

Methodist University Community Oral History Project
Methodist University
Fayetteville, NC

CYNTHIA LYNNE HARRIS

Interview Conducted by
JASMINE N. MCGATHY
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Fayetteville, NC

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Cynthia (Cindy) Lynne Harris

Interview conducted by
Jasmine N. McGathy

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Interview of

CYNTHIA LYNNE HARRIS

Interviewed by

JASMINE N. MCGATHY

0:01

MCGATHY: My name is Jasmine McGathy, today is Saturday, November 28, 2015, and the time here is 2:30 We are in Fayetteville, NC. Could you say your full name and date of birth please?

0:15

HARRIS: Cynthia Lynne Harris, August 7, 1964.

0:21

MCGATHY: Where were you born?

0:23

HARRIS: Loris, South Carolina.

0:27

MCGATHY: What are your parent's names?

0:29

HARRIS: William Glenn Atkinson and Mary Lou Atkinson.

0:34

MCGATHY: And what do they do for a living?

0:35

HARRIS: They're both deceased now.

0: 39

MCGATHY: And do you have any siblings?

0:40

HARRIS: Yes, I have three brothers: Billy, Jerry, and Clay.

0:45

MCGATHY: What was it like growing up in a household with three brothers?

0:48

HARRIS: It was adventuresome. There was never a dull moment. They were always pulling tricks on me. Like for instance one time they gave me a Feen-a-mint gum which they told me it was Chiclet gum but it is actually a laxative.

1:00

MCGATHY: Aw man!

1:01

HARRIS: [laughs] So I was always getting tricked on, you know.

1:07

MCGATHY: That must have sucked.

1:08

HARRIS: But they were protective, though, so, yeah, I never had any worries that anybody was going to mess with me.

1:15

MCGATHY: Tell me what your childhood was like.

1:17

HARRIS: We grew up kind of like –I know you are going to laugh—it is kind of like Mayberry. We rode our bicycles on the street, we played with the neighborhood kids, we stayed out until dark time, we were out until the street lights came on. Basically momma’s house was the neighborhood hangout. All the kids came there, and she would rather have it that way because she knew where her kids were at. So basically we played ball in the street. Of course that was during time when things were not like it is now. It was much safer then. Much safer, you know.

1:48

MCGATHY: What was it like growing up in a military family?

1:51

HARRIS: Well, we did not move a whole lot; daddy did all the moving. He went to Germany several times, he was in Thailand; as a matter of fact, I didn't see him until I was two years old because he was in Thailand when I was born, so we really did not have a lot of contact with him because he stayed gone so much, but momma almost moved us one time to Germany but then things started going wrong. We got all the shots to go but then momma couldn't take the car, we had to put the dog on quarantine for more than three months, and she decided it was not worth moving us so we stayed put. I was born in South Carolina because my grandparents lived there, my dad was overseas and momma needed help because she already had my two older brothers, so that's why I was born in South Carolina because I lived with my grandparents because daddy stayed gone so much. So when daddy came back we moved to Fayetteville then. . . .

3:32

MCGATHY: Did you participate in any extracurricular activities like sports or other clubs or organizations?

3:38

HARRIS: No I didn't because I had a job during high school. In my se—let's see was it?—sophomore year I got a job at the mall so I had no time for anything else. As soon as I left school I would get something to eat then go to work. And then once I graduated I became full time at that job and stayed there for five years—retail. . . .

4:11

MCGATHY: What types of jobs have you been employed at?

4:12

HARRIS: Well I had the retail job. I also worked at the electric company doing customer service there and then I'm in healthcare—been in healthcare for almost twenty years now, mainly doing billing. I did some front desk but mainly billing. . . .

6:13

MCGATHY: Do you have a hero or someone you look up to?

6:17

HARRIS: It would have to be my mom even though she is no longer here. It had to be her.

6:21

MCGATHY: Why?

6:22

HARRIS: Because she was so positive and inspirational, she always tried to see the positive things in everything no matter what it was. And also she was a giver. She had a big heart. She would take the shirt off her back if you needed it.

6:36

MCGATHY: I can definitely see that in you.

6:38

HARRIS: Yep. [laughs]

6:40

MCGATHY: Definitely. You look just like your mom.

6:41

HARRIS: Yes I do, don't I? [Laughs] Everybody tells me that. I got her attitude, too. [Laughs.]

6:48

MCGATHY: Has there ever been a time in your life when you felt like being a woman hindered you from doing something?

6:53

HARRIS: Nope, because I was raised with three boys and I had to prove them wrong because they always told me "you can't do it because you are a girl." I had to prove them wrong. The only problem I have being a woman is I can't move things, so I do have to get a guy to move things and mow the grass, so that's it. I do not need them for nothing else. [Laughs]

7:11

MCGATHY: How do you feel about women being in charge in the workplace?

7:13

HARRIS: I think it is a great thing. I don't have a problem with a woman boss or a man boss. I prefer men bosses because it is not as much drama, but I will—female bosses are good but I would rather have a

man boss because usually there's not as much drama. But I have to say, when I worked at the mall they were all female bosses and they were wonderful. . . .

7:38

MCGATHY: If you could go back in time and do something different, would you? And what would it be?

7:42

HARRIS: Yeah I would go back in time and make some better decisions, that's for sure, and spend more time with my mom, and not be in the financial situation I'm in, because I would not have made the stupid decisions I made. [Laughs] Because I had a chance to do better but I made some bad decisions and some circumstances, too, because of my health issue. Some circumstances put me where I am now. So yeah if I could go back I would change a few things.

8:06

MCGATHY: What brought you here to Fayetteville?

8:09

HARRIS: My dad was military and like I said my mom didn't want to move us, and we came here when dad was stationed here at Fort Bragg, but when he left all the other times we just stayed. So I was with my grandparents until he came back from Thailand, then we got the house in Fayetteville and stayed there. . . .

8:40

MCGATHY: What are some of your greatest memories?

8:43

HARRIS: Oh my God. [Laughs] Well I have to say my memories are growing up as a child with my brothers, all the crazy stuff that happened to us, like the time momma took Jerry's car because she had bought him some tires for his car...brand new tires and she said, "If I catch you smoking them, burning rubber, then you going to have to pay for it." Well, he decided one day he was going to burn rubber right here by Bordeaux Shopping Center and momma was right behind him when the smoke cleared. She did not say a word, came home, waited about an hour she said, "Can I borrow your car to go to the store?" He said, "sure." She backed out the driveway and when she put it in drive she laid rubber for three houses, held it for as long as she could. So yeah that is one of the funniest things that happened—

9:24

MCGATHY: (laughs)

9:25

HARRIS: —There are so many stories I can't even tell you all of them, but that gives you a clue of how my childhood went. Now we had some bad things of course, but there was more good things than bad and more funny things happened. We laughed at even the bad stuff—we still laughed. [Laughs.] Momma always said you can't—you know what can you do about it? You might as well laugh at it, you know?

9:42

MCGATHY: It wasn't funny back then, but it's funny—

9:45

HARRIS: Some things weren't as funny—now they're really funny that we're older and can remember them. Sometimes we sit here like at Thanksgiving or Christmas when everybody is here and talk about some of the old stories and just have to laugh. It is even funnier now than it was then of course. [Laughs] I am sure it wasn't funny to momma, some of the things that happened, but she still laughed. We always had a thing that we laughed at the wrong time at things that other people didn't think was funny. [Laughs.] I have a problem with that too, I laugh at things I shouldn't laugh at too. . . .

13:32

MCGATHY: Are you an animal lover?

13:34

HARRIS: Yes I am! And I don't like anybody that abuses them. I definitely do not want to see that. I have a cocker spaniel which I love dearly. She's eleven years old now. Her name is Nutmeg. And previously I had one named Cinnamon, and she lived to be seventeen years and three months. Broke my heart, it was like having a child when she died. I cried for the whole entire week. That was my baby, since I don't have any children, that was my baby. I am always going to have a cocker spaniel as long as I can afford to keep one and am able to take care of it. As long as I am not too old where I cannot take care of her I am always going to have one. And even though the one I got is a little crazy I am still going to have another one. [Laughs.] She's just very unique, that's all. She just likes...she is OCD like me. She likes things to be the same way every time, if not it freaks her out. I love other animals too but I am more of a dog lover. I like cats, but I am more of a dog lover. But I don't want to see any animal being abused, ever, no kind of animal.

14:36

MCGATHY: Yeah.

14:37

HARRIS: I am definitely always going to have a dog, like I said as long as I possibly can. [nephew interrupts]

14:46

MCGATHY: What is one of the happiest moments that you can remember?

14:50

HARRIS: It's me graduating. Because my mom always wanted us to graduate, me and my three brothers, so that made her so that made me happy because she was happy. . . .

15:44

MCGATHY: If you could invent anything what would it be and—

15:47

HARRIS: I would like to invent a cure for cancer, especially since both of my parents died from it. I would love to invent something like that. . . .

16:42

MCGATHY: What advice would you offer the younger generation?

16:45

HARRIS: First and foremost is get an education, because you can't get anywhere in the world without having at least a high school diploma or a GED, preferably a high school diploma. My mom always said education was the most important thing. She didn't care if we didn't go to college, but we at least had to graduate, so we all did and she was very happy about that. And I'd say learn from your mistakes and learn to laugh at yourself because things are going to happen and sometimes it may not seem so funny, but they will be funny later.

17:14

MCGATHY: Do you have any inspirational quotes that you live by?

17:17

HARRIS: Yes I do. You reap what you sow so be careful what you do because it is going to come back to you. Also I like vengeance is mine so saith the Lord [Romans 12:19] in other words do not try and do revenge on somebody because God will take care of it. And also my last one, the one I love the most, is Live, Love, Laugh and that's what I live by.