

her neck, restricting mobility and causing her not to be able to drive any longer. So she has moved into an apartment in an assisted living facility on the Caloosahatchee River in Fort Myers.

Virginia believes it is very important to continue the primary goal of education that is espoused by the Florida Native Plant Society. She believes that people know about the exotic plants they put into their landscapes but they don't understand how important it is to plant native plants or how natives support animal and bird life. In fact, they still don't know much about native plants, nor do they know how much trouble exotics can cause if they escape into Florida's environment. She urges that in the future, the FNPS keep up all the educational activities in which it is presently involved. The need is still there.

Virginia, keep coming to the Coccoloba Chapter events. You have much to teach us about personal commitment to what one believes in.

Alyene Hays

First President of the Tarflower Chapter

Interview by Sandy Lazarus

Alyene Anderson Hays grew up in Fort Meade, Florida with her parents, a brother, and a sister in a longleaf pine forest dotted with live oaks near the Peace River. She spent a great deal of time with her grandparents who lived nearby and attributes her great love of the outdoors and wildlife to her grandfather. They would spend every Sunday afternoon walking in the woods, for as much as eight miles, or hunting rabbits in Polk County on the Peace River. She knew when and where to expect the wildflowers to come up and was permitted to freely roam the area. Alyene's great-grandmother was a full blood Cherokee and her grandmother was 1/4 native American; so she's sure she came by her love of nature naturally.

Alyene was not always happy at home; in fact she took to running away at the tender age of two. This was because her mother and father both worked and Alyene was under the care of a mean, stern housekeeper who shut her up in dark closets. Alyene's father owned several IGA stores and her mother was the bookkeeper for them. They never knew why Alyene ran away so often. When the Great Depression came, her father, who had extended credit, lost the stores. Alyene and her older brother tried to help by collecting on some bills, but received mostly goods or work in exchange. She tells of going to one very wealthy house for collection and the butler declared he could not pay them anything and before he could close the door, Alyene spoke up and said: "You could give us that rug you're standing on, my mother would love it." Her father became postmaster at Pembroke, a phosphorus-mining town just north of Fort Meade. Her mother made silk ties.

When Alyene's mother became ill, Alyene was her caretaker even though she desperately wanted to go to college. She made a late ap-

plication to Florida State College for Women and was accepted two days before school started. A cousin came to take care of her mother, and Alyene packed and made ready for school. She had five dresses, including one made of a feed sack; an old pair of shoes, and \$5.00 packed into a refurbished trunk. Off she went to Tallahassee. She bought a new pair of shoes to perk up her wardrobe for \$2.98. She found a job as secretary to the sports department and soon was able to send money home.

Alyene was the best girl athlete on the basketball, baseball, and softball teams. She was selected to play on the National Hockey Team for the 1936 Olympics, the year of Jessie Owens fame. Her parents did not allow Alyene to go, a decision Alyene had to respect, but she has wondered what it would have been like.



Alyene Hays

For Thanksgiving 1936, Alyene came home with her trunk full of pecans she had picked up on the campus grounds. The family and friends celebrated Thanksgiving as was their tradition, in the woods on the Peace River. The men hunted and filled the stew pot with squirrels and rabbits (rarely turkey) and that year they had pecan pies and cakes. After only one semester of college, Alyene returned home to resume the care of her mother.

Ten months after selling her grove to Edgar Hays, Alyene met him formally and was encouraged by both her parents to go on a date with him. They didn't marry until 1937 because she was still caring for her mother. During their courtship, her mother was brought to Dr. Krist in Orlando and he instructed Alyene to massage her mother's legs and with this care, Alyene got her mother walking again in only a few weeks. After she married Edgar, he proclaimed in front of their friends that it was a big mistake to buy

Alyene a house. He "should have given her a tent and a broom, because she kept their campsites much tidier than their home."

Alyene has had a varied past as mother, wife, and worker. Though she never formally enrolled in college again, Alyene took many college courses for her own edification. She was also a beauty queen, and was constantly working with and teaching children along with raising her own three children. She walked her babies to the Livingston Street Zoo and would walk with her cousins from Orlando to Sanlando Springs. Well, she never really walked but ran because, she says, she was as busy then as she is now. She founded Girl Scout Troop 74, and drove 12 Girl Scouts around the Gulf to Mexico City. She was an American Red Cross Water Safety Instructor's Instructor. She had a pet alligator and once caught a 23-pound sea trout. Alyene worked at City Hall and took the census when Orlando had a population of just 50,000. She is the longest continuous resident of historic Eola Heights.

In 1956, Alyene attended Blanche Covington Nature Study classes in O'Leno State Park as a 5-day vacation for those who worked with children teaching nature. It was there that she met Kathy Sample, an environmentalist and teacher who had organized the first wildflower club in Jacksonville. They met each week and each member produced three herbarium sheets per month. Alyene organized her own wildflower club of 16 people from five counties, following the same protocol of herbarium studies. Her club became a part of the Florida Federation of Garden Clubs in May 1976. She was president for the first five years. The club today has a membership of 45. Jo Stone was a member of that wildflower club and introduced Alyene to Bill Partington to help organize the Florida Native Plant Society. The first state meeting was held at Rollins College in May 1980. Alyene was the first president of the Tarflower Chapter of FNPS and has since served in many capacities.