

Ken Vandell
Tape: 3.27.01.1
Starts: 1:00:30

Interviewer: Kathy Hersh

Recorded: 3/27/01

Location: 9049 S.W. 69th Court, Miami

Q: Ken, tell me about when you first moved to the neighborhood?

A: Well, Ruth and I moved into Pinecrest and we lived at Frasier's Trailer Park on 124th Street, where the new park is set for Pinecrest -- they bought that. And that was in 1948. U.S. 1 was just single lane, South. And I live there for about eight months. We left the trailer there and went up north for another job. At that time I was in construction. And we left here. We were gone about eight to ten months and came back. We moved into this house in nineteen forty-nine...fifty. Nineteen fifty. And we've been in this house since then.

Q: And what was here, what was around here?

A: There wasn't much here, the man...Mr. Little built this house, the one across the street and Dick's house. Three houses. At the corner of this -- 69th Court and U.S.1 -- there was Suggs Plumbing. An old southern family. Mrs. Suggs had about forty monkeys that lived in a large tree behind their home. Now remember this was on U.S. 1 and 69th Court, where the Medical Arts building is now. On the far corner was a man named Mr. Gus Dorr who owned where Dorr's Pond is. He had horses. He was in the advertising business. He was an older man and he would ride through this neighborhood on one of his ponies periodically. He was a nice man. He had about about six or eight acres of land there. South of us, 69th Court stopped at, I'd say, 94th Street with a fence. Beyond that were groves. And the road -- 69th Court ended there. U.S. 1, there were tomato fields on the right side in the area of KMart. Another interesting thing was the barracks for the German prisoners of war were on the West side of U.S. 1 where the Datran Building is, or close to that vicinity, where people from German ships, German submarines who were captured during the war had been stationed there -- or, imprisoned there. And they were allowed to work

outside. They were working in different shops in this area. But the barracks they had them in and the barbed wired was there in 1949 when we moved here. The East coast Railroad ran all the way to Homestead at that time. And, where the Jiffy Lube is was big old building --combination feed store for the farms throughout this area and they had rooms for the railroad people going back several years prior to that when the train ran to Key West. They would change crews there and those people would stay in that old hotel while they would change to the other railroad to go to Key West.

Q: So, was the railroad still...(STOP FOR NOISE). The hotel where the railroad people stayed, was there a lot of railroad activity in 1950?

A: No, mostly produce. U.S. 1 was lined with packing stores. One of our industries here was making boxes for the fruit shipping. And the people worked in these box-making plants along U.S. 1.

Q: So, on one side there were box-making plants and on the other side there were packing houses, and then behind were the groves?

A: Some of the groves are still left.

Q: Where are some of the original groves that were here in 1950?

A: Well, uh, I don't know the address -- up near O.J. Simpson where he's got his new house there. Up in that area. Up in that area.

Q: Over on the Killian Drive...?

A: Yeah, Killian Drive area. And they seemed to do.

INTERRUPTION

Q: Let's go down U.S. 1 some more. What about Dadeland, it wasn't there, I presume?

A: Oh, no. There was nothing here. Kendall Drive stopped just west of the hospital at about 90th Street and it was from then on it was a dirt road. then Arthur Vining Davis came in and he live over here, Pinecrest areas, well it was just Kendall then. And a...he was the CEO of Aluminum Company of America. And he's the one who processed some of these...got in land

development over by Baptist Hospital, and so forth. And he donated the Baptist Hospital to the Baptists, Arthur Vining Davis. And it was through his money that that was built. And that opened up Kendall. They dug these large canals for drainage purposes. If you went out to 124th Street on a normal day without a flood most of that had two or three inches of water until they dug these canals. And this drained the area. So, when we do get flooding now, Mother Nature goes back to its original because these canals can only...they were designed to only take care of so much water and if we get a torrential downpour they cannot take care of it. They just...another thing if its high water or a hurricane the ocean is a we are here so the water will not flow. There's no differential in the flow. So, the canals are hamstrung, to an extent, in discharging water out. So we get back-up. And of course we run into this flooding condition that you read about during these big storms.

Q: Speaking of big storms, you lived through some big ones, and you stayed in you house?

A: We stayed in our house. We lost a lot of trees. And a...but the house was not damaged to any extent. We have shutters, 100 percent all around.

Q: You bought this house already built?

A: Oh, yes. Yes. This house was owned by an airline pilot. He lived here about, I'd say, less than a year and he moved over to West Miami, closer to the airport. Because from here to the airport was not good for driving, even then. He wanted to be...his name was Malcolm...and, ah, he and his wife lived here. They didn't have any children. So, that was about the extent of this house. This house was built in '47. So, we bought it. We paid seventy-six hundred dollars for the house and the acreage.

Q: What was it like living here in the early days?

A: We enjoyed it. We didn't have the fence. We slept with a screen door not locked. No problems. Took it easy. These apartments of course were not here. Right over here was a family -- Mrs. Adams. They lived in an old southern-type house with about, maybe, eight hundred square feet. Built up off the ground that you could look right under the house for cooling purposes. It had a front porch, screened, and there were about five of these houses. There was a street. This street here behind us continued down

there. And there were several houses with old southern families in them. They've all been demolished. But it was nice. You had no worries, you could leave your car out. Nobody stole gas or tires or...no problems. No, it was really nice. We loved it here. We stay here. And, ah...we have been robbed once. And, ah, we had a car in the back here. We found somebody sleeping in it one day. And he had no place to stay so he came in and just occupied the car. We didn't have him arrested or anything, we just told him we didn't care for that, so, we didn't like him around. He was a young man. But, ah, no it's been nice here. We've gone through several hurricanes. We don't enjoy those, but we lived through them. We make out.

Q: What were some of the businesses that you use around here?

A: Well, there wasn't really too much here. Most of it, we all our shopping in South Miami. And, ah, ah, we had horses here for a while. Our own horses. And, ah, there was the OK Feed Store and one drug store and the bank. And it was a pleasure to go down there and do our shopping, We had an old Ford car. We would go down there. It wasn't old, it was new, but we'd go down there on Saturday's and have a wonderful time shopping, waling up and down Sunset, and we knew most of the shop owners. And, ah, it was really nice. Real friendly. And south of us the only store I know of was one that was built across from the trailer park where Gardner's Market is now, and he lived in the trailer park, and that was the only produce and general store that you could buy things from, down that way. And of course there was Jerry Sherrard who had Sherrard's Bar and Grill and that was going place for politicians and so forth that they would drive out from Miami and go down there for an afternoon drink.

Q: Where was that located?

A: Where the Dixie Belle Shops are now. There was out...there was nothing there, really. None of the stands were there, just the trailer park. The trailer park was in the woods and they had to put in their own water and sewer system. Mr. Frasier, Andy Frasier. He started that and then he sold it and moved away and the groves west of U.S. 1 were quite heavy. They were supplying mangoes, things like that, for the railroad. It was really interesting. And then FPL come in and built the Cutler Ridge Plant which is pickled now. The big...it's not used. And that was built in the '50's -- early '50's. And, ah, they had trouble with the stack emissions, so forth, but FPL corrected most of the problems. But since they put the atomic plant in, they

abandoned that one and pickled it. It could be brought back if it had to be but it would take quite a bit of money and time.

Q: What has been your occupation?

A: My occupation? Well, prior to going to college, I worked for Combustion Engineering, who built that power plant. They built the boiler, the steam generation unit. I worked for them.

Q: So, you're from here?

A: No, I came from Staten Island originally. I came from Staten Island originally. My wife and I got married, got on a sailboat and sailed to Florida -- December 22. There was snow on the deck. We sailed here. We stayed at Jacksonville on that boat for a while and some rich man came down. He said, I want your boat. So we sold him the boat, under the condition we would deliver it back to Sea Island, Georgia. So that was just another good trip for us. So we delivered it. His name was Cargill, and he was in the lumber and paper business. So we delivered the boat back there, and we then bought a small car and came to Miami and lived up near 27th Avenue and 8th Street because after the war, at that time, there was very little housing because all during the three or four years of war there was nothing being built. Everything was going into the war effort. So we took a small apartment and we stayed...there were several apartments in there. It had been an old garage and these folks fixed it up into multiple apartments. And the woman who ran it was named Rosie. I was talking to Ruth about it, this Rosie. It was a place to live. That was about it. It had a stove, bath facilities and so forth. We made out there. And then we bought the house trailer and moved into Frasier's Trailer Park. At that time I was in the construction business -- we were traveling all over the country. So we went from there...I went to (STOP FOR SIRENS IN BACKGROUND)

A: We moved to North Miami and at that time Port Everglades was just a normal small port and they were running fuel lines into the port for some of the new construction they doing there. So, I had the job to run some of the pipelines out from the mainland, out to Port Everglades. And I worked there, oh, maybe eight months. And at that time they, ah, People's Gas Company in North Miami, at 163rd Street were running low on the production of house gas, because Miami was booming and there were more houses being built that utilized gas than they could supply. So there

they decided to redo that plant and I worked on that plant for roughly a year -- redoing the plant. And they built some large capacity tanks for storing gas. They would make the gas at night and store that so in the daytime they would have back-up for the city. That was the only gas plant around at that time. Now that plant has been knocked down and eliminated. Due to FPL most people have gone to electric and bottled gas which is cleaner and really cheaper. So the old gas company is gone. And from there we went to Elizabeth, New Jersey and worked on another gas plant that was in the same dire needs for capacity. We worked there two years. And, ah, from there we went to Scheneley. Worked at the distillery and they were making, ah...what they were doing was storing butal alcohol for the new rubber tires -- again, getting back to the war. There was a great shortage of rubber so they were making butal rubber out of alcohol which Mr. Rosenstiel said "I want to stock up on the alcohol to make tires for Goodyear." So, we were there. Very interesting place, we lived down in the valley. And we couldn't work several weeks because the temperature had gone to sixteen below zero. So we couldn't do any work. Everything was tied up. And the weather broke, Mr. Rosenstiel made us work seven days a week, ten hours a day to get this finished. So anyway, that's about it. We came back down here and stayed. I went to University of Miami. Graduated engineering in 1955 and, ah, we've stayed right here ever since. And I wound up being chief engineer at the Homestead Airforce Base. And I hate to see it go commercial, because when I was there, I spent twenty some years there, we were getting problems from our takeoffs and landings. Most of our landings were in over the Everglades, we have a outer marker there, but our takeoffs were usually over the Perrine area. And we would get problems with our jets. And that hasn't changed.

Q: What kind of problems?

A: Noise. Noise and fuel and of course they emit emissions, you know, from the jets. And we maintained the jets pretty well. But I hate to see it go commercial because of that. I...I...It's just my feelings, and I hope it never does. It was designed as a military base and should be kept as that. I know there is going to be a shortage of runways eventually. They would have to put in another runway. See, it's in a position there is no cross wind runway, it's just one runway that the military live with. But there's no room to put in, so they'd have to put in a parallel runway. But ah...

Q: What do you think the environmental impact would be of that?

A: Oh, bad. We had problems. We had problem. We had to live up to several agreements all the time. And the run-off from that runway. Now I go back to the base periodically and they had to fill in all the fueling pits because of contamination. They would leak little jet fuel here and there. It would add up. A cup full of jet fuel, you know, will spread half an acre on the ground...on water, rather. So, that's a problem.

Q: So, contamination of the soil; contamination of the ground water?

A: Ground water. Oh, yes. And of course we have our own canal there. We have our own sewer plant there. When we had the twelve hundred and fifty-five houses we had to take care of those people -- all military. And, ah, we had our own sewer plant, our own water. We had a regular city there. It had heavy employment, but most of it was military. We had our own store, our own theater, everything -- swimming pools, golf course.

Q: It was a real base?

A: Hospital. A hundred and five bed hospital. A good hospital.

(PAUSE)

Q: So you must have traveled up and down U.S. 1 quite a bit if you lived here, you commuted to homestead? What was that like? What was U.S. 1 like, then.

A: Well it was only the one side, north and south on the west side. The road is still there, the old concrete road with the expansion joints -- "bum, bum, bum." They're still there. And, ah...I...of course I left for work pretty early. We had to be to work at eight, but traveling U.S. 1 wasn't bad at all. That was another thing that this base thing would contribute to heavy traffic. And of course they want to bring up Old Cutler on that. Old Cutler Road, which would be terrible, I think, to cut those trees to widen up Old Cutler Road. People don't realize when an airplane lands it got four or five truck loads of produce on it. Whether its flowers or furniture or livestock, whatever it is. These trucks have to get up to Miami. And they could take the turnpike, but I'm sure they wouldn't. They'd either take U.S. 1 or some of the back roads unless they were forced to. No, I don't like it. I don't like to see that. It was

bad when the Air Force broke it up so that some of the big corporations could put hotels in there. I there's some talk of reproduction movie business and, ah, golf course and hotels. And also keep the reserves there, with the base they've got -- the reserve base.

Q: So, you've seen a lot of changes?

A: Yes, and, most, not for the better. We wouldn't have put the six foot fence up thirty years ago. We wouldn't need...there's no need for it. And I fought these apartments and they were supposed to grade those apartments down. But, Dade County being what it is, they came right up to this street. Of course, we have grown shrubbery here and you can't see them, but we know they're there. They're not bad. Right now I have a little problem, somebody's parking commercial vehicles out here and I don't like that, but I don't know what I can do about it. Call Evelyn Greer, maybe. That's about all. Got a big truck and a couple of trailers and he works out there. He's a nice man, you know. Shouldn't live in Pinecrest if he wants to be commercial. He should live in Opalocka. That's the way I look at it. He says "I haven't got enough parking space." He rents one apartment, he only gets one or two parking spaces. So, he and his wife, or whatever, they already use them up. So he brings his truck out here.

Q: They're probably not allowed to park commercial vehicles in there, anyway. Most...

A: In their parking...

Q: Yes, there are usually rules against that in most condominium set-ups, so...Well, can you think of anything else that you feel you need to tell us? What would you say have been some of the major events that have occurred in the time you've been living here -- that you've seen an impact in the community?

A: Well, I think the building of Dadeland was fine but, as far as I'm concerned, I didn't care for it. It brought in too many people and too many cars. And, of course, west of us is the Datan Building and the new ones being built. I know they are going to go that way, but there's not much I can do about it. And I think the zoning should be held tighter than what we have been holding. In other words, keep the commercial people in their position. Most of the property that has been zoned commercial -- fair enough, I'll go along with it, but I don't like new infringement. I don't think

that's fair to the property owners up in this area, especially. Along U.S. 1 its been commercial for a long time and I think they have a right to keep it that way, but not to enlarge it.

Q: On this residential side?

A: Right, right.

Q: Kind of hard to maintain the line there when you've got U.S. 1 being the major artery just a few feet away here?

A: Well, it's like Faye, now. She wants to sell off the last half. She thinks they could build apartments on it. I said, I don't think that's fair to us. Look at this. It degrades my land if I wanted to sell it. I'm not selling it but if somebody wanted to sell it they say, well jeez, you know, it devalues it. It's a dumb question. Like Dick had some people looking at his house, oh several...maybe a year or so ago. They came out and they saw the buildings back there. The wife said, "no, honey, no I don't think so." Because of that. So, I...that's the way I look at it, anyway. They should hold what they've got. And as Evelyn Greer said one night, they're trying to cut down to a...the proportion of height to the width of the buildings in the new design. I hope they...hope she does something along those lines with the architectural side of it. You can have a nice home without going up three stories.

Q: So you watched the construction of Dadeland?

A: Oh, yes. Oh, sure.

Q: It was quite a project. wasn't it?

A: Tremendous project. Tremendous project. No, they a...

Q: Were there hundreds of workmen on it?

A: Yes, yes. Oh, I would say maybe a thousand people went to work every morning there, for a short time while they were building it. J.C. Penny and those stores, they're all being constructed almost simultaneously. Right behind each other, you know. No, its...its inevitable, but it was zoned that way, leave it there. No I...

Q: Did you know a man named Jack Hinman?

A: Henry?

Q: Hinman.

A: The name strikes a note, it does strike a note.

Q: His family owned the land that Burdines, Dadeland is on now. And then when they sold that to Arthur Vining Davis they moved across the street to what then later became Williamson Cadillac. He had a house there.

A: No, I...Hinman, no.

Q: It's interesting some of the people we've been talking to. Some of the descendants of the original settlers who came here?

A: Well, getting west of the...U.S. 1, we belonged to the South Florida Riding...Jumping, Riding Club. We used to walk, periodically, once a month they'd have a horse show, just past Baptist Hospital they had a big ring, a hundred and some stalls. We could walk our horses up Kendall Drive into there every Sunday morning, leave them there and pick them up during the week. But that's all gone. It's all houses now. You would never know there was a place up there for a horse show. And they'd have several hundred horses there on the big event.

Q: That must have been a lot of fun?

A: Oh it sure was.

Q: So you rode your horses right over Kendall Drive?

A: Down the street and up. We'd put a lead shank on them.

Q: We were going to talk about Brown's Airport.

A: Right.

Tape: 3.27.01.2

Starts: 2:00:00

Q: We're going to Brown's Airport. Tell us about where it was -- there is some confusion -- about exactly where it was. You probably know?

A: Oh, yeah. A matter of fact, I...well...You came in across...you're flying there you'd come in across U.S. 1 going East. You come down, let down and the first street there, it's a main street, it's an avenue name now. Right across from the bank, the first street you turn South on.

Q: Which bank: Barnett, First Union?

A: The one down on a hundred and fourth. Washington Mutual.

Q: Okay.

A: Turn right there. What's that street there. It's a main street.

Q: Seventy-seventh Avenue?

A: Yeah. But it has a name on it, too, now.

Q: Palmetto?

A: Yeah. Palmetto. That was there. You had to cross that to land.

Q: Okay, so it was East-West?

A: Yes.

Q: A hundred and fourth street was the...?

A: No it didn't come up to 104th. It was back about two blocks.

Q: But the runway was East-West.

A: Yes. Grass. Now you could land the other way too, but it was just grass. Just grass.

Q: So it was north of 104th Street?

A: No, south.

Q: South. South. Okay, got it.

A: A side line. Fellow worked for me, an engineer, I went to school with him. His name was Bobby Chapman. He lived in a little house off Palmetto, there. He had his airplane in the backyard. He would crank up, taxi out of his backyard over into the airport and take off. No control tower. He just flew out. He usually flew to the East or Southeast there, and he'd come back home. Come back across U.S. 1 where KMart is down...dip down over the wires and land. He had a 105. Cessna 105. He worked for me for quite a while. He and I had gone to school together. And he had a sailboat. We had a sailboat too, but anyway...

Q: Was he related to the Chapman Field people?

A: No, his father had been a builder once. Most of the planes there were light planes. In other words, four passenger, about, max. And that's what that one he was four passenger.

Q: How long had it been there, the airport?

A: How long? Oh, it's ten years that I know of.

Q: You mean at the time you came here?

A: Yeah, yeah.

Q: So at least since 1940?

A: Yes.

Q: So was it for crop dusting, or...?

A: They had a crop duster in there. They had one field, one plane, biplane.

Q: But people who had private planes could use it?

A: Oh, sure.

Q: It was basically a runway?

A: Yeah, a grass...grass field. It was very plain, you know. Rural, farmer-type airport, you know.

Q: No control tower, you said?

A: No. Oh, no, no.

Q: No lights?

A: Oh, no. We had to get in before dark.

Q: Did it have a wind sock?

A: Yes it did. It had a wind sock.

Q: Well who controlled the flow planes in and out?

A: There wasn't that much, really, you know. somebody'd taxi out there was no...you didn't have radio in your plane, you know. Those planes were just...We were...I didn't tell you we went to Key West and she wanted to go flying -- she has a private license. She had it. Anyway, she wanted to go flying, so my daughter made arrangements. We flew to Key West and took that biplane up. Well years ago when you flew they had what they called a Gosper (Sp?) Tube. There was no radio. And the instructor in the back would talk to you, down in your earphones, this thing would come through all muddled. You know: turn, bank right, bank left. He'd have to scream over the engine. So, we were in this plane and of course that plane was built in 1941. The one...that one you saw the picture of. And a...it a... it had the old Gosper Tube in it, but the new plane (or the rehab) had earphones in your heads...in your headsets. So he could talk real nice. But a...that was a plane that was down in there at that time. It was built as...that was a primary trainer plane, that we were flying in one week ago, for the government. And of course they had the real Chapman Field that did have

runway down near the power plant there. And the old saying was "One a day in...in Biscayne Bay." The pilots would land...military. Anyway. But that was a single runway: East - West. And that had lights and a little control tower.

Q: At Chapman Field?

A: That's where the power plant is down there. The U.S. Introductory Service for plants and so forth. Down in there's the old...some of the old runway is there, and some of the old landings, you know, where you turn your plane around. They're still in there, the old concrete. It's interesting in there. They've kept that just the way it was, you know. Not maintained, but...I hope they never sell that ground off, the government, where they bring the...redo the plants from foreign countries in there.

Q: So, are there any vestiges of Brown's Field left?

A: Not that I know of. It's all houses. It's all houses.

Q: So it didn't have any buildings at the time?

A: No, no.

Q: Just a landing strip with a windsock?

A: They had some stakes in the ground where you tied your plane to. So, you know, during heavy winds.

Q: Did they have anything that designated the runway like...?

A: No, just the runs, the stripes, you know, where you used it. The wheel marks. You know, it'd run the grass down.

Q: So it got a fair amount of usage, it sounds like?

A: Oh, sure. Oh, yeah, yeah. Oh my.

Q: It sounds so precarious to me?

A: Well, we were flying, my wife and I, she took more time than I did. She go here license in '39. But, a, I took about four lessons. Number one, it was too expensive -- it was eight dollars an hour. That was a lot of money then. But her folks gave her the money. Anyway, she...there was nothing there. When you'd land you'd hear the gravel hitting the bottom of the plane from the runway. And, a...they were all fabric, you know, no metal planes. And I was just thinking the other day by looking at this plane the covering on it was all canvas, you know, it was called Secanac (Sp?). It's a new material. Now, we used to be all linen on the airplanes. And then after you put it on, you had to dope it so it would shrink and tighten up. If you didn't do it right it would warp the fuselage or the wing. You had to be careful. The used to do that at these airports, you know. Then they came out with this new material. Getting back to government, the government inspector would come once a year and cut a two inch piece out of the airplane -- the fabric -- and check it for tear, to make sure it was usable. If it wasn't, he'd condemn your plane. You'd have to put it on, say three or four months, you'd have to recover it. It was big...cost a lot of money and time. Your plane is laid up, too. But they were all covered with the...a lot of the military planes were that way. Matter of fact, during the war some of the English planes were still part fabric. Some of their pursuit ships that would do two or three hundred miles an hour.

Q: I had no idea. You took lessons at the Browns Airport, then?

A: No, no, no. This was in Staten Island.

Q: Oh, I see. Okay. But you flew into Brown's?

A: I never flew into Brown's. My friend did. He had a plane there, I flew with him.

Q: Okay.

A: Bobby Chapman.

Q: So you landed at the Brown's?

A: With Chapman.

Q: But there was nothing around that...oops we almost hit that house, or..?

A: Oh, no, no, no. The only...the bad thing was the wires on U.S.1, coming in. You had to get down, over those wires.

Q: So you had to go under those..?

A: No, you go over them. Over them and down. But there's only a short distance, see. Everybody made it.

(LAUGHS)

Q: That's interesting?

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