



Willou Copeland Smith

Growing up local, Willou lived in Brunswick during the school year and on St. Simons Island during the summer. Her family had a home on Beachview Drive, right next to the Seagate Inn.

“There was a hurricane before Hurricane Dora in 1964 that I remember,” she recalls. “We had a radio newsman, Johnny Lane, whose program gave news around the town for WMOG. He was the only newscaster that people listened to. Anyway, he kept saying that the hurricane would not hit us. So, we stayed in our house on Beachview Drive. That night, our living room ceiling collapsed. We awoke the next morning and saw that all the sea oats and sand dunes were gone. I found a lifeguard seat bobbing in water next to the front porch. We just did not have the weather forecasting system that we have now, so we all relied on Johnny Lane.”

To this day, Smith leaves the island with just a chance of a storm headed our way.

Summer days on the St. Simons Island of old brought the ice man every morning to the Copeland house, where the block of ice was put in the ice box. During the evenings,

Willou recalls sitting on the front porch with her family and listening to the neighborhood minstrels, the Washboard Band.

“The band would play a couple of tunes, then for a tip, play a few more. Then, they would head to the house next door. It was like clockwork,” Willou says. “They always showed up in the evening”

Willou left the Golden Isles after high school to attend Florida State University, where she majored in harp. While attending FSU, Smith was crowned Miss Tallahassee. She was a runner-up in the Miss Florida pageant and came home to win the Miss Golden Isles contest. She was later crowned a runner-up for the Miss Georgia title.

“My daddy thought it was funny that I was given a Pepsi-Cola scholarship in the Miss Florida contest,” Willou quips. Her father was the local Coca-Cola bottler.

After college, Willou married. She and husband Bill moved to Cincinnati for four months, and then came back home.

“After all, one must always return home,” she says.

Now the next time you see a “SSI Local” sticker on a car in front of you, you’ll know what that means. But no matter how long you have lived here, I’m sure you’ll agree there’s no place like our home. ■

