

Carol McGlaughlin
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Interviewer: Edward Woodward

Carol McGlaughlin was born in 1943 in Cincinnati, Ohio. In the mid-1950s, her family sold their hardware business in Cincinnati and moved to Clearwater Beach to build and run a motel (Track 1). McGlaughlin's mother oversaw construction of the Merri-Mac Motel while her father stayed behind in Ohio to help the new owners of the hardware store. McGlaughlin recalled general contractor Ed Brittle's (*SP?*) reaction to working with her mother. "For him to be working with a woman, as I remember was really a shock to his system," said McGlaughlin. "He just couldn't believe that he was going to be taking orders from a woman ... in the end they became very good friends, but she was on the job every morning." McGlaughlin speculated that her family moved to Florida in part for health reasons; her father was ill and died in the late 1950s (Tracks 1 and 4).

McGlaughlin said her parents originally aimed to enter the wholesale electrical business, but she was unsure why their plans changed (Track 4). Regardless, she said her mother was glad no more winter mud would be tracked into her house. "She just thought it was wonderful that the kids walked sand into the house and you could just sweep the sand away," McGlaughlin laughed.

Before moving to Clearwater Beach, McGlaughlin's family usually vacationed in Miami, but one year chose Florida's West coast and stayed at the Sea Star (Track 4). McGlaughlin talked about the road trip routine from Ohio to Florida. Her family left late at night and drove some 20 hours, then stopped in Yankeetown and stayed at the Withlacoochee Inn. (Track 5) McGlaughlin explained the routine: "The next morning the plan was that you got up, you were clean, you put on your new clothes that mom bought you, your vacation clothes, which were your summer clothes ... you only had like three hours to go and you arrived in Clearwater Beach looking like you just got off an airplane, not like you had driven for 20 hours."

McGlaughlin talked about living at the Merri-Mac with her family (Track 15). Their home was separated from the lobby by a door that was open to guests. "Every move that we made the guests knew about it," McGlaughlin recalled (Track 1). "My brothers used to duck out the back door, but when I had a date, all the customers were sitting in the lobby checking out the date and what I had on. And if I went shopping or mom and I went shopping ... the guests all had to see everything that I bought. I had to model the thing, my clothes, whatever it was. And of course Mom always reminded us that this is how we made a living and so we had to entertain the customers." That included joining games of canasta, shuffleboard or bridge when an extra player was needed (Track 15). "You did whatever it took," recalled McGlaughlin. "If the customer needed to be kibitzed to or talked to, you went out, sat and talked to the customer."

McGlaughlin said her mother thrived being around people and was active in the community (Track 3). She recalled her mother inviting guests and "strays," - widows or other residents whose family was elsewhere - to Thanksgiving and Christmas dinner.

Primarily, guests came from the Midwest, McGlaughlin recalled (Track 2). Often guests helped maintain the motel (Track 3). She talked about one guest, a retired railroad executive from Kentucky, who every winter cleaned and replaced the webbing on aluminum chairs. "All the customers sort of took on the projects they could do, which really helped us obviously financially so that mom didn't have to hire maintenance people to come to work," said McGlaughlin. Her mother hired maids who cleaned the motel rooms and helped with cooking and ironing at their house (Track 10). McGlaughlin recalled some of her duties: cutting grass and working in the office.

Though McGlaughlin's mother was successful enough in the motel business to comfortably retire in the 1970s (she held a merchandising degree from the University of Cincinnati (Track 4)), she recalled financial troubles after her father died: "There was a point where the sheriff came and said he wanted the furniture. Mom told him to get the hell off of her property that there was no way that she could run a motel without the furniture in it, that she would somehow pay for the furniture," (Track 12).

In the early 1970s, McGlaughlin and her husband, who she met one high school summer working at Pier 60, bought Indian Rocks Beach property, including the Pelican Motel. "I had no intention of ever being in the motel business," she said (Tracks 1, 2 and 9). McGlaughlin recalled 15 to 20 small motels when they arrived at Indian Rocks Beach (Track 6). She described the setting: "We had a two-lane road, no sidewalks, you walked on the side of the road in sand and sand spurs, the beach accesses were not paved, they were sand," (Track 15). Now there are about six or seven small motels, she said (Track 6).

While McGlaughlin's husband worked in sales, she ran the motel (Track 2). However, unlike her mother, McGlaughlin vowed to have privacy in her home: "I had decided that I would never have customers running in and out of my house the way my mother did. I mean people used to come into our kitchen looking for a certain pot and pan."

Most of McGlaughlin's guests at the Pelican are from the Midwest (Tracks 2 and 14). Guests come from Pennsylvania and Canada as well, particularly Quebec and Ontario. Like her mother, she has developed recurring guests; five generations of one Indiana family have vacationed at the Pelican since the 1970s. Her returning winter retirees turnover about every 10-12 years, a point where many either pass away or are too old to travel to Florida (Track 16).

McGlaughlin, whose grown children have moved away, said she enjoyed raising a family in the motel business: "It was a great way to be at home, raise kids, just basically the same way my mother had done it only fortunately, I didn't lose my husband," (Tracks 2 and 14). Her kids also did their share of motel work; cleaning rooms was a family effort (Track 13). And punishment meant pulling weeds or washing windows instead of going to one's room. "They worked, and it didn't hurt 'em a bit," she concluded (Track 14).

Followup Notes:

After the formal interview, Carol McGlaughlin explained the origin of the Merri-Mac name. Friends of her parents referred to the couple as the Merri-Macs; she said her parents were extraverted, outgoing people. Also, the motel railings had a musical theme, with notes built in. McGlaughlin's father was an Irish tenor with the Cincinnati Zoo Opera Company