometime the Hemisphere Wagon to get a grasp of it. The Ringling Hemisphere circus wagon. And it sat in there, and it was set up to where they could pull it out to use it for display purposes and other things and parades. But you had a quadrangle that went around, and you see all the concrete pads nowm and it was a history of the circus. And then some key little circus acts and puppet acts and so forth. But in the middle they would periodically set up a full three ring circus. You may notice the land kind of has a little dip to it in there, and that was the seam went around and the down part was the three-ring circus and one-ring circus acts or whoever was visiting, what have you. Unfortunately, the building of the Circus Hall of Fame and the Howard Johnson restaurant… where your bookstore was there was a Howard Johnson's Restaurant. And that was a motel and they added the Viking dorms, those were the hotel's addition.

And then they built the interstate. So nobody came here anymore. And motels up and down the North Trail just had closed and turned into a mess. Because there weren't that many… You used to go up and down the North Trail before the interstate was built, and it was like a promenade. You'd see all these beautiful, neon signs, and you could tell what the weather was like from the economy, just looking at how many people were up and down the North Trail. Now we have hookers and drug dealers walking up and down the North Trail. The trail was widened in 1956-7, and it was a dusty mess at that time.

Hess: And the widening was before or after the interstate?

Braren: The interstate came down here in 1970 approximately. It took them a long time to build it, and it opened up in segments and again, so I don't remember exactly how long

it was when it… and it might be first one unit and then the next and the next. And it just destroyed so much of this area. In here it started going downhill the moment they made the Circus Hall of Fame. People took less pride in their houses and many of the people here were real old and dying and their houses were going to be sold to people that didn't…

Then we had a lot of absentee owners, and even before that happened there was a time when they just couldn't, they didn't have the vision that all along the Bay -I'm glad they didn't- but where, why not have mega-houses if you're Mr. Real Estate? All along that area, nobody did it. The Thierrys and Thielens who owned that and actually gave that in what is called a "part gift, part sale" to the New College Foundation—and that was before New College had its financial problems and the state of Florida made it be connected to the University of South Florida. And they built that wall when they thought everyone was going to buy mega-houses, and nobody bought them and bought the lots and so forth. And at the time they just didn't understand it.

Backing up for a moment. The people the Uplands have repeatedly had because in the planning of this area they gave access to the Bay. The planners and the developers that said this is the Uplands and filed the plat in Manatee County. The people of the Uplands have a plat. But they never have actually used the term easement. An easement is legally supposed to be a specific place. And they never set it up, there was one or more court cases… I've actually seen recitations of it on abstracts, and that's 50 or 40 years ago. Where you get the people of the Uplands, the court case said, well it didn't say anything, "we are establishing just North and just South of that dense zone is a place where you actually have an easement." Legally, this has been used for so long you have what is called a prescriptive right, openly, notoriously, etc. You don't actually have a particular place you can go but to have access to the Bay and a prescriptive right to go there. Since our old- oh not imminent domain- adverse possession law concepts. Then when, Thierry and Thielen, did what was a part-gift part-sale of the land, in letters back and forth negotiating the deal, they reiterated that the people of the Uplands should always be able to walk to the Bay.

Hess: You can still do that today, even though I have seen 'no trespassing' signs.

Braren: Well notice those trespassing signs are gone.

Hess: Oh, I didn't notice.

Braren: They put them up and took them down understandably because it does apply to people who aren't in this neighborhood, and there were a lot. That was listed as a great fishing part, the end of Edwards Drive was listed as a great fishing wading bar. And it used to be, until the mangrove grew up and you only had one little hole to go through. I don't know whether this is meaningful to you or not.

Hess: Totally, it is.

Braren: There's a ditch on the North side of that dense zone that is… To the North of it is just cleared property kind-of like it is… That was not a ditch when I grew up. That was

a wandering stream, and it went down to another pond that was back up in this area and was hidden. And you would find all kinds of wildlife. And then it would go out to, and had a deep enough access between the mudflats that are out there to where I could actually get in it and swim out to the channel, the main channel. That's all silted in now. Well, in the 1950s, I could swim out to the main channel through that. I wasn't very big then either.

At any rate, inside that dense area, there are a lot of nonnative plantings and there are a bunch of invasive trees—pepper, etc. —that actually it would be smart to put together some kind of a grant or process to have people come in and tear them down. At the same time, they're students so they're getting paid for their work but learning something – turned into a working classroom. That whole area, there's some stuff that I… There's one idea of leaving something pristine but it can also kill itself with part of nature. And man can manage it to where it preserves itself as you keep the good, non-cannibalizing, native species in there, and get rid of the ones that aren't native. There are probably a few exceptions—probably a few benign in there. But I used to go back in there and make little tree forts and all kinds of stuff.

— End of first interview —

Second Interview
Location: Richard Braren's garage, the Uplands, Sarasota, FL
Date: November 18, 2011

(Part 1)

Braren: Dad just imbued a love of the water as soon as… work towards anything done… whatever method we were going to be in the water. And the water here was utterly clear. Clear to where I will still dream about things… about the water being clear. The bay front… I gave you that old book or mentioned that old book yesterday, *Sarasota*, and you see some of the pictures? Well, that's how I grew up, without all the fill and everything in the bay front and the water was just so clear out there. And off here. Do you want to turn that off for a second? Just for… See…

(Part 2)

Braren: In the late 1800s about the time the settlers were coming here, Sarasota Bay was crystal-clear water and up in the estuaries, Bowley's Creek, which is just to the north of us was an estuary… Still is but it was a nice clean estuary, and you had sturgeon living up in it. And off of the bays and other places there were lots, just gobs of the fish out there. And they would brag about how many fish you could catch; you would see pictures of people with gobs of racks of fish caught, and they were catching them semi-recreationally. It wasn't commercial fisherman, it was just anybody can catch them.

The North Bay right opposite us was big, wide and full of fish. And the open area and especially to the South where they have just torn out the little wetlands' overgrowth of infusive trees, invasive trees… was a virgin stand of pines. To have pine lumber, they put in a donkey railroad. That's where a cart on a railroad about two, three feet wide and a

donkey pulls the cart. And they cut the trees and put them in there, and then that'd leave a stump, and they'd usually dynamite the stump and take the stump out because the stump was full of turpentine. And turpentine could be steam rendered and used for making paints and all sorts of other stuff. But the pine was primarily heart pine so it would grow harder and harder and harder over the years.

And to cut that doorway… The second doorway back. I was actually five years old when they were building it, and they had plasterers that would show me how to plaster and carpenters showed me… I was here when they actually built that wall. It took seven sawzall blades, you know what a sawzall is? A reciprocating saw. (Pulls out saw from the garage) This is a sawzall. That blade goes back in here, it took seven of those blades to cut through the pine you used to be able to cut by handsaw, that's how much it hardened. That's also how coveted pine was because the thick, knee part of the pine became the trestle or any part of the railroad that they put the tracks over. That's what you make it out of. It was an industry to make that and as a result all that open area.

So the fishermen, when they saw it open, would instead of going home to downtown Sarasota, they would just set up poles and dry their nets there. But you know how nice it is when the sun sets, they'd start staying night after night, and they'd build a little village there called Codzi. And there were about a half dozen houses that had cisterns that caught water, so they actually would have a water supply right there (gestures to the bay front) and that's all on the south-side. That property. So growing up had all of that water, natural. And St. Armand's key was not very populated - very few houses up there – and you could actually, where there's a mucky canal right now was crystal-clear water that was a number of feet deep. You could bring big boats and so forth, all sorts of stuff in it. So I learned how to swim long before I learned how to walk, and that was actually pretty normal. I think my sister did too. My dad had… Not sure about my brother but that's how being water oriented.

One day coming back from Lido, St. Armands from Coon Key—you'll see there's a divided—Ringling Causeway has divided- a little creosote bridge out in the middle they were building before they… It might it had been there. And they kept it while they were building the rest of the old Causeway. That part of the causeway is still there and ends up on Bird Key. Bird Key was just a mud flat with some houses and Australian pine trees. It had some little shacks up here, but it had a real mansion out on it about where Bird Key Yacht Club is. The rest of what you see of Bird Key was illegally or semi-illegally filled in. They got permission to fill it in when they were making the west coast inland navigation district. That's dredging a deep trench that'd allow you to go up and down the coast. Well they have to put the soil somewhere, so the Arvida, Arthur Vining Davis, who bought most of the Ringling lands including Longboat Key and all sorts of stuff just got permission to put in seawalls and then dump in inside of the seawalls, and that was to make Bird Key. Only they just put their seawalls out sometimes one hundred yards further than they had license to put it, so they got all this free land. Also it ruined some of the exit-flow and started eroding the North end of Siesta Key whereas the channel, Big Pass, went more directly straight out at that time.

And actually at that time there were a number of artesian well-heads, and you could still see one of them on the North end of Siesta Key right by the last cottages. That's about—a concrete thing about two to three feet in diameter about eight foot with an eight inch in diameter cast iron pipe on the inside and that's a sealed-off, very fast flowing, artesian well-head. And there were springs out there, enough to where when up into the 1950s before Castro's time we had a coastal schooner trade where schooners would leave Cuba, come up to Ft. Myers, Tampa, Tarpon Springs, etc. on around New Orleans and then back. And during—especially July, August—there's enough well-head pressure to where you had freshwater coming off the North end of Siesta Key—birds would come around to see the two different types of fish and the schooner captains would go there and dip down and fill their casts with probably not drinking water but enough water to wash and so forth. So that's kind of where you could grasp all the water and everything down here.

Coming back on to Bird Key one day, at the foot of that little divided bridge—this little mud flat—a boat, a fish boat and they're homemade about twelve feet long and 4 feet wide and they're made out of marine plywood two 8x4 planks but you cut them out in the middle so that they overlap by two feet and then you're going to build all your rails out of whatever else is there and that's your basic little boat. And it has a little one lung engine in it, and it goes CHUNG-CHUNG-CHUNG. And the first one… The engine would go both directions, and it has a little rope that you pull to start it on the front. And so you killed your engine, put the rope the other way and pulled it and put it back into gear and that was reverse. Then eventually they came up with transmission so you didn't have to…

So one of those had sunk on the edge and they had a place where they sold bait and smoked mullet. And I asked the guy, "what is he going to do with that?" and I'm about five years old, and I asked "what is he going to do with that?" and he says "Your daddy has a truck and if some of us get together and put that into a truck then you can have it." And so right over here (gestures to backyard) on that side of the yard I took that boat apart and—it was actually in the back a little—and just took that boat apart and measured it and just about by where that storage shed is, starting turning it upside down, used that as templates. And on to age 6 and so-forth put together my own, handmade boat. And learned how an internal-combustion engine worked, took that thing apart bought the parts, put it back together, and it worked. I would keep it down there for awhile but I had… My parents didn't mind me swimming in the Bay because that's like me and fish. But boating was a thing because if I'm boating alone, and that wasn't a seaworthy boat if a wind picked up.

Me handling it was not the question; it was just a clunky old boat with no floatation devices in it, and so they were happy for me to sell it and I sold it. But after that, eventually owning all kinds of boats and growing up in the Sailing Squadron and mainly sailing mostly for fun but getting up into a little more competition, labor day regattas and so forth, and then making a decision when I was a student at Duke. I went to Duke at the age of seventeen on a running scholarship. To earn more money—there were also other parts of the scholarship I had to do—to earn more money I became a mathematical modeler for Navy research.

Mathematical modeling means anything that you think is scientific really isn't until you can reduce it to numbers, and the numbers and equations work out nicely. And you can run it backwards and forwards through your computer, and it doesn't have any glitches in it. And so for a number of different things we were doing that. And to keep it simple. The next year at Duke, a girl broke up with me and I had a fatigue fracture in my fibula from over training and running. I kept my scholarship by my natural swimming ability. I didn't have to work out and I could go swim on… when I was on Sarasota High's track team, I'd go swim on the swim team when they had an opening that didn't conflict with a track meet. In a fit of adolescence when a girl broke up with me, I pulled my Navy research strings and started training as a Navy project manager and that's a long story that we'll just leave at "a Navy project manager," but it involved me eventually learning how… I went through a correspondence that was actually very good—there were two of them that were extremely good. Mostly it was those of us, us people, who were racing sailboats and wanted to learn how to make sailboats. And many sailboats were handmade at the time out of light weight and exotic materials. And so a lot of us, even, took it. I learned how to make displacement hull boats and actually got more training from the Navy. But that's…

Boats were always a part of my life. Even when I was single, I might have more than a half-dozen boats. And sometimes I'd keep them here or the Bahamas or wherever. And I might have a bunch of boats sitting around my house that I lived in down near the hospital. And people would say, "why do you have so many boats?" and I'd say "You don't sell your children, do you?" (laughter).

At any rate, boating became second-nature to me. Boating, building boats, fixing boats.

Hess: Did you like naming your boats?

Braren: Well I had… My catamarans were *Cinderella Sunshine*, *Tangerine*. Then my… boat that I… The small hull that I did most of my sailing in, I had a moth-class boat that was just beet, ruby red and then had varnished decks that turned in so you wouldn't hurt yourself when you're hiking out. And it was quite a boat. To where people wanted to protest me. I won so many races in it. And I still have… somewhere… the anchor out of that boat. I was just using it to pull up trees. Although, to pull down that was really wild. I can't see it. I had it around here somewhere. And it was one of these claw anchors that closes up. Then you just open it up and twist it. Bingo, you've got a four-claw thing that grabs. And sometimes in a sailboat race your anchor is your fastest sail. When the wind dies and the tides taking you the wrong way, you put your anchor down and you can't kedge with it. That's throwing your anchor down, pull, then throw an anchor out. But you can put your anchor down and not be carried out the pass.

At any rate, the name of that boat was *Ruby Tuesday*. It goes: I won so many races, they'd say "goodbye *Ruby Tuesday*." I was gone. Then I had a dart. Now a moth is an eleven-foot boat. That's 78 square feet of sail area, only one sail. You could literally have, and most people did have, a plumb bow, eleven-feet straight up and down stern and bow. And you could make your boat any size, but after awhile they get ridiculous and you have these narrow, little water-lines and these big curved decks so you could hike out. And literally you could have, if you want, a 78-foot mast and a one-foot boom. Of

course that wouldn't go anywhere except tip over. But mine had about seventeen-feet on the deck and the deck was a foot and a half off the water and curved like that. And so it's just shy of twenty feet on an eleven-foot boat. And if nobody is in that boat it won't stand up. It'll just fall over. And it was really fast. And you can put your feet underneath hiking straps and lean out against it. That's the only hiking assistance you can have.

Then, the next class up was called a dart. Now all of these are developmental boats, where you can make your boat out of whatever you wanted to. And they're going to break. And so my dart is the same thing only it's fourteen-feet long and 110 square feet of sail area. And you can out a harness on to your chest and hike out with your feet on the very edge of the boat and lean back. Like you've seen on Hobie Cats and so forth. And it's a very fast boat. And that boat weighed 80 pounds, fourteen-feet long, all made out of, well this one, engrained balsa. Where you take balsa wood—yes, the same stuff you would make a plastic model, little balsa wood models out of it—and you cut it, it's engrained, and you put it inside your mold. Your mold is a fiberglass like substance, only it's much more like a surfboard. It's gonna be made out of dynel and diplast. Then you put it in like that. And it holds once you've put your resin in it and it holds stiff. But it doesn't weigh anything.

I did well in those boats. And then somebody invented what's called the laser boat. Fourteen feet long, much heavier, very well-designed, and it's designed to sail, not be crazy. And it doesn't break. On certain points of sailing, it's going to beat those other boats. It's not gonna go to windward. Do you know what windward means in sailing? If the wind is coming straight out of the south, to get there I have to tack back-and-forth. The general rule is rule is about a forty-five degree angle. Well some boats will get even closer to the wind. So you'll work your way on down because your sail is actually being air foil. It's going to give you lift and you'll have a dagger boarder or a keel down into the water. That also gives you lift and you sail into the wind, to windward. You're not going directly, you're tacking back and forth in the wind. Now a moth or a dart in a light wind would tack much closer to the wind. But a laser would tack close enough but off the wind when you pull that the laser will just get up and SHOOM, right across the top of the water, in the same wind. All the laser boats were the same. They didn't break. And they were inexpensive. And every good sailor no matter if you're racing big ocean racers, Olympic class, flying Dutchmen, what-have-you you buy a laser boat and it'd be out at the Sailing Squadron and twice a week you'd be out there racing it and it's not how much money you put in the boat. It's how well you can handle your boat and your tactics and strategies of sailing. And we really honed some great sailors out of that.

Well I kind-of got ahead of my story because while I was at Duke, I wanted… I just started in on working on building boats. When I started that moth, dart phase, but the laser phase had not come. I, though, I was admitted to Duke Law School, not because I applied but because my accounting professors pushed for that. And I also had written a textbook, *Business Law for Non-Business Majors* for the business school, but it was actually titled by a tenured professor of Duke Law School who was also a commercial attorney in downtown Durham, North Carolina. But I actually was the one who wrote the monographs. I don't think he added a word or subtracted a word from it. But I got a

'with-line' on that. At any rate, that was the first textbook for business law for non-business majors.

Hess: I need to look at that.

Braren: I don't know whether I've got one anymore around. But it was Duke University Press, you might be able to find one. I don't know anymore. With all that kept in Durham, I was like "no way, I'm going back to the University of Florida because I'm just hours away from the Sailing Squadron and the St. Pete Yacht Club." St. Pete Yacht Club was the sailing capital of the South, at least. And if not, the ocean racing capital of the world because when we had the Southern Ocean Racing Circuit here… In the winters…The big "Yankee" yacht club boats were racing against us. And we proved good mettle.

But originally the Southern Ocean Racing Circuit started with a race from inside Tampa Bay and the St. Pete Yacht Club out around off Egmont Key and all the way down to Havana. Actually there was a first race where you went down – some years – you went down to Boca, went back to Venice. Other years you went out and up to Anglo Key and back to St. Pete. And then the second race was St. Pete to Havana and then Havana to Fort Lauderdale, and then you came down to Miami and you had what was called a gold cup race, which was a triangular course where you race straight into the wind, like I mentioned about going to windward, and then you go at an angle to one side and then back to where you started. You go straight into the wind and you come straight downwind and then you go back straight into the wind again. So three times you go that same 'straight into the wind.' Then you have two, what are called reaching and then the running. You show how well your boat can handle in all points of wind and how well you can navigate because you're doing it in the Gulf Stream where you're going to have a three-knot current, and then you might have a six-knot eddy and then a one or two-knot counter-eddy going the opposite direction. Now that calls for some navigating.

Hess: Ah yes.

Braren: So that was the race. Then you would race another one from Miami to Fort Lauderdale and over to Lucaya in the Bahamas. Then another one from Miami all the way around the Barrier Islands and in to Nassau and then the Governor of Nassau Cup Race which was supposed to be another gold cup but people were so drunk they would only go until [cracks up laughing]… It was a fun party race. And that went from the 1950s and got changed when Castro took Cuba and instead of having St. Pete to Havana, Havana to Fort Lauderdale it was just St. Pete all the way around to Fort Lauderdale. And that historically became one of the most lightning, cold, front-ridden races imaginable. And yes I have been on a boat when you… St. Elmo's Fire all over your rigging and you know you're gonna get hit and I had my hand on the wheel and now that I'm gonna get hit I take my hand off. The lightning is discharged down the shrouds and into the exchange plate which actually discharges it all the way into the saltwater. Then you put your hand back on and keep steering. You don't even get upset about it.

Hess: You have to know exactly when to take your hand off?

Braren: Well, if you didn't take your hand off you'd get a tingle or a burn. You'd have taken your hand off, one way or the other. Either reflex or, "AHHH!" or you say, "Okay there's the tingle. It's time to go." And so that was a good deal. I just really don't have a lot of fear of lighting storms and stuff. I have a good sense about when to get out. But when the Weather Channel and they're exaggerating these storms they talk about, "big dangerous thunderstorms." That's a nice summer thunderstorm. That's all it is and it's nothing to worry about. So I grew up viewing the weather and learning everything I could about the geology, the oceanography, physics, etc. of weather. Mostly just by picking it up, but also by going right to work and learning it from the best people I could find to teach me on it.

Just as comfortable as could be in a boat. And when I'm inside the water swimming, I'm in my own environment. I'm home in the water. I've been able to have where I could turn my feet up and go down without any weight belt or anything. Fifty, sixty feet. Free-diving, sticking around for two or three minutes and then coming back up.

Hess: That'd give me a headache. Just thinking about it…

Braren: To me being in the water… That is not an exaggeration about what's called two minutes of "bottom time" at fifty, sixty feet. Now part of that is you're using good fins and you actually as you go up you're gonna push down on the water and get your torso up and you're taking huge breaths [demonstrates huge breath] and then you're going to tuck your head but your feet are going to come up. So your waist is going to be here and your feet are way out of line and it just drives you down. And you've got fins and you're kicking like this and you put yourself – you've got a mask on but it's not a big mask. I had one handy, near here a little while ago. It's just covering your eyes and you hold it like this [grips nose] . Because every two kicks you're [breathes heavily] going about six feet so you're going to have to accommodate for your ears by blowing out your nose. Valsalva… Semi-valsalva maneuver where you - valsalva is two words. I'm pretty sure it's two words. They may have consolidated it to one. Any rate, being there, being under water was just as natural… I learned how to scuba dive, who knows how early. Then later on you had to get all kinds of certifications. And I, just because I loved it, I'd actually be getting the certification then turning around and teaching and getting paid for the work. I would do oh…That's when I did the research diving off of the Myakka River's former mouth and then down wreck-diving all over. And Miami has some of the most beautiful wrecks inshore that you can go to and go down.

And you can get um… I thought I had here a deep Atlantic spiny oyster has this little foot where it's attached to using the hull of the boat, well the hull of a wreck. And then a bottom shell is about as big as the palm of my hand and about that shape. And the top is… and it has all these spines. And you open it up, and it's in deep gulf stream waters so it's as clean as can be. And you've got this gob of delicious oyster that's literally about that big [holds up a fist].

And it's a one-meal oyster. And it's clean. And you often would scrape a few of them off because it takes a long time. They're really stuck and you want to pull the hull off. And then you've got little pieces of mud flake will be coming off of it. Well I'd have all these

portals I'd get and piston rings from old liberty ships and all sorts of stuff. And I'd make things out of them, give them away for Christmas presents and so forth. But to me, being underwater and in the water and on the water that was normal for me.

Hess: Do you want to talk more about your scuba diving in Myakka, your research there?

Braren: Well, I'll just describe it out. If you take an overview as you can see, even in an airplane but from certain satellite pictures, the watershed from Myakka curves and comes back up. You're going down, the trail even, to where the Laurel Exchange overpass goes over, and you look around you'll see that there are some little wet areas, they're wetlands kind of like this one here, only they're actually bigger. And they were a part of the eddies of Myakka wetland area. And then it went on down and then came out where the Venice jetties were and that was many years ago. Probably long before the stories I told you about fish out here. Well before that. And then the Venice Jetties—they had to jetty it because it is an unstable outlet. And it would open and close and open and close and open. So as Midnight Pass and so as Blind Pass Lagoon which is part of Sanderling Road. All of those are just areas that at one time were empty and then a storm would come and sandbar shifted over and it would empty somewhere else. And some of the time Myakka got captured by an estuary leading into Charlotte Harbor instead of going directly out and into the Gulf. And so that had been figured on and analyzed and group of us were going down there to research dive and learning how to do research, right when side-scanning and sonar and ground penetrating radar were coming out to where a civilian can have it. Because you literally, if you're touching your mask, in that environment you can't see your hand. So you're going on your own blind instincts of your natural orientation and so forth. And you actually, sometimes, you could actually see a compass but sometimes you had equipment that had a compass built into right here. You're using different from a regular mask because it was nasty. The reason is you're going through and gently pumping up debris that's real soft silt. So it's just. And you're going around with instruments in your hands too and you're feeling and finding artifacts.

Hess: Anything more on that?

Braren: Just as an aside, I had swum so much and I had done triathlons. I had an eight-minute open water half-mile swim in a triathlon. That's like doing back-to-back four-minute miles. And if you're running. And I could put so much blood flow through my two main arteries, brachial and apical arteries in my arms, that it would exceed the blood flow than an average athletic man would put through his femoral artery in his leg. And so when we went to… there's tons of scuba diving studies done..

Recording cut off. The reason was found to be a power surge in the outlet.

(Part 3)

Braren: My name is Richard Braren. I was born October 15, 1945. I mentioned Asheville North Carolina, but this was home. And here at 455 Poinciana Drive, we moved in 1950 and although I've lived in—other marriages—houses and other places in Sarasota since that time this has always been the base I come back to. And before when

we were building this house in the late 40s we lived on Bowley's Creek which is about two miles straight north of us on the Bay. Then what do you want to know next?