In 1960, a dentist from Illinois named Fred “Doc” Kroner closed up his practice for a couple of weeks and, at the urging of his friends, decided to take a vacation trip to Florida. When he returned home, he had a surprise for them — he had bought a little motel on Casey Key.

For more than 10 years afterwards, he would shut down his dental practice and head down to Florida to stay in the motel and escape the harsh midwestern winters. He called it the Island House, and today, it still remains a home away from home for regular visitors from all over the country.

After Doc passed away in 1971, his daughter Carol Turner and her husband Don continued to oversee the property, with the help of some valued long-term residents. For a few months of the year, they would come down with their children to stay at the motel and give the managers some vacation time of their own.

Their youngest daughter Jeni (Means) would tag along, attending school in Venice when they were here and in Illinois when they went back home. Jeni said traveling with her parents and living at the Gulf-front paradise made for an idyllic childhood.

“Back in Illinois, my dad was a farmer, and my mom had started a campground there — she was quite the entrepreneur,” she said. “At the campground, I would work in the general store, and you just meet such nice people there. Campers, like the customers we get here at the Island House, are such great people.”

In those days, a typical stay at Island House would last two to three months, and customers quickly became like family to the Turners.

The Island House has 14 units and a house across the street, the top floor of which is rented out on Airbnb. Of the 14 units, two are one-bedroom apartments that also include a fold-out sofa bed and four are motel rooms, and are located right above the office.

Jeni’s mother passed away in 2014 and her father, not wishing to visit without her, asked Jeni to handle the property. She has a wonderful manager, Staci Andersen, who has been with her for 18 years and fits right in with the longtime guests who still regularly come to visit. Though the property has undergone some exterior and interior renovations, it still appears to be a throwback, especially gives these days of high-rise condos, Jeni’s mother was also a graphic artist and the geometric design and sailboat in the Island House logo can be attributed to her work.

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