

Publication:

Florida Today

Publication date:

12/06/1995

Page:

Edition:

Section:

Copyright:

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Day:

MALABAR FAMILY FIRST TO GROW FLOWERS IN AREA

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Vincent Glatter always wanted to be a doctor. He should have been a doctor. Once he sutured the badly wounded arm of a Costa Rican, "and when I saw it later, there was hardly a scar," he remembers.

That was in 1974, on an ill-fated trip to Costa Rica in a VW camper.

Glatter sutured the arm without benefit of any anesthetic. "Just used some rubbing alcohol," he recalls.

But even before that, he had sutured the torn teats of the goats on his Malabar farm; had put splints on the broken leg of another goat. All the goats healed satisfactorily.

But Glatter's dream of a medical career was cut short by the Florida East Coast Railway.

On March 22, 1934, a fast passenger train struck the rear end of Richard Glatter's Model A Ford, instantly killing him.

"I was in 11th grade at Melbourne High School. They came up to get me and I wanted to go down the tracks to see my father, but they said it best that I didn't," Glatter says quietly. He shakes his head at the memory: "I just never understood it. My father was always cautious about crossing the tracks. He always watched for trains. There were no signals of any kind at the Malabar crossing."

From that day on, the dream of becoming a physician disappeared as swiftly as did the life of Richard Glatter.

Twenty-one-year-old Vincent Glatter quit school to care for the family farm, his mother and sister. And, while he never entered the medical profession, the careers he has undertaken certainly have been numerous and colorful.

Flash back to the early years of this century. Richard Glatter entered nursing school in Nashville, Tenn. Lenora Staples, from Cape Town, South Africa, has crossed an ocean and decided to enter nursing school. They met, they had a courtship, they married. Son Vincent was born in 1913 at Borden Springs, Ala. Later, a daughter, Ethelwynne, was born. They moved to Tullahoma, Tenn., then in October 1916, decided to move to Florida. "My mother wanted a warmer climate," explains Glatter.

The Glatter family found Malabar on the East Coast and a house that had been built just two years before, and they bought it, along with 20 acres of land.

"At first my father did truck farming. He raised vegetables and sold them to the stores in Melbourne and to households there. Then Dewitt House interested my father in growing flowers. House had had a greenhouse in South Carolina, and he was familiar with flower growing."

Young Vincent Glatter was tutored at home by his mother for the first three grades, but by the time he was ready to enter the fourth grade, he was sent to the Malabar School on Main Street and, later, to the new school on Marie Street.

"That new school was only used for about three years before they shut it down and bused everyone to Melbourne," says Glatter. "It sat idle for a while, then a couple of different families lived in it. One of them was the Lind family."

In the meantime, Richard Glatter went into the gladiolus-raising business.

"We were the first flower growers in this area," remembers Glatter.

Actually, Richard Glatter does not confine himself just to the growing of gladiolus. He grows calla and Easter lilies. He grows pinks, calendulas, roses. He makes sprays and wreaths. He develops a fernery.

"On Sunday afternoons, the cars lined up out there," says Vincent Glatter, motioning to the gravel road. "They came to buy flowers."

What did the flowers sell for?

"Probably about \$1 for a bouquet," he says.

But that is not all.

Richard Glatter shipped gladioli to Chicago, Philadelphia and New York. They were shipped in huge hampers, picked up by the express trains from the freight platform at Malabar.

In the northern cities they sold for 35 cents to \$1 a dozen, depending on their size.

"We had two men working for us," Vincent Glatter says.

A quick lesson in gladiolus growing in Florida:

The bulbs are planted in September. They bloom from mid-December for most of the winter. By the middle of February, or at least by March 1, the first bulbs that were planted were dug up, put in trays and stored until about July. Then, they were put in cold storage in an ice plant.

The Glatters usually took the bulbs to Fort Pierce.

"Occasionally my dad took the bulbs to cold storage in Leesburg," says Glatter.

The freeze of January 1940 wiped out the flower-growing business in Malabar.

By this time, Vincent Glatter was 27 years old and newly married. Just the year before the big freeze, he went to a Seventh-day Adventist camp meeting east of Apopka. He met a young woman from Lakeland, whose name was Frances Welch.

He remembers: "We had a two-month romance, married in Lakeland and honeymooned in Miami."

Frances Glatte pulls an old envelope from a drawer. On it are the marriage vows Vincent made, written in pencil. She still treasures it.

After the freeze, Glatte and his wife started a dairy.

"We had 16 cows and with the help of 'Pop' Crowe, I milked those cows," says Frances Glatte.

An inspector with the state health department said the Glattes had to have a cement floor in the barn, but the cost of putting in a cement floor was prohibitive. The dairy business was discontinued.

"Then I started driving a Texaco gasoline truck," Vincent Glatte says. "Worked for Red Groves who had the Ford agency and the Texaco agency. Then, I went to work for Frank Laibl, who had a gasoline distributorship.

"This was during World War II, and I delivered gas to all the Coast Guard stations from the inlet to Cocoa Beach, as well as to Banana River Naval Air Base."

Driving a gasoline truck has its share of excitement: Vincent Glatte's truck once clipped a cow on the road just west of the St. Johns River, and another time, the truck's engine threw a rod, and the engine caught fire.

"I'm on the grade just east of the St. Johns, near Mims, with 4,000 gallons of gasoline on board. I get out of the truck and run, but I am worried that other cars might come up on the truck about the time it blows. Strangely enough, the fire was brief and went out."

In 1948, Lenora Staples Glatte, Vincent's mother, returned for a visit to her native South Africa. She died there, and that is where she is buried.

There were other adventures for the Glattes on their acreage in Malabar. At one time they began raising goats.

"We had 62 goats, as I recall," says Glatte. "Milked two or three. We had to dip those goats once a month to get rid of the lice, and they sometimes ripped their teats on the barbed wire fences. Once we had a baby goat who nursed on a cow. It had to stand on a stool to nurse."

After the gasoline truck episodes, Glatte says he became a carpenter, working for his brother-in-law, Sidney Boskind. They bought a bulldozer and Vincent practiced driving it.

"I'd never driven a bulldozer before, but after some practice I cleared 40 acres of land between Indian River and Canova Beach. Later, I cleared land for the building of the Cape Canaveral Hospital."

The afternoon shadows are growing long. Glatte tells the story of his trip to Costa Rica with his sister, when they went over the side of a mountain in his VW camper. They escaped with their lives - but just barely.

That was 21 years ago. Now he is retired and enjoys visits with his children, Roderick and Elaine, as well as his grandchildren.

The winter sun is fading fast in the west and the air is growing cold. Vincent and Frances Glatte see a visitor to the door of her car and Frances says, nodding toward her husband, "He's lived in this house for 79 years."

The old farmhouse sits grandly in the Malabar woods, no longer surrounded by gladiolus or ferns, but by memories.

QUOTELINE:

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Illustration: Color photo by DELINDA K. HARTMAN, Bay Bulletin VISIONS OF PAST: Vincent Glatter and his wife, Frances, stand near their Malabar Home. Vincent Glatter holds a photo of the same home taken in the 1930s.

Bay Bulletin Special B&W Photo FAMILY BUSINESS: The Glatter family stands in one of the gladiolus fields they owned in the 1920s. From left are Ethalwynn Glatter, Lenora Staples Glatter, Vincent Glatter and Richard Glatter.

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