

From Aunt Isabel

LIVING IN FLORIDA (2005)

As I told you in the last Swope News, my family and I lived in Florida during the four years of World War II. Leaving Indiana with my children, ages 3 and 7, was quite traumatic. Guy had already taken his position at Buckingham Air Field in Ft Meyers, so Cooksey drove us down in our old 39 Chevy. I remember we had to stop at Ft. McPherson, Atlanta, to get much needed gas stamps.

When we reached Florida, I tried to explain to the children the changing scenery. "That's Spanish moss", I said pointing to the grey bearded stuff draped over the limbs. "I know all about it", three year old don piped proudly, "my doctor told me all about it when I was born!"

We lived happily for a while in an old two story house with Mango trees in the back and a coconut tree in front. Since it leaned, Gyanne and Don had fun trying to climb it, but they couldn't get very far up.

One day Don came running in from playing. "Mommy" he exclaimed, "I almost caught the prettiest snake, but it got away." Eventually the "pretty snake" was caught and killed, a deadly Coral Snake!

We experienced our one and only hurricane. It was before hurricanes were given names. Guy had to stay at the fort on duty. Schools were dismissed, so Gyanne came home, already in the rain. Following directions, we filled our bath tub with water, and got out candles. Wind screeched and rain drove in parallel sheets, trees groaned and bent (our neighbors tree fell), power went out. During the night, there was a knock at the door. It was the lady and her baby who lived in the garage apartment in back of us. "I thought we were going to be blown away", she said tearfully. "Can we stay with you?"

So the two of us sat up, watched and listened through the night while our children slept peacefully in their beds. Next morning we waded in water assessing the damage. A few trees were

down and there was debris everywhere. But we were safe and dry.

Since teachers were in demand, I volunteered. I was assigned to a three room school out in the country, I took Don with me and believe it or not, he sat quietly enjoying the company of the little pretty blond girl who sat in front of him. Once I ask a little boy why he wasn't working on his numbers like the rest of the class. "I hain't got nary no pencil," he explained. So much for teaching grammar!

We three teachers ate our lunches (brought from home) sitting in the yard watching children play. We pulled grapefruit from the trees around us. They were sweet and delicious.

One year I was Gyanne's room mother. For a special occasion I wanted to serve orange juice and cookies(home made of course). We had no electric juicer, so I squeezed dozens of oranges by hand! I proudly served orange juice and cookies to some 25 or 30 students, and Gyanne was pleased!

Though gas was rationed, we managed to visit most of the tourist attractions still open during the four years and enjoyed an occasional visit to the Ft. Myers beach. Once Don waded out over his head but, Gyanne pulled him up by the hair, thus avoiding a near tragedy.

When our landlord decided to sell our house, we moved on to the base in a "two wide". We shared bath room facilities with other army personnel, but we got used to it. After all, we could smell the orange blossoms from near by trees!

We had the same privileges as army personnel, so we shopped at the PX, ate at the base, and Guy and I attended dances and other functions. Gyanne remembers a magicians show where she was asked to pull a white rabbit out of a hat!

It was all new and exciting and in spite of the war, it was the most enjoyable years of my life!

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