

I am Charlene Bootsma and I moved to Guantanamo Bay in 1955.

I am Donna Thacker. I moved to Guantanamo in 1955.

And I am Jeanette and I also moved to Guantanamo in 1955. [laughter]

[Charlene]: And then when we actually got on the base, it was just back to normal living. Living there is just a normal, American life.

[Jeanette]: But we moved into a two-story duplex and it was a very nice home. We had mango trees, concrete, right outside. It was concrete. The mango trees right outside. We had papayas and the mangroves were at the base. It was on a bay, an inlet, and the mangroves were right at the base of the inlet there so it was a beautiful setting.

[Donna]: We could wake up in the morning and hear the dolphins play.

[Jeanette]: Playing in the bay.

[Donna]: Just squeaking and having a ball back there.

[Charlene]: Well, I was at work and the boss called everybody, told us to come up and he told us. He said, "I have something to tell you" and he said, "I can't go into detail. You have just got to do what I say to do." And he said, "everybody proceed home. Pack one suitcase a piece and be ready to be picked up in one hour."

We - Donna and I - stayed in Kansas City about a week and we flew back to Norfolk and I got an apartment and I found a place that there were other families that had been evacuated that were living there and Donna could go to school. You know, they could all go to school together and I went to work on the base and it was a day or two before Christmas?

[Donna]: December 10th I think

[Jeanette]: I got in two days before Christmas.

[Charlene]: Back to the base and it was different but you just pick up, you know, and your life returns to what it was before like it never even happened.

[Donna]: It was not until 2009 when I fortunately got to go back to Cuba. I was at the northeast gate, the spot where they cut the pipe and the marine commandant had taken me out there to give me a tour and he was saying, "This is where they cut the pipe," which I already knew. I had seen it before, but they have a picture there above the plat... I am going to cry. I said, "That's my dad!" And I knew it was my dad.

[Jeanette]: We were just family. So that when... here I am a young bride and I am not only away from everything I have really ever known. I cannot go back. And that, I think, the day that I realized I could never ever go home again and it...

[Charlene]: And that was our home.

[Jeanette]: It was!

[Charlene]: We felt home when we were there.

[Donna]: Did not want to be anywhere else. I think Guantanamo made me a very independent and dependable person. All my life's lessons were at Guantanamo from the age of eight to the age of eighteen so everything I ever experienced was in Guantanamo. I am an adventurous person, I am a very dependable person. I am sometimes an intelligent person. I think Guantanamo shaped me totally. That it is who I am today.

I just do not want the people in the United States and anywhere else to think that this is a bad place to be.

[Jeanette]: No I think it is a very important part of history and history has to be recorded to be accurate because of our memories. How will they know if we do not share? We have to share our stories. We have to share our experiences and they need to be recorded.