

Sun Cities Area Historical Society
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Case # 209

Interview with Florence M. Spears

September 26, 1991

Date of Birth: December 31, 1908

Place of Birth: Lakewood, Ohio

Florence was an early resident of Sun City and a DEVCO hostess.

Synopsis:

- Father born in Berne, Switzerland in 1882 and immigrated to Pennsylvania at age 1. He worked for the National Carbon Company, Lakewood, Ohio; dropped of school in 8th grade out to help family.
- Mother born Mt. Washington, Pennsylvania in 1891; family moved to Ohio when she was a baby. She attended school through 10th grade.
- Met husband in Lakewood; married June 7, 1929; son born 1938.
- Husband was a bricklayer who worked for his dad; worked many jobs during the Depression; eventually with Roosevelt and the WPA; died in 1938 of meningitis; sister (nurse) came to live with me.
- Got job with Republic Steel in Cleveland; worked 2 years; married my boss, who was a widower with a young daughter. His heart doctor recommended a move to AZ; we arrived in 1957.
- Bought biggest model home so children could come and visit. Paid cash. We were the 8th couple to move into Sun City. Loved the Sun City life.
- Husband died in 1963
- Became hostess in the models; later work in office and King's Inn. I set up tours and meals in Phoenix; showed homes to everyone; married a widower.
- Sun City now too large, with too much traffic; it has lost its sense of community.

C-209

26 September 1991

Release Form

This interview agreement is made and entered into this 26th day of September, 1991, by and between Florence Sears (herein after called "Interviewee") and Melanie I. Sturgeon (herein after called "Interviewer".)

I agree to participate in a tape-recorded interview with Interviewer in association with her research on Sun City, this research being done under the supervision of the Arizona State University Graduate Program in Public History.

This agreement relates to any and all materials originating from this interview or subsequent interviews by the Interviewer, namely the tape recordings and the indexes and abstracts of the interview, and any other written materials, including but not limited to notes, transcripts, or any other materials prepared from the tapes.

In consideration of the mutual covenants, conditions, and terms set forth below, the parties hereby agree as follows:

1. Interviewee irrevocably assigns to the Sun City Area Historical Society and the Arizona Historical Foundation, co-owners, all his/her copyright, title, literary property rights, and interest in and to the Interview.
2. By virtue of this assignment, Interviewer and the Sun City Area Historical Society and the Arizona Historical Foundation will have the right to use the interview for research, educational, and other purposes, including possible publication.
3. All materials from the Interview, including but not limited to transcriptions or other finding aids prepared from the tapes, may be copied, reproduced and/or published.
4. Interviewee acknowledges that he/she will receive no remuneration or compensation for either his/her participation in the Interview or for the rights assigned hereunder.
5. Interviewer and the Sun City Area Historical Society and the Arizona Historical Foundation agree to honor any and all reasonable restrictions on the use of the Interview, if any, for the time specified below as follows:

C209

SUN CITIES AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Florence Sears – DEVCO Hostess

Interviewer – Melanie Sturgeon 26 Sep 1991

Belva McIntosh transcribed the audio tape in May 2008

This is Melanie Sturgeon, and on behalf of the Sun Cities Area Historical Society and the Arizona Historical Foundation. I am interviewing Florence Sears, one of the early pioneers of Sun City in her home in Sun City, Arizona. It is September 26, 1991.

STURGEON: Florence, can you tell me the dates and places of your parent's birth?

SEARS: My Dad was born in Bern, Switzerland. My mother was born in Mt. Washington, Pennsylvania. I should have got the data out. I don't remember the years they were born. My mother would be one hundred and my dad would be one hundred and nine.

STURGEON: When did your father come over here?

SEARS: He was a year old. They went to Pennsylvania.

STURGEON: Can you tell me what your parents did for a living?

SEARS: My dad for worked for what is now Union Carbide, but he worked in the plant called the National Carbide Company in Lakewood, Ohio. He was foreman over, I don't know what department but he was foreman.

STURGEON: When he began to work for the company did he start as a laborer and work up?

SEARS: No, he went right in as far as to my knowledge, he went right in there when I was just a little tiny girl.

STURGEON: What was your parent's educational background?

SEARS: My mother went through grammar school, not to high school, my father went to the seventh or eighth grade and my grandfather passed away and he had to –my grandmother had five children and one on the way. Dad was the oldest and he was thirteen and he – no he was fourteen, and he had to go to work to keep the family together. Besides, my grandmother worked some of the time too by taking in washings.

STURGEON: Did your mother ever work?

SEARS: My mother worked before she was married in a chewing gum factory in Cleveland Ohio but I don't know which one. She did not work after she and dad were married.

STURGEON : Can you tell me a little bit about yourself – where and when were you born?

SEARS: I was born in Dec. 31, 1908 in Lakewood Ohio – born at home, had a midwife deliver me because my uncle was a doctor and he didn't get there in time. They didn't have transportation. He had a car but I guess he was held up someplace, but he got there but I was born when he got there. I have two sisters – I am the oldest, one sister is 3 ½ years younger than I am, my brother was born about six years after my birth date and he only lived 24 months. My younger sister was born twelve years younger and in the meantime dad was transferred to New York to the plant there and my youngest sister Betty was born in Carney, New Jersey.

STURGEON: What was your educational background?

SEARS: I went through the tenth grade.

STURGEON: After you moved to New York did you stay there?

SEARS: We were there three years and my mother disliked it so much and she had the baby there and she just could not – and her mother was in Cleveland Ohio and was dying of cancer, she said to my dad I have to go home and I am not coming back. So Dad had to make all kinds of preparations to move back. Each time he moved was a promotion, well, then he had to go back to his old position in National Carbon. But we went back home. In the meantime we rented our home to an aunt of mine so we had a home to go to.

STURGEON: When did you meet your husband?

SEARS: I met my husband in Lakewood. He lived in Cleveland. I worked for the telephone company. I was sixteen years old when I quit school. My aunt was the telephone chief operator at the Lakewood Telephone Company and Dad passed away. We were left with a home but that is about all. My aunt said to my mother why don't you let me get Florence a job here. So mother fought it tooth and nail because she wanted me to continue school and even my home room teacher came out to the house to talk to me and said, Florence, you cannot quit school. I said I feel like I should help. I can't see my mother going out and doing housework for us and I am old enough to go out and work. I loved to work at the telephone company. I was a telephone operator and I was there for four years and that is where I met my husband. He was picking up a girl friend of mine and he saw me and asked Elizabeth who I was and she told him and he said would you introduce me, I like that girl. I had bright red hair and of course Elizabeth was a real nice person and it was just a date. In those date we dated other people, we didn't just find one boy and stick to them you know. So Elizabeth told me about it and she said I made a double date for you. So that is how I met my husband and we were married in 1929, June 7, 1929.

STURGEON : What did he do for a living?

SEARS: He was a brick layer and his father was the contractor. He worked for his father.

STURGEON: Let's go back to your father. When he died he didn't have any insurance, there was no pension?

SEARS: He had a pension. Of course the pensions they had in those days were not too much but that is about all he had. Yes, he did have insurance. We had a little but not enough to carry us through the life we were used too.

STURGEON: You got married just on the eve of the depression. Did your husband keep his job during the depression?

SEARS: No. My husband worked at several things during the depression. They couldn't get any building – building went down hill. He sold Hoover's. My mother belonged to the Eastern Star, the Rebecca's, the Pythian Sisters and she had a lot of friends. My mother was a club lady. She belonged to a lot of things and did a lot of things with clubs. She would tell her friends that my husband was out

of work and then they would call and say, my windows need washing, do you want to come over. So he did handy work. He did anything he could for people and finally, you know, Roosevelt was President and he formed the WPA and my husband worked for the WPA for a while until they got back on their feet. We did go all through the depression. There were very hard times. I worked at the telephone company and I had a cousin that worked for Griselly Chemical Company in Cleveland Ohio and she said, Florence, (we were like sisters) there is a job here as a key punch operator and I wish you would come. By that time I was put on the floor as supervisor. I had to work split hours and when my husband would come home from work I was going to work. So I thought maybe I ought to take that job because it was an all day job. And like a foolish person I quit and I regretted it to this day because I loved the work and I could have gone up and up and so I went over and worked at Griselly Chemical as a key puncher and then in 1930 E. I. Dupont took over Griselly Chemical. Our whole data processing was asked to go to Wilmington Delaware. So I couldn't leave my husband and he was working then. I thought I can't go to Wilmington. You weren't forced to go you had your choice. I didn't go. Only about a third of the people went. I didn't have a job. So I said to my husband I am almost thirty and if we want to have a family we should do it. So we tried and we accomplished that. I was so happy carrying my baby – I didn't know if it was a boy or girl like they do today, so I had a little boy. In the meantime, a month before my baby was born – my husband had sinusitis and he had tremendous headaches – he was so bad that my youngest sister next to me was a nurse and she came over and took care of him or helped me. She said Florence there is something more wrong with Mike (his name was Michael). Why don't we get Dr. Mitchell – he was a specialist. Before Dr. Mitchell came – they used to come to the house- He started to get out of his head and he knew it was about time for my baby to be born and he knew I was going to have this child any day and he would have spells when he would be out of it and then he would be alright. Then he would say to me, Florence I don't know why I have to be like this now. I should be with you and I don't think he knew when I went to the hospital to have the baby. They brought him into the hospital – Dr. Mitchell came to see him and said get him to the hospital. So while he was in the operating room he had spinal meningitis. I didn't even see Jerry yet, it was a boy and I named him Jerry, not Gerald, Jerry. One of the doctor's came to me and said you can have Jerry every day if you don't see your husband. If you see your husband we can't bring Jerry to you. That is a very contagious disease. Anyway he passed away and that is how I remember Jerry's birthday. So I was married eight years to Michael and he always said he wanted to build a brick house. We had all kinds of plans so that was the end of that. I wanted to stay home and take care of my baby and we didn't have very much in the savings and we had to - my mother said anytime you

start college. We had moved there so he could go to Arizona University and then he could come home. I would like a year off just to do what I want. He had wheels going on in his head all the time. So I knew the principal of the school near us so I called him and said would you and your wife come over for the evening I have something I want to talk over with you. He came over and we talked it over and he said everybody can't go to college and if he is willing to go after this year let him have a year off. So we did. He went to the Aviation School, there was one in Kansas, there was one in Hollywood and there was another one but I forget where it was. He picked Hollywood. So he met this girl there at the school and in Oct 1957 my husband and I went on the Ohio picnic up at South Mountain and when he got home there was a phone call from Jerry saying he was married. He was eighteen and she was eighteen. They are married and they are the happiest family and they have two lovely girls. He has had wonderful positions even though he didn't go to college. He worked for an Insurance Company and he worked for Fremont Insurance in Los Angeles for years and just the same as my department was eliminated his department was eliminated because they thought it would be cheaper to have their investigations done by other companies rather than have that whole office for it. Jerry was management of that office force. He called me and told me he was out of a job and my heart just sank and I said Jerry what are you going to do. He said don't worry mom I have a job already. I work for this detective agency and I manage the whole deal. A woman owned it and she knew Jerry through Fremont and she said this was my luckiest day to get you so that is where he is working now. Well my other husband lived here, getting back to that we would go over to see the kids and visit them on weekends. On the way over we saw all this commotion going on these fields, big machines working and a big sign about future retirement home and then there was a little tiny shed and I then that Sunday I saw a piece in the paper about Del E. Webb planning this retirement center and I said isn't that interesting. We had an acre and a half lot over in east Phoenix and I said maybe we ought to go into something smaller. And we did, we came out here and we bought our home from a picture up on the board. They had all the models pictured and we no more than stepped in there when Bob Dietzler, there were two salesmen, there was Bob Dietzler and Jack Hayden. Bob was the one that waited on us and took us up to see where they were beginning to build up on Peoria Ave was the end right then – there was nothing beyond Peoria Ave. I liked it and my husband he looked at me and when we knew what the prices of the houses were I said, Dear this is for us. We bought that lot – they drove us up in a truck through the cotton fields to see the lot – we bought the lot – we picked out the house – we bought the Pickford. He lived until '63. He passed away in '63. He had a nice life while he lived here. He played golf – the doctor allowed him to play golf – nine holes three times a week. He had an aneurysm on the brain. He

was bleeding and he died in St. Joseph's Hospital. So I came back home and I knew I didn't need that house. We got the biggest house here because of the kids coming over. So I put the house up for sale. My husband and I sold our house in Phoenix and I sold this house myself on Augusta Drive. We had the eighth key – we were the eighth people to move in. There was George and Mable Bain, Lu Lecy and I forget the other person's name, the Ellis, the O'Bryants and the Turnblooms. It was a lot of fun moving here in Sun City and knowing all the people. We would get out on the sidewalk with our brooms and we would all stand there and talk. And don't forget the recreation center was there – the swim pool was ready to swim in – everything was here. We went swimming every day and all of a sudden we went down to the rec center one day and Tom Austin came along and he said I need a few ladies to help me. This is volunteer work, he said. Gyla O'Bryant, Garnet Burnham, myself, Lou Lecy and Ray Bain – oh we would help. All of us helped to get the clubs organized, crafts, the swim club, the card clubs, everything. Every night a few of us would congregate down by the pool on Oakmont Drive and just visit and sing and have the best time. We were the happiest people.

STURGEON: Before we talk a lot more about Sun City; would you mind telling me a little about the neighborhood you grew up in?

SEARS: Oh a wonderful neighborhood. My uncle, my dad and another friend built our home. It was a real large home and we went to live in it before all the inside work was finished and that was in Lakewood Ohio. Dorothy was born there and Charles was born there. It was a nice neighborhood and all of my friends that were say a year older or even a year younger than I were are all gone now. The neighborhood was like years ago it wasn't all built up. There was a lot of spaces between our homes. We had places to run. We would play war – we would bicycle in the street. The street went from Bell Avenue to Warren Road and Warren Road was the center street in Lakeland Ohio and went all the way north and south and we had no traffic and everybody didn't have car then. We didn't have a car.

STURGEON: Was Lakewood a suburb of Cleveland? Was it a small town?

SEARS: Seven miles out of Cleveland. It was small when we started but now I think there must be maybe 100,000 people there. See, they couldn't expand too much because there was Cleveland, there was Rocky River, Fairview Village, Omstead Falls. Some places can't expand because there was no place to expand. I went back a year ago in June and some of the same people were living there.

Some of the younger ones that came after we lived there not when we first came. It used to be before they ever started to build homes on that street it used to be a grape vineyard with concord grapes. Sort of rural – half and half. Our school was a mile and a half away. We had to go way down to Detroit Street for our elementary school, for our Junior High School and our Lakewood High School was built in, oh I can't remember the year, but that was a little closer for me. It was near Madison Avenue. We bicycled back and forth.

STURGEON: In your neighborhood did you have different ethnic groups – like Poles or Swedes?

SEARS: Where my Dad's factory was there were about twelve streets that were all ethnic. We used to call it the bird's nest. I don't know why. There were Polish, Bohemian, all kinds. They had another school at that end all the children that went to our school were from the heart of Lakewood and west. To my knowledge I don't know of any ethnic children in the school then. That is so many years ago that you can't remember.

STURGEON: You mentioned that your mother was very active in clubs. Was your Dad active too?

SEARS: My Dad was active also. My sisters were both active in lodges and clubs and I resented it when my mother and dad would be going through their routine. Every lodge they belonged to they went through the chairs and there is a certain amount of material you have to learn. They would go up in their big master bedroom and they would be learning it. I used to think – they didn't do it every night, but the nights they did, maybe I was a selfish child and I said to my mother I am never going to join a lodge. Now wasn't that a nasty thing to say. And I never did.

STURGEON: Now when you got to New York you said your mother hated it. It must have been a different kind of community there. What was it like?

SEARS: We were in a sort of – it was a nice district but it was all scotch people and they were so aloof, except for our neighbor next door and she was a lovely little woman. She wasn't scotch. Vera – what was her last name? I always called her Vera. She had one child after another and Mother and her became fast friends and they would take the babies out for a walk n their carriages. Mother never became involved in clubs there, just in Lakewood. That is another reason she wanted to come back.

STURGEON: Now, what about when you got married, did you get involved in any activities, I know you didn't want clubs but did you get involved in anything else?

SEARS: No, because I worked everyday when I was first married.

STURGEON: What about when you married your second husband and you stopped working did you get involved in things then?

SEARS: I was involved in the Red Cross and I collected for them and everything that went on but I didn't ever join a club. Except our little card clubs we had with our friends and things but I never joined a lodge. My Dad was a 32nd degree Mason and my stepdad was too. But I enjoyed working for the Red Cross. When we came out here I went right to IBM and they gave me a job. I worked in many places. I worked for IBM and like the Kelly Girls, I worked for American Oil, I worked for Motorola. I worked for the Arizona Republic for certain lengths of time. They sent me all over. I never graduated from high school – I never went to college. Sometime I think maybe I should go to college here, over on the east side I thought about getting my diploma, but all this came up about Sun City and I just let it go. I did go down to the typing school for a semester. I can't think of the name. I never joined the clubs.

STURGEON: Do you remember during the depression, was your mother remarried during the depression so that she was taken care of? Do you remember when your step-father retired?

SEARS: He retired in '58, right after we moved here. He retired then and he was way up in his 70's and he lived alone in that big house. My other sister the nurse in the meantime had married and lived in the country. She married a man who was a farmer in Dover, Ohio, when Dad was failing so and she would go up and visit him. One time she went to visit him and she said you have got to come home with me. You can not stay here. So they helped get the house sold and he went to live with Dorothy. He died in Dover Ohio right before my second husband died. We went there and he knew me.

STURGEON: Do you remember during the depression when you were having a hard time and they were having all those debates over social security, did you remember ever thinking that might be a good thing to have or were you concerned about that at all?

SEARS: They didn't have social security. Never gave it a thought.

STURGEON: Do you think social security has been a good thing?

SEARS: Yes I do. It helps a lot of people and some people here that is all they have to get along on.

STURGEON: When you were starting to approach retirement age after you had moved out here and you were working did you think at all about your future and how you were going to take care of each other?

SEARS: We had a savings and we had our home. We figured we were retired. When Ernie and I bought the place in Sun City, we figured yes, we are retired now and I still worked until I was just getting awfully tired of going so far back and forth from Sun City. So one time Tom Austin asked us one late afternoon when we were all sitting there and he said he needed help and we all said we were glad to help and we started on that. Finally they had – see I never came to the grand opening here. The weekend of the grand opening I think I was in California so I never saw the model homes until (end of tape side A)

(Side B) anyway I scheduled them all and then the tours they would take them all over Phoenix in these buses and Scottsdale wasn't what it is today. They would stop at one of the little ice cream places in Scottsdale on main avenue and they would have a strawberry pie or some little dessert. Oh, I tell you we had a big time. Then finally they told Gray that we were spending too much money. But that is what my job was – scheduling all these entertainments for all the people that rented those apartments. Those people came here to see it and maybe buy houses. I don't think that there were – I bet ten percent or maybe less didn't buy. Everybody was just so very happy here and liked it so well and liked the layout of the streets and how everything was so pretty. They just liked it and they would come up after their tours and we would talk and I would tell them everything I knew about Sun City. And they would say how nice every body was. You would go in the store and everybody would talk to you. They just thought it was great.

STURGEON: When you were helping Tom Austin organize the clubs did they grow very quickly?

SEARS: Everybody that was here. Most people that age have something they are doing and are interested in. Did they take advantage of it? Yes. I am not a

seamstress or a sewer. The only thing I liked to do was cross stitch or embroider or crewel. But I don't care for sewing. But I went to the sewing club. I went over to Lakeview sewing club for years because it was interesting and I did learn a lot even though I wasn't a seamstress and they would have good speakers there. So I still have my card and I just talked to a lady I met in church and she said when are you coming back and I said, oh I may come back. What we liked was outdoors. I took golf lessons because my husbands played golf and I didn't. So I took golf lessons and I played golf for a while and then my back started bothering me. I had back surgery and he told me not to play golf and bowl. So swimming was the priority. I loved to swim. I lived in the pool. That is how I got so many wrinkles. We played shuffleboard. We played mini-golf. I love to play mini golf. I couldn't play golf so I played mini golf. Joined the clubs. Anything outdoors. I didn't play tennis but they didn't have a tennis court. It is just in recent years that they put in a tennis court here at Mountain View.

STURGEON: Were you part of the Reverend Witt congregation?

SEARS: I was with Reverend Witt. They were two fine people. We went to church. We went to the Congregational Church over on 3rd Avenue in Phoenix. We didn't join. Then when we came here we did go over to the church once but we didn't continue going. Then there was a couple that moved here by the name of Mr. and Mrs. Forrester. They were swimming all the time too. He said one time that they knew a minister in California and he was going to talk to him and see if he couldn't come out here and form a church. He did so and it happened and we had our church in Oakmont Center. My husband was the first deacon and Lady Ross was really the first deaconess but then she didn't go the whole way, I mean she didn't take her full term so I took over. I am a charter member of that church and I love it and I love everybody in it and I go to the church meetings. That is one thing I don't miss. We were all so happy when Reverend Witt and Gladys came. You know what Gladys did. She baked thousands of cookies. They stayed in that little apartment in back of King's Inn on 107th and then whoever was going to join the church would come there for their orientation and then she would serve cookies that she had baked. She baked cookies for years. I was on another committee with them too. I was in so many things I don't remember all of them. We went around the neighborhood for money and when they were talking about building Sun Valley Lodge they had a write up in the paper about people that put one hundred dollars in would become a member and get into the lodge maybe a little bit sooner or whatever. We all worked on that. Gee, that is a long time ago.

STURGEON: When you first moved here do you remember any of the surveys that the Del Webb Company sent out to residents?

SEARS: I believe so. I don't remember written surveys. I know we had a little office where if we had any complaints about our houses we would go there and whatever was wrong they would fix it. But our key man, Les Perry, he would always go to the house and asked how you liked it. I don't remember written surveys. That must be something I missed.

STURGEON: Did you ever have any interaction with Del Webb, the man?

SEARS: My husband talked to him on the golf course. I never talked to him but I saw him a lot. I never had the honor of speaking to him and I wish I had because he was a nice man. I knew most everybody else in the company. I knew Jerry Svendson when he started working when Tom left. I hated to see Tom go. This little red haired fellow came along and he was newly married and then a year after he had a baby. We all got to like him very much. Every time I see Jerry if he is speaking and I happen to be there he just always waves. Afterwards he comes up and he hugs me. It is just so nice to have people like that you know.

STURGEON: Did you or your husband ever get involved in the Home Owner's Association?

SEARS: No, we never got in any of the groups that take charge of things.

STURGEON: I understand in the early days they had a big discussion about whether Sun City should incorporate or not. Do you remember what they were arguing about?

SEARS: Oh so much they were arguing about. We would get more money if we incorporated. Another would get up and you don't know what you are talking about. We wouldn't get more money. Then they would bring different things up reasons why we wouldn't. We have gone this long as a self governing little city and we want to keep it that way. We have had a lot of hot arguments at these meetings. I felt that I did not want to incorporate. Because I felt we had gone all these ways with self government and even though we don't get the money that the cities that are incorporated get I still think that we are better off as we are. Now Mr. Meredyth, and I know he might hear this tape, but I can't help it and I will tell him face to face I am not for incorporation. He might say don't come up here anymore. Sun City is basically run by volunteers. The only ones that are paid are

the ones that are the pros in the golf club. We have a new man in the pro shop with the clothes and things. He gets paid.

(The transcriber is unable to hear Ms. Sturgeon very well, if at all.)

Oh, about the school taxes? I was always willing to pay school taxes regardless. We always have paid school taxes. If we were incorporated we would have to pay more school taxes and we are paying school taxes now.

STURGEON: When you look at Sun City now, how do you think it has changed?

SEARS: It grew too large. There is a lot more traffic. When we came we were younger. Now I am old. If it was like it was when we came it would be wonderful, but there is so much traffic. This week I have noticed how much more traffic there is this week than last week. You know people are coming back and it is getting to be a busy place. That is what I have noticed about Sun City. The people are still lovely. They are real nice. There was a real sense of community in the early days that isn't quite the same now. It can't possibly be with the number of homes and streets.

STURGEON: I heard that when they started on Phase II and built the recreation center that there were some unhappy feelings on both sides. Do you remember any of that?

SEARS: I very seldom paid any attention to that because I knew that Del Webb was gone and they were going to build as much land as they could get. It was a little disappointment. Now from Peoria down, that includes this street there was just a little land and it was all agriculture. Watermelon, carrots, no cotton, it was agriculture. We used to go down there and down about where Olive Avenue is there was an old house and a great big old barn and one side was all open. They would pick watermelons and fill that with watermelons and you could go and buy them for a cent apiece. They would say go up the field, there are some overripe ones, take them. You see it was more rural. It is so different now. It is like living in a city. We are in a city now. We aren't in a little community.

STURGEON: When you first moved out here there were only about eight houses and not very many people. Were you worried about moving someplace where there really wasn't a community and nobody knew each other?

SEARS: No. We were looking forward to reading the paper about what it was going to be like. We knew they were building. The houses started on Alabama and 107th. They went up Alabama to St. Annes.

STURGEON: When did your first husband die?

SEARS: In 1988 at Sun Valley Lodge. He was in Sun Valley Lodge five years. He had Parkinson's disease. We were married twenty years. He died two days before his birthday and I had a party set up in the nursing care center and ordered the cakes and everything and he was gone that Sunday and I had to call it off.

STURGEON: As you lived in Sun City and the cost of everything started going up, are you still comfortable with your financial situation?

SEARS: I can feel the difference on the interest on my money. I don't get near the social security as a lot of people that I know. I was flabbergasted. My husband and I had a pre-nuptial agreement that everything goes to his children and the ----- and everything goes to my children. He did leave me money. I noticed that the interest keeps going down. The bills they pay for me keep going higher. So I notice it but I don't think I will die poor. I think I will be able to make the grade. I know that if Harry knew that it was going to be as bad as it is he would have maybe made things just a little better. His children are so good to me. I have nothing to worry about. I have so many homes I could go to.

STURGEON: When your husband first came to Sun City were you able to pay cash for your house or did you have to take out a mortgage?

SEARS: We paid cash for it.

STURGEON: When Del Webb built Sun City there were no hospitals and very few medical facilities. Were you involved in trying to get those things started?

SEARS: I really was not involved but I was very happy to know they were talking about building a hospital. See, I was in the hospital several times at St. Joseph's for operations and illnesses that I had. Then that is where my second husband died was in St. Joseph's. That was quite a ways over. So that is why I was very, very happy when they said something about building a hospital. I had nothing to do with that. I do belong to Sun Health organization there and give money every year for the hospital.

STURGEON: Were you involved in the Sun Valley Lodge?

SEARS: No. I feel ashamed. I feel that I should be working down there. I know so many people – of course since my husband died a lot of other people have died – but when I go in that door I just can't.

STURGEON: I can understand that. Are you still involved in the community?

SEARS: Oh, indeed! I always welcome newcomers and take them muffins. We have a gatherings every once in a while. We can't have the whole street. You know what I was thinking? I would just love to have our whole street have a yearly street picnic. You know there is one street that I know that has that and it is Hacienda Drive. From one end of it to the other end. That is a lot of people but it is a lot of fun. You would get to know everybody down that way, up that way. Now that we are having more discussion about having block watches, maybe I can get something about the yearly picnic.

STURGEON: Well, when you look back at Sun City and all the changes you have seen, is there anything else you would like to tell me?

SEARS: I got my sister to come live here. She lived in Albuquerque, New Mexico. She knew we loved Sun City and she knew that after Harry died I was here alone, but they moved before Harry died, they moved while Harry was in the nursing home. I think they came because I was alone here, and I liked it so much and they have so many things to do. My sister is a little more active in clubs than I am. She belongs to the Newcomer's Club. She belongs to a lot of church clubs. She is in to everything. She is on the order of myself. She goes to visit people that need visiting. People that are alone or people that never get out or people that are sick. And that is what I do most of the time. I am always doing for somebody. My dear friend is in the hospital right now. Tuesday was her surgery – she had a knee operation. She has no family here and no one except a good neighbor. The good neighbor has her husband in a nursing home and goes every day to see him. So I said just lean on me while you are here and I will look after you. So I was down there most of the day of her operation. I went down after I got through at the Historical Society yesterday and I am going down today and keep her buoyed up. She is a widow.

STURGEON: Do you have any friends that came out here because you liked it so well?

SEARS: Yes, they all bought out here. Most of them are gone now. My friend of 60 years and her husband are both gone now. There is Irene that came out here. Irene Boss is gone. I have brought a lot of friends out and a lot of people out. There are some people that came to visit us but they won't leave their children. I can't think of anything else except that I do love Sun City. I will do anything I can to promote it and hope that the Ambassador's – I will go up there and find out if they are not advertising. I know that Sun City West is, but I would like Sun City to advertise. This is Phase I from the tracts down to Olive and you see we are older and we are either passing away or we are going into retirement homes. That means there are a lot of houses for sale and the younger people are buying them and I think we are getting more young people down this way than the other people are. The ones in the 50's and early 60's. It is becoming revitalized. The house catty-corner across the street – the man doesn't look too young but I think she looks like a little 16 year old. She is as cute as a button and nice. They are from Texas.

STURGEON: Have your neighbors been from all over the place?

SEARS: Yes, the one that just called us from Wisconsin, they are from Texas. Nellie is from New York, Harriet and George are from Detroit, Michigan and Harriet's husband, George is down at Sun Valley Lodge. Helen is from Chicago, Petit's are from Wisconsin.

STURGEON: Did you ever have neighbors that didn't like Sun City and left?

SEARS: Yes, the people that bought my house on Augusta Drive were from Chicago and oh, yes, she wanted that house. He said well we ought to think it over and she said no I am going to buy this house. They bought the house and they lived in it six months. She just did not like it here. I don't know why. I didn't keep in touch with them. My neighbor down there told me she just didn't like it here.

(doorbell rang and that ended it.)