

Interview Subject: Ruth Karp

Date Recorded: 2-18-12

Location: MDPL office, Art Deco Welcome Center

Date of Birth: 3-28-25

Ruth Karp came to Miami Beach with her husband after World War Two and established a small produce business which eventually became Carnival Fruit, suppliers of produce to the big hotels and the cruise ship industry. She is an artist and the mother of School Board Member Martin Karp.

First impressions of Miami Beach: like going into a fairyland. 1946. Came down on honeymoon. Stayed at the Shoreham Norman. Beautiful room. \$35 a week. Wonderful breeze and could see the water. Was advised to go the Cleavelander for \$21 dollars a week. They went out to eat, the movies, the dog track on Biscayne. There was a kosher restaurant that was very good, somewhere around 6th Street. From 5th down was the main area, the hub. Drugstore on corner owned by Galbut. Miriam Galbut and Ruth were friends.

There was George's Chicken. George was Greek. Chicken dinner came with potatoes and coleslaw.

We came back down and fell in love with beautiful foliage, the water, the beach. The men who got the sand in their shoes pulled their wives down. We gave up a produce business in NY and moved down in 1950's.

Describes how husband started out working at a local produce store and worked his way up to having his own company, Carnival Fruit. Lived in a part of the building that was part of Joe's Stone Crab. Places didn't want you if you had a child. Four of them lived in an efficiency. Reminisces about the clientele coming to Joe's. Later, after they formed their own company, they sold Joe's their produce.

Ruth worked for the City of Miami Beach as a recreation director. She talks about their struggles getting established in a home and business, Carnival Fruit Company. Converted store to open air, New York style. 1960. Established a wholesale business.

Clients: Fontainebleau, Eden Roc, Cruise, Concord Cafeteria, Wolfie's, The Rascal House

Sold business eventually to an English firm. Eventually became part of Sysco.

Tells story about applying for membership in Bal Harbor Country Club and being denied because of being Jewish. Didn't know anti-Semitism was still around. Fought it legally and won. They paid \$450,000 legal fees to keep us out. The powers that be were the ones who forced the rest to go along with suit. 1985. Surprising how late anti-Semitism existed.

Describes culture shock of racism, taking the bus. In Queens her doctor was black, her dentist was black. Didn't understand the separate water fountains, segregation on buses.

Went to Copa when Lou Walters owned it.

Overt signs of anti-Semitism. "Restricted" signs everywhere.

Worked with pre-K, outdoors, 50 children, by herself. Tremendous challenge. They had a spring play with costumes, a band, where they drew, and made clay.

Worked with recreation department. They did more things with our children than California. They used to have Halloween parties. Memorial Field. Council and Mayor were jurors. Spring plays. They had a bandshell and put on programs.

Everyone knew each other. They were all friends. They were a little community. The carriage brigade - they'd all go to the beach together. Really tough finding a place to rent with children. Buildings weren't more than 3 floors.

Mentality of tearing anything down older than 30 years. Speaks in favor of historic preservation although she wasn't involved.