



MY STORY

by Old Betsy

I arrived in Moore Haven, Florida, on September 9, 1926, to begin my work as a firefighter in this small town on the shores of Lake Okeechobee. But things changed on September 18, 1926, when the Great Miami Hurricane came through. The simple mud dike that was around the lake broke, and Moore Haven was flooded with about 15 feet of water. That put me underwater too. Somewhere between 150-300 people died. The town was struggling to survive in many ways, including financially, and I was purchased by the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers. The Brotherhood relocated me to a town named Venice, situated on the Gulf of Mexico, and I first came to Venice on November 4, 1926. Not long after, in 1927, the Brotherhood incorporated Venice as a city. I was the first fire truck. It was an exciting time. The city grew and grew. The Brotherhood brought many visitors to Venice, including Thomas Edison, and we were introduced.

So many things have happened, and so much history has passed. The Brotherhood, which brought me to Venice, didn't survive the Great Depression. But new life came. The Kentucky Military Institute, a school for young men, opened its winter quarters here in Venice. Venice also

had an army air base and flyers were trained here. I was the only fire truck in town until 1949 when the army air base left, and gave the city two trucks that joined me in protecting the city.

Then this place turned into a circus – literally. Ringling Bros. and Barnum and Bailey Circus announced that it was moving its winter quarters to Venice on Christmas Eve, 1959. In 1962, the Army Corps of Engineers began the construction of the Intracoastal Waterway, which made Venice an “island”.

In the late 1960s, I retired – but only where firefighting was concerned. I can still pump that water, but other trucks that came along could do it better, and the well-being of the citizens in the City is very important to me. So I began my new job as an ambassador for the City of Venice. So many great things to do! I entered contests at fire truck competitions and even won a few! Not bad for an old gal. Fifty years ago, I started leading the Venice Lions Club Halloween Parade every year. Running in parades is one of my favorite things to do. I’ve been in parades in Ft. Myers (celebrating that guy Edison’s birthday), St. Petersburg (bridge is a little scary), Sarasota, Bradenton and, of course, Venice, just to name a few. My favorite parade has been the Venice Holiday Parade, which was started in 1976. I began just carrying Santa Claus and a few of the children that would come down to the Avenue, and later, as the parade grew, I carried dignitaries and our local Councilpersons. I just love the children who would wave at me.

I take my job as ambassador for the City of Venice quite seriously. I have had a little work done on me from time to time, and I want to thank Chief Dewey Stephens, Chief Harry Sjoblom, Chief Bud Divine, Chief Gordon Struble, Sr., Chief Ted Deming, Chief Jim Colbert, Chief J.M. Keys, Chief John Reed, Glenn Stephens, Gaylord George, and Earl Midlam, for taking their time to take care of me and to make sure I was provided for. But I’ve recently had the makeover of my lifetime. I took a trip, on a transport, to Daytona Beach, where a corporation named PRIDE totally re-made me. I cannot thank enough the workers at PRIDE, as well as the citizens who donated their time and money for my makeover. I may be 85 years old, but I’m looking forward to spending another 85 years here in Venice, riding in the parades, and continuing my work as an ambassador for the City. Be sure to wave at me when you see me!