

Members: the Heart and Soul of FNPS

Cynthia Plockelman

Charter Member of FNPS and the Palm Beach Chapter

Interview by Ray Miller, FNPS President

Have you ever known someone who seems to remember the names of everyone she's ever met? That's a gift many of us would like to have. After talking with Cynthia Plockelman, it seems she has this gift. This FNPS and Palm Beach Chapter charter member appears to know just about everyone and is a wealth of historical South Florida knowledge. Cynthia is our FNPS Governmental Policy Chair and also serves as the Chapter Representative for the Palm Beach Chapter.

Cynthia was born on June 22, 1938 in West Palm Beach, where she lives now. She is proud to call herself a fourth generation Floridian. A few of her ancestors settled at Shingle Creek in Osceola County after the Civil War, while others came from a young Miami to settle at Figulus (also known as the Potter Homestead in Palm Beach).

While growing up in West Palm Beach, Cynthia's family and one other were the only human inhabitants on an isolated road off the Intracoastal Waterway. She has loving memories of running through the sand pine scrub community that surrounded her home. She also enjoyed climbing the large gumbo limbo trees that dotted her yard. Occasionally, a large diamondback rattlesnake would wander through the area. Going shopping would mean packing up the family and driving to Miami. During these fall excursions, the road would be slick with crushed land crabs. She loved her trips to Miami, passing by extensive marshes and undisturbed natural communities. She is particularly fond of her memories of Arch Creek in Miami, before development.

Cynthia has enjoyed a lifelong love of nature, nurtured during what she describes as living and growing up in Florida "during the best of times." She has endured many major events, including the hurricanes of '47 and '49. She remembers going down to Lake Worth (Intracoastal Waterway) during the eye of the '49 storm and seeing the six-foot rack line from the tidal surge. Her neighbor's home was flooded, but her family's home was higher on the ridge and escaped damage.



As a youngster, Cynthia essentially lived outdoors, which her parents encouraged by their own activities. Her father, an architect, was on the City of West Palm Beach Recreation Board and her mother was involved with Junior Audubon Society.

Cynthia earned a BA degree in Political Science from Florida State University and MA degree in Government from Emory University. She has held the position of Technical Reference Librarian with the South Florida Water Management District for the past 38 years. While originally hired to do policy analysis and run the reference center, Cynthia gravitated to operating the reference center full-time. She is the District's third librarian (since 1949).

She credits the Native Plant Workshops held in Miami (earlier in Brickell Hammock) during the mid to late 1970's for nurturing her appreciation of native plants. Her memories of this group include several extended fields trips, including one to Jamaica. When talking about her Miami experiences she throws out names like someone sowing an area with seed—names like George Avery, Sonny Bass, Jane Brooks, Chuck McCartney, David and Sally Black, and Don and Joyce Gann. You can tell that Cynthia's friends and acquaintances mean a lot to her. She feels that the Native Plant Workshop group was instrumental in helping promote the protection of special areas in South Florida, much the same of what FNPS is trying to do statewide nowadays.

Cynthia also owns her own business, Two on a Shelf, selling antiquarian (used) books. You may have seen Cynthia peddling her wares at a few of our past annual conferences (The best books are snapped up

quickly). Cynthia also has an intense interest in metaphysics, birding, and butterfly watching.

Her motivation for joining FNPS was that she didn't like the way the world was going, with the emphasis on unregulated development. She felt that FNPS could be the coalescing group needed to bring other groups together and become a force to be reckoned with. She personally knew Bill Partington and supported his attempts to start FNPS. Another reason was her dismay at the lack of literature on Florida native plants. For a long time, Long and Lakela's *A Flora of Tropical Florida* and a few pamphlets were about the only references available. She felt that FNPS could promote the need for and even generate some of the literature.

She feels one of the milestones in the South Florida science scene was the establishment of the Archbold Biological Research Station in Lake Placid as a pure research facility. (I also think it has a lot to do with the memories of her youth and homestead in the sand pine scrub community). She appreciates the variety of science that the researchers have produced at the facility and the fact that it deals with all environmental components (i.e., plants, animals, insect, physical, etc.).

Cynthia believes that FNPS members need to be a critical force in the protection of the natural areas that remain in Florida. Among her suggestions are for FNPS to develop an expert witness list and establishment of a pro bono program for legal issues. She also feels that we need to support our members more on local problems. One of the biggest challenges for FNPS in the future will be to remain relevant with the needs of our membership. If we are seen as being ineffective, we will lose our numbers.

Cynthia's proudest accomplishment has been developing for the District a library that is a source of information for everyone in South Florida. (Many can attest to that!) Finally, when asked how she stays motivated, she refers to her parents fostering her love for the outdoors and her memories of early South Florida. She is also quick to remind you that she retires in two years and one month. ✨

Member profiles needed on an ongoing basis. For guidelines, contact the editor (see pg 3).