

Sun Cities Area Historical Society
ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Case # 210

Interview with Rose Butler

October 3, 1991

Date of Birth: 1898

Place of Birth: Washington, Indiana

Ruth Butler was one of the earliest residents of Sun City. She and her husband bought a home the first day that the community was open on January 1, 1960. They founded the cycle group: The Sun City Pushers.

Synopsis:

- Mother born on a farm in Montgomery, Indiana in 1862.
- Father born in Cincinnati, Ohio in 1867. Carpenter and musician.
- They met in Washington, Indiana, and married July 7 1897.

- One brother later became first DEVCO salesman in Sun City.
- Dad took brother and me when he tuned organ pipes; we sat on bench and held down the notes.
- In our house, Dad played piano; I played violin; brother played drums.
- Attended parochial school in Terre Haute, Indiana. My future husband's sister was a nun in that school.

- Taught in Bedford Union H.S. for 15 years; met husband in Chicago.
- Depression didn't hurt us too much; both had jobs; I was teaching.
- Married in 1934 and moved to Grand Rapids, Michigan. Husband was director of Western Union; was trained in communications in WWI.
- Bought 22 acres in Michigan in 1942 for retirement investment.

- After father died, Mother came to live with us. Social Security was new and I remember thinking it was a good idea, until I heard Goldwater say it would be better to just invest the money. But Mother's little pension gave her \$30 a month and it helped.
- Originally planning to stay at the farm, we saw an ad in the Saturday Evening Post about the new Sun City community. Sister lived in Scottsdale and our son was heading west to go to school in CA.

- We arrived January 1, 1960. Made a down payment on our house in Sun City the first day they were open. They had run out of sales slips, had to give us a paper receipt instead. We bought the smallest house model because husband said if cit went broke, we haven't lost a fortune.
- First day it was open... it was a circus in Sun City. Weather was fine, but we had had to grab a salesman to get assistance. The model homes were beautiful. Our house was only one with gas and original heater.
- Our new house cost \$8,500 but we paid cash and got it for \$8,300 on the spot. About every 6 months, it went up in price.

- Peoria Public School's tax issues wanted to pull Sun City in because of money; no one wanted to be on the school board, they ran ads for it. Gene took the job and when it was his turn to be the president, he demanded an agenda; being a budget man, he cut the school budget amounts in half.
- Pedal Pushers formed because I wanted to cycle, plus the roads were smooth and the community was easy to get around. Anyone could join. Enjoyed the bike trips; we got to see what people were doing with landscaping.
- Community has changed; less community atmosphere; more selfish.
- Community telephone book listed folks three ways: alphabetically, then by street, and then by state.
- Early 'community cards' cost about \$8-\$10. Couldn't use the Rec. Ctrs without this card.

C-210

SUN CITIES AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Written by Rose Butler, 10865 Cherry Hills Ln W. Sun City, AZ

February 1960

1959: Home from teaching. The Saturday Evening Post had named a winner for naming Del Webb's Retirement Center. We emplaned at Toledo airport amid a most severe wind, snow and sleet storm. Arrived at Phoenix airport amid sunshine and beautiful landscaping including roses around the airport. "This is for us," we both shouted to others. Next day drove out to Del Webb's Retirement Center. It was like a circus – hundreds of people touring the center.

We couldn't drive through the mudded cotton fields to see where the houses were being built. We grabbed a salesman's coat tail and hung on until he could service three or four couples at once. We finally got a down payment made. Back to Michigan to sell our twenty two acres purchased for retirement

Del Webb had offered a #1 home to the winner who named his Retirement Center; a second prize a lot to build one and a third prize two weeks vacation for a couple at his apartment center.

There was a large map of Sun City on the wall of a little 10x10 building. We stuck a pin on the map on a site that was next in construction. We moved in on our twenty sixth wedding anniversary, July 4, 1960.

Safeway was having its grand opening. This circus crowd was far beyond Del Webb and his staff's wildest dream. The day before the grand opening, January 1, 1960, they were said to be chewing their fingernails and "wondering if anyone would show up."

No one who moved in knew anyone else. We were all strangers. But all at once everyone knew everyone. We were anxious to know our new neighbors. Neighborhood parties, dinners all helped to add to the friendliness of the most unique center in the country, yes, and the world.

We had to drive to Phoenix to shop for furniture. Very few shops were opened as yet. We had to go to the Center each morning for our mail. I believe it was Carnation who drove a dairy truck around, milk, butter, cream, etc. were provided.

Del Webb provided sixty dollars to each household for landscaping his property. It wasn't long before each house became a small "castle", beautifully landscaped.

I told my husband, Gene, that it was a perfect setup for a bike. No chuck holes and perfect mountain views. He said "OK, we'll drive to Maryvale for one. On the way he said, "we'll get two." We bought two Firestones for the total sum of \$72. Started riding that evening. I still have the twenty-six inch bike; a stationary one and a better fitted one to my 5'3" height – a 24". We rode each morning around 7 a.m. and again after sunset.

Riding a bike we could appreciate the landscaping of each yard. No two houses were allowed to be painted the same color, nor the front elevation allowed to be the same design.

Our first morning out, April 4, 1961, a couple invited us to join them on their back patio. Her husband was making donuts. They were the first couple to join us. A neighbor across the street wanted to ride. She purchased a bike, got on, and was wobbling, trying to get started. She fell backward into a cluster of cacti. She just escaped going to the hospital! But she persevered. Gradually men and couples joined us. They met at our driveway until we finally decided to meet at the Sun City United Church parking lot, on which was painted a map of the United States.

We used to brag about riding from "coast to coast". The local newspaper, a weekly, Bob Jantz paper had a heyday teasing us. We continued to give them ammunition for their columns. After some months the Schwinn Company called on Gene to interest him in managing a bike shop in Sun City. No way could he take on another activity. His time was spent in helping Sun City get started as living places.

After registering in Glendale to vote, we both became Registrars to get people registered to vote. Gene became a Precinct committeeman and later, as we grew, he was appointed chairman of all the elections held here.

A native Arizonian, Mrs. Ethel Angel, a Republican who moved to Sun City asked Gene to help her host a barbeque on evening in April. At that meeting The Republican Club of Sun City was formed. She knew personally the Governor Jack Williams, Goldwater, Paul Fannin, the next Governor, and many important Republicans. Gene served as President, secretary and treasurer of the club. He was president at the time of his death March 3, 1966.

He served as Director of the Homeowners, the Recreation Centers, the Peoria School Board as president (no one else would take it); was parliamentarian of clubs and a charter member of the Men's Club. He was chairman of a committee of four (two from Sun City and two from Youngtown) to decide on the location for the parish of Catholics of Sun City and Youngtown. Del Webb had set aside several sites for churches. He was a member of Holy Name Society of St. Joachim's parish and a fourth degree Knights of Columbus. His picture and obituary were on our front page news paper.

I was a member of St. Joachim's choir, retired after twenty five years; a charter member of the parish Sodality; a Sodality Mass song leader. I am a charter and retired member of mini-golf. I am now a "prodigal daughter" returned to my first love a "Pedal Pusher."

After the death of Gene I didn't ride regularly with the group until 1986. We were in a waiting line. A man in front of me overheard me talking to my brother and his wife about joining an exercise class. He, Mr. Larry Baur, turned around and said to me, "Why don't you join the Pedal Pushers?" I couldn't believe what I heard. The Pedal Pushers? That's my gang! The next morning the riders gathered on my patio for breakfast and I was with my first love pushing "Pedals".