

ARRIVING

My grandfather owned a veterinarian clinic in Terrell Texas where he worked to exhaustion. They learned about the opportunities in Panama from a friend's Panamanian wife Zona. "The second they got a chance to move down there they did"

AMARILLO, TX (US)
1962 - 1972

LEAVING

The family returned to the US in 1962, partially due to my grandma's concerns about civil unrest in Panama, but the full picture is unclear

Carolyn was devastated to leave, and at 16 struggled socially back in Texas. She felt like she was the only one of her friends to leave

After some negotiations the family was able to invite their full time Columbian nanny, Gerna May, to live with them in the US

The family rented a house for 18 months in the Santa Rita Mountains, which Carolyn remembers fondly

She recalls their pet armadillo, and later their catamundi (like a long nose raccoon), who would follow behind them like a house cat when they went out in the jungle on their horses

ATLANTIC SIDE
1952 - 1962
CRISTOBAL,
COCO SOLO,
+ SANTA RITA MTS

The Canal Zone felt like they were part of Panama. "That's all you know growing up"

Growing up in Panama was "a piece of heaven" that she would relive given the chance

Carolyn recalls when they moved away in 1962, their ship going around the break wall one last time, and her sobbing, unable to look back

They lived on Melendez Ave in New Cristobal until the late 1950's when the site was abandoned and Canal Zone workers and families were relocated to Coco Solo

Carolyn remembers running down to the hill to the beach with her nanny, Gerna May, pushing her younger sister in a stroller going full speed and everyone laughing wildly

Carolyn recalls walking barefoot with her sister to the store in Colon to buy lottery tickets for their mom. "Everything felt safe"

Her father once said "I'm not gonna complain about socialism because this has been really good to us"

His government job provided good pay, pension plan, cheap housing, health insurance, and even paid vacations. They took a cruise provided by the Canal Company twice to New York and once to New Orleans

The housing was provided for a nominal fee as part of employment on the Canal. This included services like the Canal Company mowing their lawn

Carolyn recalls always feeling safe, noting that the townsites had gates where people had to show ID to enter

Carolyn went to Cristobal High School (formerly navy barracks) where she recalls a diverse student body, at least 25% Panamanian kids of all different races, some of who lived outside the Zone and paid to attend the US school

Carolyn was part of an organization called Rainbow Girls. They'd meet in the Masonic Lodge and after the meeting they'd go on the roof and watch "hookers" pick up American men on the street below. The building is situated at a corner border between the Canal Zone and Panama

BECKLEY FAMILY HISTORY, PT 1 AS TOLD BY CAROLYN (MY AUNT)

