

Ken Harrington
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Crystal River, FL

Ken Harrington was born November 1941 in Louisville, Kentucky. In 1951 he moved to Pinellas County to live with his mother and stepfather after his father died. His mother and stepfather moved to Pinellas County in 1947 for health reasons. His mother had consumption or arthritis, Harrington recalled, and her doctor suggested she move south.

Harrington's parents managed an outlet for Tropical Flying Services, which had facilities at Albert Whitted and Pinellas County airports. They signed up people for flying lessons and Harrington helped refuel planes. In the late 1950s, the family delivered the St. Petersburg Times along the gulf beaches from Blind Pass to Sand Key. Before that, Harrington's mother delivered the St. Petersburg Evening Independent.

Harrington's adventures along his gulf beaches newspaper route ranged from meeting well-known baseball players Whitey Ford and Bob Feller, to being searched one early morning by the secret service at a Treasure Island hotel where Vice President Richard Nixon stayed. One customer owned the Zebra Lounge and San Souci cottages. When he needed someone to manage the cottages, he hired Harrington's parents. Later they would own and run their own motels.

The San Souci cottages, Harrington recalled, were built from heart of pine in the early 1900s, then floated by ship from St. Petersburg to Madeira Beach in the 1940s. Harrington said guests, often repeat visitors, came from Ohio, Michigan, Illinois, New York, New England, and later years Canada. During the summer guests came from Tampa. Harrington and his parents handled maintenance, he recalled. A retiree helped with maintenance such as painting in exchange for free rent. Harrington thought the retiree, Chris, and his wife, who they called "Mom," were from New Jersey.

Very seldom were guests from the South. Harrington recalled one New York couple who stayed six months during the winter. They drove a 1937 Cadillac limousine and had four cats. A Monsignor from Chicago was an annual guest, as well. One year a busload of students from North Carolina State rented cottages, but opted to sleep on the beach. Harrington took guests fishing for mackerel just off shore in the gulf. One New York banker preferred trout fishing in the Intracoastal. Playing shuffleboard was popular as well. Rates were about \$70 a week.

From about the late 1950s to early 1960s, while managing the San Souci cottages, Harrington's parents also owned the Paradise Pier at John's Pass. His step-father also worked at Florida Power. At the restaurant Harrington washed dishes, cleaned tables and occasionally cooked. A neighboring fishing crew sold them fresh filleted grouper, snapper and other catch that the restaurant usually served fried.

Harrington recalled the cost of fish: red grouper was 10 to 15 cents per pound, black grouper 10 cents a pound, and goliath grouper a nickel a pound. But snapper was

preferred. “Before grouper became anything, snapper was the king fish of all fishes in a restaurant,” Harrington said. “Since it was hard to come by you had what you called snapper fingers, little strips of snapper . . . Well truth be told most restaurants served grouper sliced up to look like snapper fingers, including ours.” Harrington laughed, adding “snapper was too . . . expensive.”

Across from the Paradise Pier was a small roadside attraction with salt fish in an aquarium, a porpoise named Patty that performed tricks, and a gift shop. Harrington was part of Florida’s kitschy trade, as well. He helped create shell dolls with friends who owned the Shell Factory on 4th Street in St. Petersburg. The dolls were made with scallop shells and pipe cleaners and had painted faces. The cleaned shells were assorted by size. The basic doll took a few minutes to build, recalled Harrington. They also made a fancier taller doll with a shell-layered antebellum dress. The dolls were packed and sent to gift shops.

On Sundays, Harrington and his parents set out to see sites themselves. “We would get in a car on a Sunday to take a drive and a drive in the country was going to Dunedin, and going all the way to Tarpon Springs was a day trip,” he said. “Tarpon Springs even then was a destination point to see the sponge docks.” Harrington recalled taking the ferry from Pinellas Point to Sarasota and Bradenton, fishing for blue runners along the way.

From about the early to mid 1960s, Harrington’s parents owned the Dolphin on North Redington Beach. Rates were about \$100 a week. At the Dolphin, Harrington helped at the front desk. He was surprised how often people asked if the motel had a pool. “Yes, it’s the biggest swimming pool you can swim in, it’s right out the back door there,” he’d respond, referring to the gulf. “I didn’t know why you’d have to have a little crummy pool to swim around in when you had that nice big ocean out there and the beautiful sand beach.”

Harrington’s parents sold the Dolphin in 1967, he recalled, a few years after reduced bookings hampered their payments. He attributed the slow-down to the New York World’s Fair. After selling the Dolphin, Harrington’s parents bought a motel on 4th Street in St. Petersburg called The Virginian. For a short time they also owned a filling station in Pinellas Park. They ran The Virginian for about a year, recalled Harrington, then sold it and moved to Kenneth City, and later Crystal River.