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Y. Stories to Save Lives

Interview Y-0029

Martha-Mac Harris

14 June 2018

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ABSTRACT: MARTHA-MAC HARRIS

Interviewee: Martha “Martha-Mac” MacKinnon Harris

Interviewer: Caroline Efird

Interview Date: June 14, 2018

Location: Martha-Mac Harris’ home, Albemarle, Stanly County, North Carolina

Length: 2 hours

Martha-Mac Harris was born on January 5, 1950. She lives in Albemarle, North Carolina and works in the field of education. Much of this interview details the experiences of Ms. Harris’ grandparents and parents in rural Montgomery County, North Carolina. She describes her family’s customs and social expectations related to burial practices, tenant farming, church, and women’s education in the early to mid 20th century. She describes how healthcare was administered in the late 1800s and early 1900s in rural parts of the North Carolina piedmont. She recounts what it was like to grow up as an only child on farm in Wadeville, North Carolina (Montgomery County) in the 1950s. Ms. Harris describes her positive experiences with healthcare providers during several lengthy hospital stays at Troy Hospital (Montgomery County) when she was young. Until the age of thirteen, she was the primary caretaker of her elderly grandmother. She also describes how it felt to be one of less than 200 women who were accepted at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 1968. She concludes the interview by contrasting how some residents of Montgomery County and Robeson County had differing connections to the Confederacy once the U.S. Civil War was over, and she ponders how Scottish heritage could have impacted Robeson County residents’ views of “the North” and “Yankees” after the Civil War. This interview was part of the Southern Oral History Program’s project called Stories to Save Lives: Health, Illness, and Medical Care.

FIELD NOTES – MARTHA-MAC HARRIS

Narrator: Martha “Martha-Mac” MacKinnon Harris
 Interviewer: Caroline Efird
 Date: June 14, 2018
 Location: Martha-Mac Harris’ home, Albemarle, Stanly County, North Carolina

NARRATOR

Martha-Mac Harris was born on January 5, 1950. She has lived the majority of her life in Stanly County, North Carolina, although she grew up on a farm in Wadeville, NC (Montgomery County). After completing high school in Montgomery County, she attended the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (class of 1972). She earned a B.A. of English Education. She later earned a Master’s of Creative Non-Fiction Writing from Queens University in Charlotte, NC. Currently, Ms. Harris is a writing teacher at the Albemarle Correctional Institute. She has three children, James Monroe, David Monroe, and Hannah Harris.

THE INTERVIEWER: Caroline Efird is Ph.D. student in the Department of Health Behavior at UNC-Chapel Hill. She is currently working with the Southern Oral History Program on the Stories to Save Lives: Health, Illness, and Medical Care project.

DESCRIPTION OF THE INTERVIEW:

The interview was conducted in the living room of Martha-Mac Harris’ home in Albemarle, North Carolina. She was very a gracious host and was at eager to stories about her family and childhood. Specific questions about health/healthcare were asked because this interview was part of the Stories to Save Lives: Health, Illness, and Medical Care project.

NOTE ON RECORDING

Several background noises occurred throughout the interview, including air running through a vent, and traffic on the street in front of her home. There was one brief interruption when a salesperson knocked on the front door and the recording was paused. The interviewer used the SOHP’s Zoom 4 recorder #4.

HIGHLIGHTS OR POSSIBLE EXCERPTS

[1:27:00-1:31:39] Martha-Mac Harris talks about how she was sick as a child with “*the mad itch*”, in the 1950s, and how she would have to spend weeks at a time in the Troy Hospital (Montgomery County). She describes how the hospital was new and “*state of the art*” and how she loved the way that the nurses treated her. She even remembers one of the members of the Board of Trustees of Troy Hospital who would stop by to check on her. She recalls how one could stay at the hospital for weeks at that time versus present day when “*they kick you out.*” She also talks about forming a friendship with an elderly woman who had a room next door to her at the hospital.

There is also a poignant line around [1:15:08] when Ms. Harris says “*family was healthcare.*” She was referencing the fact that people simply took care of one another

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when someone was sick in the mid 1800s, because there were not hospitals in rural areas in those days. *“So somehow, they all survived, but by the grace of God, and everybody, they grew their own food, and there was no healthcare monthly payment, and there was no healthcare. [laughs] It was just family was healthcare.”* [1:14:50-1:15:09]. She also mentions this earlier in the recording in regards to her step-grandmother, Phoebe (affectionately called “Aunt Ruby”): *“...If someone got sick, call Phoebe, Phoebe would come sit with the sick folks. That was pretty much how healthcare was just family, friends. You knew who to call to sit by the bedside with the sick person.”* [0:47:53-0:48:26]

TRANSCRIPT: “Martha-Mac” MacKinnon Harris

Interviewee: **Martha** “Martha-Mac” MacKinnon Harris

Interviewer: Caroline Efird

Interview Date: June 14, 2018

Location: Albemarle, North Carolina

Length: 2 hours

START OF INTERVIEW

Caroline Efird: My name is Caroline Efird, and I am here with Martha-Mac Harris in Albemarle, North Carolina, and today is June 14th, 2018. Do you want to introduce yourself?

[0:00:18.6]

“Martha-Mac” Harris: I’m Martha-Mac Harris. I live in Albemarle, and I grew up in Wadeville, North Carolina, in Montgomery County.

[0:00:29.7]

CE: Well, Martha-Mac, to get started, could you tell us a little bit about your grandparents?

[0:00:35.0]

MH: The only grandparent that I knew was my mother’s mother, and by the time I was born to older parents, the other grandparents had already passed away. My mother’s mother was named Flora, and she was very Scottish, very proud of her Scottish heritage, and she grew up in Red Springs, North Carolina, and her family came over in 1753 from Scotland, from Kintyre, Scotland. They were McEacherns and then they were also

MacKinnons, and they came from the Isle of Skye, and they came to escape oppressive conditions in Scotland, and they came to Wilmington. They landed at Wilmington and they came up a flat-bottom boat up the Cape Fear River, and they liked the soil in Red Springs, where they could grow tobacco and cotton, and that's where they settled.

My grandmother Flora was one of four girls, and her father was a farmer there in Red Springs, named John McEachern, and he was with the Home Guard in the Civil War, but as the Civil War progressed, he had to go serve. He was a little older, but he finally was called into service towards the end, because they were calling in everybody. But in the beginning, he was part of the Home Guard to protect the womenfolk at home. But he served and came back alive, but his brother died at Cold Harbor, and that affected the family story a lot, because everyone was very bitter that they lose that brother at Cold Harbor.

And he came back and bought a lot of land, farmland, and he gave each one of his daughters a piece of farmland, and his advice to each daughter was to always keep the land in their name and never, ever put it in their husband's name, because he believed in women's rights and women owning their own property, and he wanted his daughters to be real strong, and he was ahead of his time, because he made sure they kept the title, the deed to the land in their name, and when they married, that they not add their husband's name. So that was way ahead of the time.

Grandmother Flora, my mother's mother, was born in 1870, and when I was a child, she told me stories about visiting Mary Todd Lincoln, and that was the thing that fascinated me the most when I was a child, because I'd get off the school bus and she lived with us half of the year, and she'd be sitting on the couch. She was in her eighties,

and she would talk about—and her mind would wander, and she would talk about Mary Todd Lincoln. I could never understand it as a child, how she could have known or ever seen Mary Todd Lincoln, but as an adult, I pieced it together that she visited Mary Todd Lincoln with her grandmother, and she was only about probably four or five at the time, but it made an impression on her, but she was visiting with her grandmother, so that the story began to make a little sense, because after Abraham Lincoln's assassination, Mary Todd Lincoln lost her mind and began to wander around, traveling around visiting relatives and friends all over the South, and somehow my grandmother's grandmother visited her. So that was a tie with history way back that I was fortunate to hear about.

Here's a history in my mother's side of the family of women marrying late and having children very late, and that's why I had a grandmother who was born in 1870 [chuckles], because most people, that would be their great-grandmother or their great-great-grandmother, but my grandmother was thirty-five when she got married, and then she had four children after that. Every two years, when one would wean, she would have another one, so she had four after that. And then my mother was older when she had me, and it's a family tradition. [laughs]

But my grandmother was very proud of her Scottish heritage, and she married a—well, her name reflects that. She was Flora McNeil McEachern, and she married Neil MacKinnon, who was a widower from Wilmington, and that was my grandfather Neil. He was a newspaper reporter for a newspaper in Wilmington, and he was a journalist and he was a widower with two boys, so my grandmother married him and had two stepsons immediately and then she had her four more.

Neil MacKinnon, he enjoyed being a journalist, but he moved back to the Red Springs area with her, and they settled down farming. And tobacco farming and cotton farming was the big thing in Robeson County and Hoke County, and then my grandmother's father, of course, had given her her own parcel of land, so she always had at leased out for tobacco, and the story was she always had money in her billfold—no, her change purse. She didn't have a billfold, but back then she had a big black change purse that impressed me as a child, and it was always full of money. There was one side pocket for paper money and one for coins, and it was never empty. They said my grandfather Neil, everyone said he was blessed to marry Flora McEachern because she was John McEachern's daughter and she would always have plenty of money.

And that's how they—not really quite sure how they met. That's still a mystery. But since he was in Wilmington and she was in Red Springs, but he had relatives in Red Springs. His sister, Nancy, lived there and he'd come up and visit her. That's probably how they met.

And so my mother had two brothers and a sister, and she was also a very independent-minded woman, like my Grandmother Flora, and she married at thirty-five also, and then was forty-two when she had me. So nobody was in a hurry to get married and nobody was in a hurry particularly to have children. It seemed like they were very content to have their own career, and marriage was very secondary.

[0:08:52.6]

CE: What was her career?

[0:08:54.9]

MH: My mother's career was—her philosophy was somebody has to work and save, so even though her mother had the land and everything, it was unheard of to sell the land, so my mother knew she had to work.

To backtrack a second, my Grandmother Flora lived in a little house in Red Springs across from Flora MacDonald College, which later turned into St. Andrews, but Grandmother Flora lived there as a widow. Grandfather Neil had passed away, and she moved to this little house in town instead of being out on the farm by herself, and her house was diagonally across from Flora MacDonald College. Of course, years later, in the [19]60s, it moved to Laurinburg to become St. Andrews College, now St. Andrews University.

But when my mother was growing up and time for her to go to college, all she had to do was walk across the street, walk down the street and across the street to Flora MacDonald College, and her degree was a Bachelor of Science in food science, nutrition and food science. So when I was growing up, I was very aware of that, because on our kitchen wall, instead of a picture of fruits or flowers, there was a picture of the food wheel, all the foods you're supposed to eat daily, and she was very conscious of nutrition. But her degree in food science allowed her to be a home demonstration agent in Montgomery County. Now they don't call them that, they call them home extension agents, but back then she was called a home demonstration agent. And before that, she taught Home Economics in a high school in Belmont and several other small towns around North Carolina.

But when she got this job in Montgomery County, it looked like a permanent career move for her, so she was in her early thirties and she moved to Troy, the county

seat of Montgomery County, did not know anyone, and found a room to rent with a Mrs. Grant, who was also another very independent woman who was a widow. My mother moved in to rent that room and start her new job, she made friends quickly and easily, and soon had a lot of good friends to socialize with, but she was still single and working at the Agricultural Building in Troy, which is next to the library today. It's always been there. But she was the home agent. She'd go around teaching women how to preserve peaches and how to make good cornbread, the best way to do crewel embroidery for cushions. For several weeks, she taught a workshop on crewel embroidery, which all the women were very anxious to learn about so they would have beautiful cushions for their couches. Her favorite thing was teaching how to can tomatoes, preserve people's vegetables in their garden.

Her most interesting food that I associate with my mother is the way every summer she would make peach leather, which is a lost art to make peach leather, but it would extend throughout the summer. It was like waiting for the peaches to be ripe, picking the peaches, boiling them till they became mushy like a stew, like a peach stew almost, and then you would lay out the pulp on screens out in the backyard under the mimosa tree. She laid them out on the backdoor screens, old backdoor screens that were falling off the hinges. She would lay them between chairs and put the pulp on top of the screened doors until it dried. Then she'd bring it inside and roll it out and cut it and roll it in sugar, and that was peach leather. And she'd give it away at Christmas to everybody. That was my favorite thing that she would do.

But she always had help in the kitchen, which back in the fifties, that was still part of the southern heritage, is to have an African American woman to help in the kitchen,

and they worked very hard, as hard or harder than my mother in the actual preparation of things. They did all the hard work.

So my mother was in her new job, going back to the beginning of her new job, and Mrs. Grant, who had a house there near the Troy Hospital, she rented that room from her, and Mrs. Grant told everybody in Troy that, "I have this wonderful young woman living with me now, who will eat anything. She will eat anything and can get along with anybody." That was what she said to everybody about my mother. "She can get along with anyone and will absolutely eat anything." So that was my mother's introduction into Troy society.

So anyway, the way she met my father was my father had been a math teacher in Franklin, North Carolina, and he had decided to come back to Montgomery County to help his father on his farm there in Wadeville, which is between Mount Gilead and Troy, and he decided to come home and help his elderly father on the farm. He lived with his father and his stepmother.

My father's name was David Harris, and my mother's name was Martha McEachern, and they met because my father would come to the Agricultural Extension office building to talk to the farm agent and to ask questions about crops, to try to help his father on the farm, to ask questions about pigs and cows, so he'd come maybe once every week or two weeks to talk to the farm agent, and to do that, he had to go down a hallway and pass my mother's office, where she was the home agent. He would poke his head in her office door to speak to her, because she was a very friendly person, and he would say, "When are you gonna give me a ride in that new Plymouth of yours?" And that's how it all started. And, finally, she did give him a ride in her new Plymouth that

she'd bought in Albemarle at what is now a Pontiac place. It was either a Pontiac or Plymouth, but maybe it was "that new Pontiac of yours." I'm not sure.

But she'd gone to Albemarle to buy this Pontiac or Plymouth. They call it now 5 Point Public House, but it was to be called Pontiac place or the Pontiac dealership, and the Pontiac dealership symbol is still there, up there on the building. But someone gave her a ride over there to buy her first car, and she didn't have a driver's license and she didn't know how to drive. She bought the car and taught herself to drive, and drove it back to Troy, and that's the car that created a new family, because it was the line that my father used [laughs] to get a ride in her new car.

And so she was Martha McEachern at the time, but then she and my father finally decided to marry when she decided that he was the one, and she decided that he was the one because he had a good heart, and she'd had lots of other suitors who were doctors and such, but he was a fairly humble farmer who did happen to have a law degree also, but at the time they met, he was helping his father on the farm. But they met, so they became my parents, David and Martha Harris.

Then she told me later, years later, after my father died, that she had chosen to marry him because of the way he cried at his father's funeral. She said that touched her, that she knew then he had a good heart, the way she saw the tears streaming down his face at his father's funeral. And even though she'd had lots of better offers, as far as more prosperous men, she chose him. Then she encouraged him to run for judge, since he did have the law degree, and he did, and he was a judge for thirty years and farming on the side. He began to farm on the side, and always lost money on pigs because the pig market

was never very good in Montgomery County. You spend a lot on 'em but never make your money back.

And then they could not have a child, and finally they said after seven years they did have me, and at the time, there was no hospital in Troy. There was one doctor, maybe two, to take care of everybody in that area, and they made house calls back then. If you couldn't get to the doctor's office, they'd come to you, to your house. That was still the age of doctor house calls. And when my mother was pregnant with me—this was 1950—there was no hospital in Troy, so they knew they would have to drive to Charlotte Hospital, which was on Kings Drive there. Now it's called CMC Main, in downtown Charlotte. But back then, it was called Charlotte Memorial Hospital, and that's where people had to go to have their babies. If you lived in Montgomery County, that was pretty much your only choice, unless you wanted to have a home birth with a midwife or find a room in the Health Department building, a spare bed.

[0:20:53.1]

CE: How long a drive was it to Charlotte?

[0:20:55.2]

MH: It was an hour at the best. With not bad traffic, it was an hour minimum to get there from Troy. And my mother's labor came along fairly quickly and a little unexpectedly, so Dr. Charles Eckerson was the main family doctor in Troy at the time, so the way that it would work was you'd call the doctor at his house, and his house was a few blocks away from my mother and father's rental house there in Troy, because by this time, my father left the farm and was living—he and my mother had bought a little house in Troy.

So they called him up at his house and said, "Think it's time," so he rushed over to my mother and father's house, and he got my mother to get in the car with him, his car, and my dad, he started to get into the car with him and my mother, and Dr. Eckerson said, "No, David, you get in your own car. You're going to follow up. I don't have time to mess with you right now. Follow us."

So Dr. Eckerson raced to the Charlotte Hospital, and I was born about twenty minutes after they got there. So it was a long way to have to go with my mother being in labor, but my father was trailing behind, because Dr. Eckerson thought my father would slow him down. So, apparently, Dr. Eckerson broke a lot of speeding laws that night [laughs] to get there.

After I was born in the Charlotte Hospital, the nurse came in and said to my mother, "Oh, you're the woman who had the baby so fast and has the husband who looks like President Truman."

And my mother said, "Yeah, that's him, except he's better-looking than President Truman." So Truman was still president at that time. [laughs] And then Eisenhower was coming in soon. I don't know if the inauguration was later in January, maybe. But that story was told to me a lot. "You're the woman who has the husband who looks like the president." [laughs]

So I was an only child, and remained an only child. My grandmother, Flora, my mother's mother, was the only grandparent that I ever really got to know well, and she lived with us at least half the year, sometimes longer, because she was a widow, and that was a very rewarding experience to have my grandmother, because we were required to sleep together because it was my job to look after my grandmother. I was about ten years

old, but it was my job to look after her, so she slept with me and I took care of her and dressed her and undressed her, so we were very close. Then she died when she was ninety-three. In 1963, she died when she was ninety-three. At the very end, she had to spend most of the time in a nursing home in Red Springs. It became too difficult to take care of her at our house, and I had gotten to the place I couldn't lift her because I was still a child myself.

So she was in a nursing home full-time the last year of her life, and the only people she knew at that time were people who were dead. She would talk about her Uncle Hector, and people would come to see her, but she would imagine that they were relatives who had passed away. On the day she died, she told everyone she was going home that day, and she was so happy she was going home that day, and she did die on her birthday, January the 4th. She had always hoped that I would be born on her birthday, but I was born two hours later, so I was born January the 5th at 2:30 in the morning, so I missed it, and she was sad, because she wanted me to be born on her birthday. But I was almost born on her birthday, except for the wild ride to Charlotte. [laughs]

So I wasn't born in Troy, but apparently back then, a lot of people were born at home still, because my father's sister always talked about her two were born at home, and she was in Harnett County. But they were born at home still back in the late 1940s, they were still being born at home. People didn't want to bother with the hospital, or maybe the hospital was small or they were afraid of infection. I'm not quite sure. But up until 1950, most people were still born at home.

Then when I got older, I became interested in the grandparents that I didn't know, that I didn't have the privilege of knowing, and that would've been my father's mother

and father, and I wanted to know so much about them because I'd see their pictures, but I knew nothing about them, so I did ask my father about them. The information that I have is from him or some of his cousins.

But the way that my father's parents met was unusual also, because in today's world they might've met on Facebook, but back then it would've been very unusual for people from two different counties to meet. It was very odd. My father's mother was Lena Hadley from Richmond County, and her father was Alfred Hadley and her mother was Catherine Cheek, and they were Quakers from Pittsboro. The Hadleys, their heritage was Quaker, and there's even a road, as you're coming into Chatham County, called Hadley Mill Road, and that's where they had a mill, but they were Quakers. But somehow they moved from Chatham County to Richmond, because Alfred was a farmer. Everybody was a farmer then.

So she was living in Richmond County and had her degree in English, and she also was another independent woman, not particularly living her life towards finding a husband or anything. She was enjoying teaching English. I still have a copy of her English certificate and her grade that she got on her exams and everything, so I treasure that a lot.

And then back then, well, anyway, she was offered a teaching position in Montgomery County on a farm not too far from where my grandfather was living as a farmer, but they didn't know it at the time, but she was offered this position to teach my grandfather's uncle's daughters. Back then, a lot of young women didn't go to school. The father would hire a private tutor or private, like, governess, but they wouldn't call it a governess so much, because that seemed like you had a lot of money, but a private

teacher to come into the home, rather than the daughters going out of the home, because academies for females were still rare and they were expensive and they were far away.

My grandfather had an uncle named Bud Parker, and Bud Parker was a prosperous farmer and he had two very delicate daughters named Ella and Jamie, and he wanted them to have a fine education because he said a woman needed a fine education, and that was his first priority. So somehow he got my grandmother's name, who was Lena Hadley. I don't know how he got her name, because she's living in Richmond County. And how they made contact back then is a mystery to me. Somebody had to know somebody, somebody's cousin knew somebody else's cousin, because there were no phones, really, either. So, somehow my grandmother, Lena Hadley, heard about this position that was open, and applied for it and got it.

So she comes over in a wagon from Richmond County and begins to live with Bud Parker and begins teaching his two daughters, Jamie and Ella, and apparently is doing very well teaching them. She teaches them all subjects, but her degree was really in English. She was very settled in. She had her own room in a very nice old farmhouse there. Turned out this farmhouse was only about two miles from where my grandfather had grown up and was living as a farmer and farmer's son, and my grandfather's name was James Atlas Harris. So I'm not sure of their ages. They're in their young twenties, twenty-two, twenty-three.

So, one day my grandfather, James Atlas Harris, his uncle, Bud Parker, came over to visit for the Sunday afternoon visit. Back then, that was the big social event, was the Sunday afternoon visit after church, and you would visit *all* afternoon and they would arrive by wagon. But Bud Parker, his wife, the two girls came over one afternoon to visit

my grandfather and his family, and Bud said to my grandfather, James Atlas Harris—they called him Jim—“Jim, you need to come over to my house some Sunday afternoon and meet my daughters’ new teacher, because y’all are around the same age. You need to come over and meet her. Her name’s Lena, and you need to come over and see her. She’s quite pretty. You need to come see her, so meet her sometime.”

So at some point, he took him up on the invitation and went over to meet Lena, and the rest is history. They got along, Lena Hadley and James Atlas Harris, found they had a lot in common, and they fell in love and they got married, and then she moved out of the Parker home and moved into the Harris home.

She had a sister who was a very good seamstress, and her sister Mary made her wedding dress of blue. She chose blue instead of white, a blue silk. And her hands were sore for days from all the tucks, they said, in the bodice, but it was blue silk, which I always thought was fascinating that she chose blue, and it’s also possible, I was told later, that that was the only fabric that they had at the time, and they were very frugal, thrifty people. So I have a picture of her in her blue silk wedding dress, and him with his handlebar moustache, and he was already going bald. She could have been approaching thirty, I don’t know. But they both look extremely serious in their wedding picture, because back then, people did look serious in their wedding pictures. [laughs] But he looked older than she because of his moustache and his balding head.

Their first child was my father, David Hadley Harris, and then they had another son named Alfred Harris, who was nicknamed “Chick,” and then they had Frances and then they had William, and they had a hard life on the farm, but it was a life my grandmother knew she was choosing. She never went back to teaching, and she—full-

time mother and housekeeper running the house, and she had help in the house from the tenant farmers' wives up the road, because after slavery, everyone became tenant farmers instead up the road. But the tenant farmers up the road, their fathers or their grandfathers had been slaves. So that was the new social order, was the tenant farmers. So up the road from the farmhouse were lots of tenant houses. But the wives of the tenant farmers would be the women who would come down and do the laundry for my grandmother and help prepare meals.

But she ended up dying of cancer, probably it was colon or stomach cancer, but they never were sure, because she had a hard life and worked very hard, and later pictures of her shows she was very thin, very, very—looked haggard and thin. So she died fairly young, but my father was an adult by then.

But, again, I was always curious—then I became curious about my grandfather James Atlas Harris' parents, and I would ask lots of questions, but I didn't growing up, but as I got to be an adult, I began to wonder about his parents and found out a lot about them. His father was John Wesley Harris, because somewhere on his side of the family they were big Methodists, and then he married Frances Parker, who was the sister of the Bud Parker. So Bud would have still been his uncle.

Anyway, so it was Frances Parker had a big dowry of land, so that's where the land came into the family. Her father, Mason Parker, had a lot of land, and so part of her dowry when she married John Wesley Harris was this parcel of land, and they built a humble farmhouse there, with the typical hallway between the main living quarters and the kitchen, because there were so many kitchen fires back then. So there would be, like,

the kitchen was never part of the main house. There's a hallway and it was mostly an outside kitchen.

But they raised several boys and a girl, who all branched out and most of 'em ended up transplanted to Stanly County. My grandfather was the only one who stayed as a farmer in Montgomery County, but all of his brothers and sister moved to Stanly County and became prominent citizens in Stanly County. But his oldest brother, Arthur Parker Harris, founded Home Savings & Loan in Albemarle, and then had two brothers started businesses in Norwood, and his sister married a Mr. Lance from Albemarle, who had a clothing store on the corner in Albemarle, Lance Clothing Store. But they all though Albemarle and Stanly County was far superior to Montgomery County. They were happy to get away from the farm. They wanted nothing more to do with the farm, but my grandfather was attached and he stayed. But he was very content to be a farmer. He wanted nothing else. But the rest of them wanted more out of life. His older brother was in the first graduating class of Wake Forest, or second year, second graduating class of Wake Forest when it was still in the town of Wake Forest, and he was a math teacher, in addition to starting Home Savings & Loan.

But anyway, when John Wesley Harris married Frances Parker, they raised these children. I don't know if I remember all their names, but there was Arthur Parker, and then there was my grandfather James Atlas, then there was a William, then there was—the daughter was the baby and she was Alberta, and then Alberta, they—I'm trying to think. There was one other I'm leaving out. But there was William, and there was Eli David.

At some point in the 1890s, there was a severe typhoid fever epidemic that swept through the little village of Wadeville due to the contaminated well water somehow, and many, many people died in Wadeville, and there was no cure for typhoid fever. There was a great fear of it. But at that point when typhoid fever completely wiped out a large part of the population of little Wadeville, typhoid fever caused the death of John Wesley Harris and one of the sons, Eli David, and Frances Parker also ended up dying of typhoid, but they said she also mostly died of a broken heart when her husband and her son Eli David died. They said she did have typhoid, but she mostly died of a broken heart of her husband's death and her son's death. But typhoid fever took a lot of people's lives, and I'm not sure of the exact year that that went through Wadeville, but it would have been the mid to late 1890s.

[0:41:33.5]

CE: Do you know how people got cared for when they had typhoid?

[0:41:38.6]

MH: I did hear that it would be neighbors. There were no nurses or doctors. There was no known cure. There would be friends and family, neighbors who would come in and sit with the sick and dying, [and use] cold compresses. They did cold compresses on the head, warm compresses on the feet, were the big thing, I read. Warm compresses to the feet somehow are supposed to help, but they still didn't know a lot about germs, and people would sit with them and try to get their fevers down, and the whole point was to get the fever down and hope and pray. Probably there was a lot of prayer, and back then, people did not use funeral homes much.

The bodies were laid out in the home, in the parlor, for guests to receive, family, guests, and neighbors to view the body, but the bodies were always in the home. Even I have pictures of my grandfather's body in the parlor, in the parlor at the farmhouse. They're in that parlor. And my grandmother, I don't have pictures of that, but I have the stories that her body was laid out in the parlor also. It didn't take long for the body to decompose, so they tried to have fast burials, so they're buried at a cemetery at Wadeville, Wadeville Baptist Church there in Wadeville.

But then this might be a little gruesome, but anyway, when my grandmother died, her body was laid out in the parlor, and my grandparents' daughter, Frances, my father's sister, was attending college at the time at Meredith [College] and getting her education degree to teach at Meredith, because they're all big fans of becoming teachers. So she was at Meredith, and back then, that was quite a journey from Raleigh to get back to Montgomery County, so it took her longer than it was hoped for. It took maybe two days for her to get back from Raleigh. I'm not sure how she would have traveled, but by the time she got home, her mother's body had started to turn colors and she was—it was very traumatic because no one had warned her about that, and that was the first big death she had probably experienced as a young woman, was to see her mother dead. And the body had already started to turn, so she got there in time for—the funeral was going to be soon, that next day or a few hours later after she arrived, because they didn't properly warn her about that.

The two girls that she had tutored when she was a young woman and had come all the way from Richmond to Montgomery County to tutor, they were present, at the viewing and at the funeral. They loved her still, and everyone was very fond of

Grandmother Lena. She was very kind and very quiet and self-effacing and was happy to be the wife of the farmer, Jim.

In his obituary—I don't have a copy of her obituary. I have a copy of his obituary, which said—the title was “Gentleman Farmer Dies,” and that was his legacy, was he was a gentleman farmer and everyone loved him. Everyone that he was—made a friend of everyone that he met. His ritual every day after—even when Grandmother Lena was living, his ritual every day was he had his overalls on all the time, but he would walk the mile into Wadeville to the post office and check the mail. They had a little post office. Even as a child, I remember the post office, the little boxes. And so he would walk every day into Wadeville that one mile to get the mail.

So they had a happy life, and sometimes I suspect it was happier than the life we have in modern life today because—everyone knew their ritual for the day. There was nothing much that was unexpected, except illness would be the only unexpected thing, would be illness or storms, nature or illness. But otherwise, their lives were very predictable and everyone knew what they were doing that day when they got up, and they were not burdened by technology.

To go back in time again, when Grandmother Lena died, my Grandfather Jim was very lonely, and he waited a year or so, but he began dating my Grandmother Lena's best friend, who was also related by marriage. She was Phoebe Watkins, whose brother—Phoebe's brother had married Grandmother Lena's sister Mary, who's the one who sewed the wedding dress. So somehow, everybody starts coming over from Richmond County. I don't know the odyssey, how it all happened. I don't know if they followed

Lena, but anyway, Mary Hadley, Lena's sister, ended up marrying a Mr. Watkins, and they settled in Wadeville too.

And Mr. Watkins had an old maid, they called her at that time, a sister named Phoebe, and she was the helpmate to everyone. If someone got sick, call Phoebe, Phoebe would come sit with the sick folks. That was pretty much how healthcare was, just family, friends. You knew who to call to sit by the bedside with the sick person. But Phoebe was the big helpmate to everybody and was probably present when Lena died, probably at her bedside, even.

But after about a year of being lonely, Grandpa Jim began seeing Phoebe because she was like family, was Lena's best friend, married into the family, Watkins married Hadleys. So at this point, the youngest child was the only one at home, was my Uncle Bill. All the others were out and graduated and in jobs or marriages. And so Bill was still called William, and he was about fifteen or sixteen and driving, so Grandpa Jim would ask him to drive them on a date, so that's what he did. He'd take them out courting and sparking they called it, courting and sparking, and Uncle Bill always told me the story of taking them for a ride. They would be in the backseat, and he'd tell me, he'd say, "I'd hear a loud smack like they had kissed," and he'd say he didn't mind because Phoebe was like family.

But they ended up calling her Aunt Ruby, which is such a southern thing that somebody has one name, but they're ended up calling something totally different, and you don't know where it came from. But her real name was Phoebe. Maybe it was Phoebe Ruby or Ruby Phoebe, but she was called Aunt Ruby.

And so when I was a little two-year-old, I remember going to meet her, because she was still living at the farm as a widow after Grandpa Jim died. My mother and father and I lived in this little house in Troy. And so I was taken down there to visit, and it's a very strong memory that I have, because she had two sisters who also had not married and lived with her, their names were Aunt Sudie and Aunt Lottie. Aunt Sudie and Aunt Lottie, they were also Watkins who had never married, and no one thought Phoebe would marry, but Grandpa Jim had found out he loved her for all the memories that they shared together.

But back then, many of the Watkins women did not marry, and it was perfectly fine with everybody. They were called on to bring food to homecomings or to sit with the sick, to sit with the sick and elderly, so they performed an important function in the society back then to be helpmates to people but not necessarily to marry. But the family joke or folklore was that Aunt Lottie and Aunt Sudie came to visit Aunt Ruby one day, and they didn't leave. That was the story. It was told a lot, "Well, they came to visit, but they didn't leave."

And so when I was a two-year-old, I remember going into the dining room, and Aunt Ruby was sitting in her rocking chair, and the way it was always set up was that Aunt Sudie would be on one side of Aunt Ruby and Aunt Lottie was on the other, like Aunt Ruby was the queen of the household and they were the—I've forgotten what you call it. Like in a court, a royal court, they were the helpers to the queen. I can't remember the phrase for that, but they were the helpers to the queen, and they probably helped her a lot with the cooking and the housekeeping. And they had their own rooms upstairs.

So go ahead.

[0:52:45.4]

CE: What happened to the farm, the land?

[0:52:47.8]

MH: Yeah, that's a sad story. But I left out a part of this story, since it isn't a very linear story, but in 1902, picture John Wesley Harris' and Frances Parker's children, they've all moved to Stanly County, except for Grandpa Jim's still the farmer who stayed behind. He decided he would build a house on the land, so that was nice, and it had more stylish architecture and was nice. So in 1902, 1900—I'm getting my dates mixed up. So my father was born in 1902, so it wouldn't have been 1902. Okay, it was 1912. That's when it was. He built this nicer farmhouse, and he handpicked each tree, had each tree handpicked that he was going to build the house with.

So the house is still standing. It was built out of all heart of pine. He handpicked each pine tree that he wanted for the house. So the house was hand built all out of heart of pine, and it's still standing, and it's abandoned. It's for sale. And ten acres of it's still for sale, but it got sold off in parcels and everything. So right now the house doesn't look like its former glory, but it was a beautiful Greek Revival farmhouse with the columns, and it had a lot of bedrooms upstairs, had two downstairs, and no indoor plumbing, of course. There was an outhouse.

But my father remembers—my father was born in 1902, so he was born at the old house. All the other children were born at the original old farmhouse in the pasture, but my father remembers carrying, being able to carry things like furniture and pots and pans from the original house in the pasture to the new house, which was yards apart from the original house. The original house is no longer there. But he remembers carrying things

as a little boy, helping carrying things over to the new house. So he would have probably been about ten. But the house was built in 1912.

[0:55:31.2]

CE: And what types of things did they have on the farm, what crops or animals?

[0:55:37.0]

MH: They had milo, which I don't know if people grow that anymore, but they had milo and rye and wheat and also pigs and cows, never sheep, though. There were never sheep. But they had milo, milo and corn. I've actually written a poem about my grandfather's crops that I can't recite from memory, but I wrote it years ago when my father's brother William, did an oral history memory of the crops, of what grew where, how my grandfather had decided which field was for which crop, and I remember that made an impression on me. I was in my twenties, so I wrote it down because I was afraid it would never be repeated because nobody else would remember where the crops were. And he told me, where the milo was and where the corn was.

And he told me there was a blacksmith shop up the road where my grandfather would go with his hired help who were tenant farmers or descendants of slaves that would help him sharpen the tools and sharpen the plows, keep the plowshares sharpened, and he told me where the blacksmith shop had been, which is where the mailbox was because he didn't want it too close to the house. But I remember being fascinated with the vision of my grandfather sharpening the blades, the plows, so they were sharp for plowing.

And the other story that was told to me was pig-killing, hog-killing time was a very important time of the calendar year, was the hog-killing time. And there was a man

up the road who was a tenant farmer. His father was a slave, and he'd learned a certain skill from his father who was a slave, and this man was named—we called him Uncle Sherman. But Uncle Sherman had learned this skill from his slave ancestors of how to test the temperature of the water for the hog to be put into this boiling-type water to get the hair off the hide of the hog. And, of course, the hog would end up being the hams hung in the smokehouse, and it was important food that everyone depended on, was the slabs of the ham meat and everything. But it was a skill that Uncle Sherman learned from his slave ancestors.

And he was a very large, heavyset man, and his job on the farm was to test the temperature of the water that the hogs were going to be put into, and he did it by putting his arm in the water. He'd put his whole arm in the water, and he was somehow immune to the pain. It was some skill that was—it was considered a very valuable, important skill, and he was high on the level of—he was revered because he had this skill. He did it and didn't flinch. He'd put his whole arm into the boiling water and he knew when it was the right temperature for the hog. So it was amazing to me, and I'd say to my father, who would tell this story, or maybe even my mother, at this time, knew all these folklore stories, "It didn't hurt him?"

And my father said, "No. He thought it was a great honor to test the water, and he didn't mind. It was an honor to be the one chosen to test the temperature."

Of course, these days, we would think that was a horrible thing, but in that culture of that time, he was very pleased to do this. So, go figure that, but he was very honored to do that every spring, I guess it was.

But when I was growing up, my father also raised pigs because he got that love of pigs, from his father, his father's father, and I was allowed to have one pet pig, but—and I was allowed to have one pet calf. But one day I got off the school bus and my pet calf, Susie, was dying, so Susie died in my arms. She had some kind of terrible virus that goes through cows a lot. But Susie died in my arms, and after that, I never wanted another pet cow, but we had lots of cats and dogs.

It was not uncommon for me to wake up and there'd be a new litter of kittens on my bed at the foot of the bed when I woke up. That was not uncommon. The mother cat would always have them at the foot of my bed, and my grandmother and I would wake up and say, "Well, Goldie had another litter last night," and we wouldn't disturb her at all.

And we always had a litter of puppies born in the barn, and one day my father was crying and came to tell me that one of the puppies that I'd named Prince, my father said he would live, but one of the barn rats had chewed his leg off during the night, and he was my three-legged dog named Prince. But that was very common also. The barn rats would often chew off the legs of puppies.

I grew up aware of death, in a way. But then over time, it became the custom for people to become embalmed, but still with my grandparents, they were not embalmed, and they still had pine caskets, and burials were swift.

[1:02:31.3]

CE: What was it like being a caretaker for your grandmother when you were a child?

[1:02:38.5]

MH: I considered it an honor and not a burden because I loved her. She was the only grandparent that I knew. And she was very reserved and very serious, solemn, but I loved taking care of her. But as I inched my way towards age thirteen, it became more difficult and she became a more difficult patient. I was a very thin child, and she was a very heavy grandmother, and so when she would start falling, I became frightened, because she would fall a lot, and she would say to me, "Martha-Mac, I'm going down," and I couldn't hold her. I couldn't stop her from falling, and that used to distress me that I couldn't stop her from falling.

So when I was about twelve and a half, thirteen, was when she went to the nursing home because I couldn't lift her anymore, because my job in the middle of the night was to help her with the bedside commode and to dress her and undress her at night. And I always considered it an honor, but when my parents would leave me alone with her, I became afraid, because I'd be helping her to the bathroom and she'd say, "I'm going down," and she would cry because she couldn't help it. So that became always something I was very worried about, being alone with her.

But there was no such thing as home healthcare aides or—no one used the state to care—it was always family and friends, and it was considered a great concern to maybe end up in a nursing home. It was considered a place where an older person would beg their children to, "Not let me end up in the nursing home. Don't put me in the old folks' home," because everybody wanted their family to take care of them.

And even my mother begged to not go to a nursing home, "Please don't ever let me end up in a nursing home." It wasn't considered an option. You were supposed to take care of your parents or grandparents until they died. You weren't supposed to put them in

a home. That was for people whose family did not care about them or for people who had no family, but if you had family who loved you, they were supposed to take care of you. It was an obligation. But it was frightening for me as a child towards the end.

But I heard through the family folklore that my grandmother had a great sense of humor when she was younger. With her sister Carry, they would share a lot of reminiscences and family jokes, and laugh and carry on, but that was not the side of my grandmother I knew. She was very solemn and talked about Mary Todd Lincoln, what she wore and how she acted.

But my grandmother was very—the Civil War was still a very—I don't know how to describe it, but it was still very close to her because her favorite uncle had died at Cold Harbor, who was named Robert McEachern, and he was her favorite uncle, and he died at Cold Harbor. So for all of my childhood, all of my life that I knew Grandmother Flora, she called it the War of Northern Aggression. She refused to call it anything else. And all of the people her age did the same. They called it the War of Northern Aggression.

And the only way she referred to Mary Todd Lincoln was Mary Todd. She would not ever refer to her as Mary Todd Lincoln because she didn't like Abraham Lincoln. So she was "Mary Todd" this and "Mary Todd" that, but not "Mary Todd Lincoln," and Abraham Lincoln did not exist in her memory. She held a grudge, like most people of her generation in the South. It's the way that it was. And so my mother still had that grudge, too, so I've had to overcome all of that.

But when I was a child growing up, you'd walk into my grandmother's home in Red Springs, first thing you saw when you walked in her living room was a portrait of

Colonel Robert McEachern, who died at Cold Harbor. It was a homage to him and it was like a shrine, almost, to Robert, who died at Cold Harbor.

But the other brother, Hector—

[recorder turned off because of a knock at the front door]

[1:07:57.3]

MH: So my grandmother's brother, Robert McEachern, was a man that she worshipped, and she was—for all the time that I knew her, she was always very angry at Yankees. It was very real. It was as if the Civil War had never ended for her, and I have to honestly probably say it was like that for a lot of women of her generation who grew up as children listening to stories at their grandmother's knee, because she'd heard stories about how the Yankees had caused so much destruction in her area of Red Springs, and how General Sherman had come through Lumber Bridge, which was a little village close to Red Springs in Lumberton called Lumber Bridge, and Sherman and his men had burned down their church. And so after the war, they petitioned the federal government to rebuild the church, and the federal government did provide funds to rebuild it.

Things like that were very vivid memories for her, and she'd grown up at her grandmother's knee, the grandmother who visited Mary Todd, and heard horror stories, and for her, it was just [that] they had invaded the South, and it wasn't about—that's all it was about for them, was some sort of territorial war.

So Robert's portrait was very prominent as you walked in to the living room, and it was a picture of him with his company. I've forgotten which company that it was, but his company, and he looked like my mother to me as a child. I thought, "Gosh, he looks like the male version of my mother." But he was very distinguished-looking and had a

broad forehead and a moustache. But he was wounded at Cold Harbor and died at a hospital in Petersburg, Virginia, and the folklore was that the family slave was dispatched to Petersburg to bring his body back home for burial, or that his manservant, slave, from the old days, was dispatched to bring him back home for burial. And then his brother Hector was wounded, but came back, and, of course, my Grandfather John came back in one piece, but Hector was severely wounded, but he ended up being the Hoke County sheriff for years and years and years.

And my grandfather was a state representative or senator after the war, and he was granted amnesty. I have documents where my grandfather was asking for amnesty for so-and-so and so-and-so, and because they have family, they need amnesty, but my grandfather had to be granted amnesty, and all of them were consider traitors by the North and had to be granted amnesty. But my grandfather did serve in state government after the war. Or I'm sorry to say that I may be confused. It could have been before the war. I don't know, but he was in state government as a representative or senator.

But he had to get amnesty. He had to apply for the right to keep his land. Land was extremely important, and so he was able to leave his daughters, each one, a parcel of land. And somehow he was allowed—he bought the land when he came back after serving, so somehow he had to have been granted amnesty. But his brother Hector was the sheriff in the neighboring county. Then Robert died at Cold Harbor. But the family folklore is very vivid. It's almost like he became a saint, he was so looked up to.

So when my grandmother had a granddaughter from one of her sons' daughters—one of her granddaughters married someone from up north—it was pretty awful in terms of people accepting him. And we're talking the 1950s, 1960s, and my mother's brother

never accepted him because he said he was a Yankee. So the grudge was held for a long time [laughs], and it was something that I was always very curious about, but my father seemed to have escaped. In Montgomery County, there didn't seem to be that a grudge about the Civil War, and it wasn't talked about very much, but in Robeson County and Hoke, where my mother's—what was from and her Scottish ancestors lived, it's still talked about, honestly. It's still called the War of Northern Aggression in Robeson County, and we're talking 2018. So if anybody's left living there who's in their 100, 101, they get it. They still talk about that. So if you went to a nursing home in Red Springs and found the oldest citizen, somebody would still call it that.

But my father's—the culture in Montgomery County was real different. It was just get on with life, and nobody talked much about the Civil War. But my father's grandfather John Wesley Harris, who died of typhoid fever, he was the youngest in a family who—his father did die in the Civil War, so his mother had to raise a whole lot of children as a widow. But he was the baby, and his father, Eli, died in the Civil War. So somehow, they all survived, but by the grace of God, and everybody grew a lot of their own—they grew their own food, and there was no healthcare monthly payment, and there was no healthcare. [laughs] It was just family was healthcare.

And to backtrack, to go backwards a long, long, long way, my mother's Scottish family, they signed an oath to King George and did not fight for freedom in the Revolutionary War. They were loyalists. So to come to the new country, they had had to sign an oath of allegiance to King George, and the Scottish people always took their oaths very seriously, very seriously. So they were loyalists.

And so when my mother, in her life, married to the farmer David, she was a social climber and very social class-conscious. She wanted to become a member of the Daughters of American Revolution, which was the social club of the time in the [19]60s and [19]70s and [19]80s, and still it's a social club that people like to join, like even in Charlotte or something. But she did not qualify, because she wanted to be a member of the DAR to have prestige in the eyes of her other friends in Troy, Montgomery County, but she didn't qualify because her Scottish ancestors were loyalists, so she had to go into the DAR based on one of my father's Revolutionary War veteran ancestors named Jesse Baldwin. Somehow that's allowed. You can go in on one of your husband's ancestors. So that's how she got in, and I've still got that little certificate of how she's a member of the DAR.

But her ancestors didn't help her out with social prestige because they were loyalist and they were—a lot of loyalists went to Nova Scotia in Canada, and some of hers almost [move there], but they decided to tough it out in Red Springs. But since they had come to Red Springs in 1753, they had to sign that oath of allegiance. And they got tired of the rain in Scotland and the fact that they could no longer honor their clans either. They couldn't wear their kilts. But they were very loyal.

But then my mother was so proud to go to Flora MacDonald College, and Flora MacDonald was a big loyalist, too, I guess she was. You see a lot of markers, state markers with her name on them. Her farm was confiscated. I'm not sure. But back then, people had to survive the best way they could. But the fact that my mother's family were all loyalist was my mother's great shame. She wished that some of them had fought for the Revolution [laughs], but it came back to her when she was trying to get into the DAR.

But I've still got to go find the grave of Jesse Baldwin. I know where it is, I've got to go hunt for it. It's in a little place called Capelsie near Ellerbe, and apparently he's buried at the Baldwin home place. I've got to find where the Baldwin home place is, but he's buried there in that family cemetery. Somewhere I have a picture of him. He was a valiant soldier in the Revolutionary War, but all the Baldwins were.

Capelsie is a place you would miss if you blinked your eye, because if you're in Ellerbe and you're trying to take a shortcut through the woods to Hamlet, that's when you'll find Capelsie. If you take the shortcut to Hamlet from Ellerbe, you run into a little place called Ledbetter where there's a waterfall where they harnessed the water for a mill. The mill's gone, but there'll be a little sign for Capelsie near Ledbetter. So that's my next adventure, because I've got to find Jesse Baldwin's grave. I've always been interested in family history, but when I had children, I had to—I no longer had the time for it.

[1:20:13.0]

CE: Can you tell me a little bit more about your childhood in Troy, maybe about what school was like there growing up?

[1:20:23.4]

MH: Well, as a child growing up in Troy, we had that little house in Troy, and then Aunt Ruby died and Aunt Lottie and Aunt Sudie died and the house was available, so my mother had the better job at that time, and she bought out my father's two brothers, the interest of my father's two brothers and his sister. My mother and father had the land and the farmhouse built in 1912, so when I was two, we moved from Troy to the middle of nowhere in Wadeville, way out in the middle of nowhere where there were the tenant

houses down the road with all the people who were descended from slaves and owned a few—very few neighbors.

And so my childhood was changed radically when I was two when we—no longer could I run out the backdoor to the neighbor and see that little boy, but we were in the middle of nowhere on the farm with no neighbors, and I knew nobody, so I had to use my imagination a lot, and I had imaginary friends. I had to have imaginary friends.

I remember that Aunt Ruby had installed a wall telephone, which was not a novelty. I remember that phone. It was made out of mahogany or something, and it was very high up, and I could hardly reach it. If I wanted to answer the phone, I'd have to get on a stool or a chair. So it was really high up, and it was the original old antique telephone with the little string attached to the end.

And my father answered the phone in a very strange way. He would say, "All right?" not, "Hello?" "All right?" that was it. That was his way to answer the phone for the rest of his life. It's like, "All right. What are you trying to say or why are you calling me?" But it was many, many years, into the [19]60s, before we got a desk phone with dials, that I remember, that I could use, and it was always a party line. You were always on a line with other people.

It was a lonely childhood, and I had my pet calf and my pet pig, and go with my father to feed the pigs. My mother was always at work being a home demonstration agent demonstrating some new valuable home skill of preserving some vegetable or fruit or—I don't remember—cleaning was not among the skills. I don't remember my mother ever washing a dish or making a bed or sweeping because she had African American help from the tenant farms up the road, and they received very little pay, but it was their only

choice of a job, and they kept the house running. They were the ones who really kept the house running, and she had the job that paid the taxes, is what she used to say. She had the job that paid the taxes and kept a roof over our head.

My father had the part-time job as a judge. On Tuesday, he was a judge at the courthouse in Troy, and the rest of the week he was a pig farmer and lost money on the pigs all the time. But he was a judge on Tuesday, but he refused to wear a robe, so he seemed to—and I spent a lot of time visiting him at the courthouse in Troy. My babysitter was the jury box. I would sit in the jury box and listen to him all day long be the judge, and then my mother was at work a block or two over in the Home Extension office building being a home demonstration agent.

And there was a family across the street from the Home Extension office who were my official babysitters. It was two elderly women, and her husband was no longer in the picture, but the other sister had her husband, and they were my babysitters. And if my mother and father were both really busy and couldn't be bothered with a younger child, I would go to Esther and Bertie's house. And it's a funeral home now on the corner across the street from the home extension office. But it was Esther and Dan Stewart and Bertie Brown, and they were my babysitters, and they were elderly, and they taught me to knit. Miss Poole also. My childhood was about knitting, and Miss Poole taught me to knit. Her house was down the street, and she taught me to knit also, Miss Poole did, and Bertie Brown taught me to—I spent a lot of time knitting with Bertie. But Bertie didn't like her husband anymore very much, so they divorced, but they were still best friends and he'd still come by for supper sometimes. They didn't like living together, but they were still friends. So I remember him coming by.

But Dan and Esther loved me because their daughter had died and I looked like their daughter, so they took a special interest in me because they said I looked like their daughter who had died. So I was special to them, and I liked being special to them, because my mother was gone so often, I wasn't sure I was special to her, because her job was extremely important. She was a very early career woman. Her career was really more important to her than anything else. And she did love me, but I didn't feel like I was valued first. It was quite an interesting childhood because my father doted on me and my mother did not dote on me, so it was a strange back-and-forth thing.

And I thought the house had ghosts. I was sure the upstairs had ghosts, and maybe it did. I would not go upstairs by myself, so if I went upstairs, my father would have to go with me because I felt like there were ghosts upstairs. And so that was my childhood, was a fear of ghosts.

And I was sick all the time also. So that was odd. I was sick all the time, and the only time I was really, really happy is if I was in the hospital in Troy, because we had a new hospital. They'd built the Troy Hospital, and it was fairly small. It's bigger now, but it was fairly small, and it was considered state-of-the-art. They were real proud of it all. The Troy Hospital was a very big deal. If you were on the Board of Trustees, it was a very big deal.

Starting at age five, I had to be in the hospital a lot because I ate too much peanut butter and it gave me something they called the "mad itch." Nobody had ever been—but I was in the hospital for a week with mad itch when I was five because—they said the only thing they could figure out was I was allergic to peanut butter and I would eat a lot of peanut butter crackers, stacks to the ceiling, like high stacks of peanut butter crackers.

That was my diet, that and hamburger and homemade French fries, because I wouldn't eat vegetables. So I ate a lot of peanut butter crackers, and they said that was what caused the mad itch.

So starting at age five, I was in the hospital at least once a year, and I loved it because—I didn't realize it was healthcare. I loved it because everybody treated me very special. I had really starched clean white sheets, and everybody was always asking me, "How are you doing?" Everybody seemed to really care, so I loved the hospital, and I'm probably the only person in the world that can say that. But I loved my Troy Hospital. I felt like I was their favorite patient. I was always having the flu, I was always nearly dying, I was always, at death's door, so that's the childhood I had. I was considered to be—I was a weakling. They would call you—they'd say I was puny. So it was an odd childhood.

But I loved the nurses. They all knew me by name, and I felt like they were going to all make me better. [laughs] And this is strange when I hear myself telling about it, but that was—I was in the hospital at least once a year. One of the trustees, Mr. Wynn, he knew me by name., I remember he'd always come by my door to see how I was doing. Once I was in the room with a young baby, even. They let me in the room with a baby, and I loved that.

I remember one year that I was in the hospital I met the nicest elderly lady next door named Mrs. Poole, who had a beautiful Victorian house on Main Street, Troy, with gingerbread trim, and she and her sister lived alone there. They were famous knitters. They could knit anything by a pattern, if they had a pattern. They were very good at following a pattern. She was sick in the hospital and ended up in a room beside of me one

year, and she made friends with me and I made friends with her, and she taught me to knit. Mrs. Poole is the one who taught me to knit.

Back then, you'd be in the hospital for weeks. They didn't kick you out like they do now. I don't know how it was paid for, but I would be in there for minimum of a week, sometimes for weeks. But this time when I was in there with Miss Poole, it was because I had another episode of the mad itch, because they couldn't cure it. I mean, it was a terrible rash all over my body, and I couldn't stop scratching. But it was when I had the mad itch, because they let me be in there with a baby, so I must have been nothing contagious. But Miss Poole was next door, and she'd come visit me and I'd go visit her. It was like a great retirement home or something, and she took great pleasure in teaching me to knit. So that was my career as a knitter, and I hadn't thought about that in a long time.

Then when my mother and father first married, my father had a math degree and a law degree, but he had a mill called Troy Milling Company. He had a mill where people would bring their corn and their wheat to turn into cornmeal and flour. And I still have some of his sacks. But he had to declare bankruptcy with that mill because he wasn't making money with it. He had to declare bankruptcy, and he declared bankruptcy on it right before I was born, or right before my mother found out she was pregnant, because they'd given up on having children. And so right before my mother found out she was pregnant, he had to declare bankruptcy with the mill, and he was most upset, because my mother was the only one working. I'm not sure why he didn't try to teach math or practice law. Back then it cost a lot of money to set up a law practice. You've got to rent the building. It was costly to set up a law practice.

After that, I would hear my mother say—she would tell this story a lot. There would be a couple around the communities—there are so many small communities in Montgomery County. One woman from Ophir or Okeewemee would see her at her home demonstration meeting, and they'd say, "Can you give my husband and me some tips on how to get pregnant? We've tried and tried, and we're not able to get pregnant." And they would be an older couple, and, "We're just about to despair. We can't get pregnant. Do you have any tips? How did you and your husband get pregnant at your age, at being so old?" because my dad was forty—my mom was forty-two—let's see. My dad would have been four years older than my mother, so he'd have been forty-six.

My mother would say to them with an absolute straight face, "How to get pregnant," she said, "all you have to do is go broke. All you have to do is go broke, and you will get pregnant," because they'd gone broke with my father declaring bankruptcy. "Just go broke, and that's all you have to do." Because the ladies would tell my mother, "I don't have children," at the church gatherings, at homecomings, reunions. The woman told my mother, "I feel like—." My mother told a lot of stories all the time. They would be repetitive, so I couldn't help but absorb it. But she would say the women would say to her, "I wish I had a child, and I don't know how to have one." And she said, "Reunions feel like a three-legged man at an ass-kicking." That's what they would say to her, "I feel like a three-legged man at an ass-kicking. Can you please help me?"

And she'd say, "Just go broke."

And so apparently when—it was good news and bad news, it was, the bankruptcy, but it was—she found out she was pregnant. At some point along the way, [my father] ran for judge and got it on the Democratic ticket. It was by party back then, so he got it

on the Democratic ticket. And when I was in high school, he lost to a Republican, which was, back then, as bad as losing to a Yankee, probably, in that folklore, in that social context. Montgomery County was predominantly Democrat.

It was so hard to find records going back much past John Wesley Harris because the courthouse in Montgomery County had burned down. And it used to be in Lawrenceville, which was off of [Highway] 24-27 Bypass. As you come towards Troy on 24-27 Bypass, there was a sign that says “Lawrenceville.” It looks like a dirt road, but there was a community called Lawrenceville, and that’s where the original Montgomery County Courthouse was. That’s where all the records were, were in Lawrenceville, and it burned down. And at some point—because Montgomery and Stanly were one county, and there was a ferry, and there was no bridge, and it was one county, and all the records lost. Stanly County records, Montgomery County records were lost in that fire, in the Lawrenceville Courthouse fire, the 1850s and everything.

So the way I found out about John Wesley Harris was census records in Raleigh. I had to go to Raleigh to the State Department of Archives to look at census records, and that’s where I found the census records where Patience Rush was the head of household, because Eli was in the Civil War or he’d already died, and John Wesley was listed as the baby, but Patience Rush was listed as head of household. But I know where she’s buried. I found out where she’s buried. It’s wonderful to find out where your ancestors are buried. She’s buried in Pekin, which used to be called Harrisville. Used to be called Harrisville, but now it’s called Pekin. Patience Rush is buried way out in the woods next to Sardis United Methodist Church, and there’s not many people that know that, but a Harris cousin in Candor told me and took me there to see it, this all overgrown.

Back then, the wives, on the tombstones it says “Consort of,” not “Wife of,” “Consort of.” “Patience Rush, Consort of Eli Harris,” or something like that. Or they weren’t considered wives; they were called consorts. There’s a lot of old cemeteries like that in Montgomery County and Robeson County. They’re way out in the middle of nowhere.

But anyway, the childhood was an unusual childhood, and there’s many days I wish I’d stayed on the farm and not gone away to school, but it was such a strong legacy of going away to college that it would have been hard to disobey that legacy, except Grandpa Jim, James Atlas Harris, he’s the one that embraced the legacy of being a farmer, but everybody else wanted to get away. And Grandpa Jim and Lena had a family rule, a family rule that—they had the four children—that when one child finished college, it would be his obligation to help the next one because there’s no such thing as student loans or College Foundation or anything like that.

So when my daddy finished at Wake Forest—and he was at Wake Forest when it was in the town of Wake Forest—when he finished at Wake Forest, he already knew the script. His job was to help pay the tuition for Alfred, the next one. Alfred might have gone to [North Carolina] State. I’m not sure where Alfred went, but my father’s job was to help pay that tuition, and his father would help if he could, but my daddy’s job was to work and help pay Alfred’s tuition. Then when Alfred finished, it was his job to work and help pay for Frances’ tuition at Meredith [College]. When Frances finished, it was all of their jobs to help pay for William to go to State, where he got an accounting degree and worked for Champion Paper and Fibre Company as the head accountant and became very wealthy. He became the wealthiest of all. But they all had to help. That was the job, their

job description as children. They were told early on they had to help pay for the tuition and books and everything.

And I remember my Grandmother Lena sold cows and pigs—a cow and a pig—to buy a dress and evening gloves for my Aunt Frances to attend a dance at Meredith. They said she sold a pig and a cow for the evening gloves that had to go over the elbow, and a dress, because that was the only way she could afford to pay for her to have something special to wear to a dance.

[1:40:58.2]

CE: How did you decide where to go to college?

[1:41:03.2]

MH: It was an accident, because nobody in my family had been to UNC-Chapel Hill. My father wanted me to go to Meredith because that's where his sister had gone, and he pushed my becoming a teacher because his sister was a teacher, and even then in [19]68 when I went to college, even then it was unusual to not be a teacher. These days, my father, who's a lawyer, would have encouraged the daughter to become a lawyer or to aim high and become a judge, but my father never mentioned becoming a lawyer, not one time, not even a legal researcher. He never mentioned it once. And my mother had been an English teacher at one point in her career before becoming a home demonstration agent, so they both encouraged my becoming an English teacher. Looking back on it all, I was fairly programmed to become an English teacher, and history's what I was really interested in. So you would say today that I was programmed to become that because my father would say, "You need to become an English teacher so that if you ever become a

widow, you'll be able to take care of yourself." And sure enough, Aunt Frances had become a widow early in her life, and so that was her way of paying the bills.

My father transferred that to me and said, "You need to be sure and get your teaching degree so in case you're ever a widow—." So it was always, "In case you're ever a widow—," was the thinking. So it was still very old-timey-type thinking. "In case you're ever a widow" would not be said today, I don't think, but back then it was very—first in their brains. It was assumed the man would die first, and then what is the poor woman going to do? So in case you're ever a widow, you need to get a teaching degree.

[My father] wanted me to go to Meredith, so I disobeyed my father on that. I did apply to Meredith, and I got in, and then I applied—he wanted me to go to maybe UNCG, back then they called it. Before that, it was called Women's College or Woman's College. And he wanted me to go to somewhere safe and small and church-backed. He did not want me to go to a large university. He was frightened for me to go there, but he wanted it to be church-backed for sure.

Anyway, somehow I found out that back in 1968 they only accepted a limited number of females in the freshman class, and it was, like, 150. They only accepted 150. It was under 200. They only accepted—it can be looked up on the Internet, but it was under 200 that they accepted, female applicants. In 1968, it was mostly a male university. And back in the early sixties, you only could transfer as a female. No females were accepted as freshman. I found out there was a limited number of females accepted. Something about that appealed to the competitive streak in me. I thought, well, I want to see if I can get in, so when I got in, I felt like I had to go. I had to be like a pioneer? [laughs] So I

wanted to be a pioneer, so I went, because supposedly they only accepted the cream of the crop and all that, but still, more men you'd see on campus than women.

There were very, very few African American people accepted in the freshman class, and not any women. There might have been one African American, maybe, and there were only two African American men I can remember seeing on campus that were in the freshman class. And I remember one of them was not treated that warmly, either, but his brother was mayor of Atlanta at that time, so they said he got in because his brother was mayor of Atlanta, which was not true at all. But he was very smart, but it was very hard for him. Now I look back on that sometime and feel sorry for him because he was not accepted, I don't think, with welcoming arms. He was treated as an oddity, and even the women were treated somewhat like that.

But I went because I felt like after being accepted, I owed it to myself to go, but I felt lost a little bit there. I remember feeling lost and thinking, well, maybe I should have gone to a small college that was church-backed. But it was hard to find a place, a niche, there sometimes, but then I finally found it. My sophomore year I found my niche. But I had a good roommate, and I had a roommate from Troy. So she was valedictorian of the class in West Montgomery in high school. She was valedictorian and I was number three, but I got in, anyway. But she ended up not finishing because she fell in love and got married, but she was often not even there. But I had roommates that were really, really wonderful roommates on the other side, and we'd do things together.

So it was more of a—the roommates made it okay the freshman year, and then the hallmates, because we didn't have suites. I was in Connor, but we had hallmates, and back then they had someone who was a junior who would, like, try to be mentoring and

take care of you and be mentoring. And there were some transfer female students across the hall, so they were very special because they were juniors and they'd transferred in as juniors, so that was very special, and they thought it was wonderful to be there.

So anyway, that's how I chose UNC, and then I was going to major in history, which is what I was really interested in, but then my father died when I was a freshman at UNC, and so I felt like—kept hearing his voice, “You need to be a teacher in case you're ever a widow.” So I did that, I got the teaching certificate.

[1:48:00.8]

CE: And then what did you do after you graduated?

[1:48:05.9]

MH: The only job I could find at the time was I was a secretary in the political science department typing curriculum vitae and helping graduate students. I was the secretary in political science department. Then I fell in love and got married and moved to Arkansas and got my first teaching job at Arkansas in Batesville, Arkansas, and taught seventh- and eighth-grade English across the river in Newport, Arkansas. The superintendent told me I had to move, that I could not live in Batesville and teach, that I had to be a citizen of Newport. It was across the river. You had to go across the bridge, and I had to live in Newport if I wanted to keep the job, so had to leave Batesville and go live in Newport where the rice fields were and leave picturesque Batesville behind. But I taught seventh and eight grade there.

And then we moved back to North Carolina and I taught at Montgomery Community College in the prison there, taught reading there. Then my husband got accepted at [North Carolina} State University to finish his degree, and then I taught at

Northern Wake Optional High School for high school dropouts. So, a checkered career. It had no clear path. It was very checkered career.

And then I taught Northern Wake Optional High School, and then I taught ninth grade, tenth grade, eleventh grade, twelfth grade. And then I worked at the Department of Cultural Resources for the Library for the Blind and the Handicapped. And then my husband and I started a family and had James and David. Then that was for a long while, and then we moved from the Raleigh area to Stanly County, and I worked raising sons. That was my job. And then at some point along the line, I started back at Stanly Community College. And then I had a daughter, remarried and had a daughter, Hannah, and then work at Stanly Community still. [laughs]

[1:50:45.5]

CE: Well, it sounds like this might be a nice place to pause.

[1:50:57.3]

MH: Okay.

[1:50:59.2]

CE: Is there anything else that you'd like to share or something that you think I've missed asking that you wanted to talk about?

[1:51:06.7]

MH: I feel like I've jumped all over the place, about grandparents and great-grandparents. But it was growing up, was a great contrast between Robeson County and Montgomery County, lot of clannishness in Robeson County, lot of clannishness. In the Montgomery County, it was the opposite of that, where people were happy to have a little

piece of land and to survive, and Robeson County, people still talk about their ancestors a lot, and it's still very clannish.

[1:51:46.2]

CE: Why do you think that is?

[1:51:48.0]

MH: I haven't figured that out yet. It's all that they had. It's all that they had. They gave up their life in Scotland and came on a huge adventure over to get a better life. In Montgomery County, people came from all over, and it wasn't like, "Who are your people?" type of atmosphere.

In Robeson County, everyone still talks about, "What clan are you a member of?" They still talk about clans.

In Red Springs, they had the Highland Games for years and years, which reinforced that thinking, and then the Highland Games moved to the Laurinburg area, to the John Blue plantation, the John Blue cotton plantation. So Red Springs is still upset with Laurinburg because they took Flora MacDonald College and the Highland Games. [laughs] It's a cultural thing. You'll hear—nobody who lives there now is upset about that, but the old folks, the old people who remember Flora MacDonald, most of them are passing away, but they remember the Highland Games. But for some reason, it wasn't making enough money.

But the clannishness was reinforced there with the Highland Games and the Flora MacDonald College. It was their identity. It was their identity of, like, "What part of Scotland were your ancestors from? Where did you come from in Scotland?" At the Highland Games, there was a big map of Scotland that had the location of each clan, each

family name, where the MacKinnons were from, where the McEacherns were from, where the Monroes were from, where all the clans were from, and it gave you a sense of pride and identity. It reinforced self-esteem.

And in Montgomery County I had more of a feeling of people living in the present, and in Robeson County you step back into the past as soon as your feet hit the soil, that sandy, loamy soil with all the pine trees. It's like you go back—even now if I go to the Highland Games, it's a connection with—and people try to go through all the old cemeteries and find out where so-and-so's buried. It's still like when you go to Robeson County in the old—it's still like the Confederacy lives again. I don't know if there are other parts of North Carolina where that's true, and someone else might disagree with me, but definitely with my mother's family it was a real thing.

And my grandmother still was a very—tried to make me aware of all the sacrifices made and everything. She retaught it all over again every chance she got, so I grew up feeling like “What should I believe in?” But my father was Baptist, grew up Baptist, and church denominations were very big caste and social dividers still. My father was raised Baptist. His grandfather was Methodist, so in his family, there was always a great divide between the Methodist and the Baptist. One woman would take her daughters to the Methodist church and the father would take the other children to the Baptist church.

My mother's Scottish ancestors were always Presbyterian. In my mother's view, Presbyterians was the only true religion. I mean, that was the only real religion, was to be a Presbyterian. I grew up in the Troy Presbyterian Church because my father was a big believer in family peace and reconciliation, so he joined the Presbyterian Church. But

church was a big divider too. Being a Presbyterian was very important to my mother, and it was—like I said, in her view, the only real thing was—they were married in a Presbyterian church in Red Springs. She had a Presbyterian funeral, which, to her, would have been the only real funeral to have, would have been a Presbyterian funeral.

When my mother's mother, Flora, and uncle found out that my mother was marrying a Baptist, the family folklore was when they found out she was marrying David Harris, who was raised a Baptist, they would say, "Oh, Martha's marrying *that* Baptist." It was "*that* Baptist." But then my mother's mother said she would forgive him for being a Baptist because he was so sweet that she would overlook it this time because he was very special and sweet. And then my mother married him because he had a good heart, she said.

So those are the highlights. There's Flora and Neil, had Martha, and James Atlas and Lena had David. So that's the story.

[1:58:07.8]

CE: Well, thank you so much for sharing today.

[1:58:10.9]

MH: You're welcome.

[1:58:10.9]

CE: It's been an honor to get to talk with you.

[1:58:13.5]

MH: You're very welcome.

[End of interview]

Edited by Caroline Efird on July 18, 2018