

Maureen and Mike

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The following transcript was provided to Archives and Special Collections by [The Gathering: Collected Oral Histories of the Irish in Montana](#) with its associated audio recording.

**Oral History Number: 435-006**

**Interviewee: Peggy Harris**

**Interviewer: Maureen Edwards**

**Date of Interview: August 30, 2010**

**Project: The Gathering – Collected Oral Histories of the Irish in Montana**

ME: This is Maureen Edwards. I'm at the home of Peggy Harris who has lived a long (phrase unintelligible) here in Missoula Montana. We are interviewing for The Gathering, a collection of stories of the Irish in Montana and Peggy has agreed to participate in this. So Peggy, what is your full name?

PH: My full name is Margaret Louise Harris Harris. My maiden name happens to be the same as my married name, although my husband and I are not related otherwise.

ME: Where did you get your names?

PH: Margaret is to remember an aunt, a sister of my father, who died before I was born and the Louise is for my mother.

ME: And where were you born?

PH: Jacksonville, Florida.

ME: What was the year?

PH: 1938.

ME: And the date?

PH: [full birth date restricted]

ME: And did you live in Florida all your life when you were a child? All your childhood?

PH: I lived in Florida until I was 15 with the exception of the years of the Second World War when my father worked as a civilian for (Name/word unintelligible) Company in Marietta Georgia to build war planes and then we moved back to Florida. And my dad moved us to Georgia when I was 15 years old.

ME: And how many brothers and sisters do you have?

PH: I'm the oldest of six.

ME: And are you married? You said you are married to Mr. Harris.

PH: Yes.

ME: And when did you get married?

PH: On June 17, 1961.

ME: Do you have children?

PH: We have two sons.

ME: And what are their names?

PH: Clint, Clinton Gates, and Eric, full name Eric William.

ME: Now the Gathering is a project to collect the stories of the Irish so we'll go back and talk about your Irish ancestors.

PH: Okay.

ME: So what is your father's full name?

PH: It's John William Harris.

ME: And was he of Irish ancestry?

PH: Yes, he was. He was a second generation Irish American.

ME: Tell me about his parents.

PH: His parents were John Henry Harris who was the son of Irish immigrants in New York. His mother was Hannah Enright who was John Henry's second wife. My father was her first son.

ME: And when did your grandparents come over, do you know?

PH: My great grandparents. John Henry's parents were James and Joanna and I think they came separately and married in New York in the 1850's. Early 1850's. Joanna came in 1853 according to the 1900 census. James Harris died in New York before the 1900 census and so I don't know his exact immigration date but I'm estimating about 1850 because, no, no, no, it had to be in 1855 or earlier because it was 1860 that he was naturalized a citizen and I think at that time you needed to live in the country for 5 years to get citizenship.

ME: Do you know what your great grandfather did when he was in Ireland? What his profession was or where he came from?

PH: No I don't. I think that he originated in County Wexford but I'm not sure. The reason I think that was that there were at least five other Harris Irishmen in Herkimer County in New York who lived in (Herkimer? Word unintelligible) and I looked through the origin of all of these men and only one I found hailed from Wexford and he was much younger than James. And so I corresponded with the Wexford Genealogy, what is it Center, and they were able to get minimum information for me but they couldn't prove the birth of any of these men because they, at the time of their immigration, things were so chaotic that records had been lost. And I know that James's father's name was Martin and that was another thing. All these five men that I assumed were somewhat related although they may not have been exactly brothers, at least three of them had a mother named Mary and all of them supposedly had a father named Martin. So I think that one of them definitely was a brother, that was Matthew, and the others may have been cousins. But I've done the genealogy as best as I could (laughs). I couldn't prove it.

ME: So where did your grandfather, your great grandfather ended up in New York and what did he do there?

PH: He was a farmer at first and apparently fairly prosperous. Just generally they had a small orchard and pigs and cows and chickens and whatever. And then several of their children died. They had 10 children altogether, 2 of them died as elementary age children, they were girls, and after that they moved into the town of Herkimer Village and two other children died as teenagers. And when they moved into town, James Harris worked as a laborer or as mason and, according to a newspaper article, late in his life he was a County tax collector of some sort. I forget the title but it was some sort of Village assistant to tax collecting. And it was a job apparently that was rotated between citizens; it wasn't a very big town.

ME: And you said that your great grandmother came, you think separately from James?

PH: I think she came separately. Her name was Joanna and I'm not sure of her maiden name. I couldn't find her own death certificate or record of her death except a newspaper announcement which lists her as Mrs. James Harris. I have the death certificates of my, of James, I mean of John who is my grandfather and two of his siblings, but none of them list her maiden name; they just call her Joanna Harris. So with my own situation, it's possible that her maiden name was Harris too but I haven't proved it. I don't know.

ME: And how many children did they have?

PH: They had 10.

ME: And so six of them lived?

PH: Let's see. Four of them died before the parents and then another died so that when my grandfather was 35 years old, he had lost both of his parents and five of his siblings and by that time he had moved to Florida.

ME: So the rest of them are still in New York, as far as you know, or do you know?

PH: I don't know. It was a very difficult family to trace. My grandfather moved to Jacksonville when he was a young man, and one of his brothers, William, moved there and worked with him. Actually, William was older and he moved first and then John came down with his wife. He moved there first and then he sent for his wife and his first two children who were born in New York. And William had a contracting company and John worked for him as a foreman. And there is another mystery. Because William in 1901, Jacksonville City, which was a, I don't know what the population was, but it was a city large enough to be a kind of a railroad crossing center, and it had some tall buildings in the city center and it was a port as well, so I don't know the population but it was a city by definition and the City Center burned to the ground in 1901, and after that, and it burned the court house, and it burned everything, so William Harris got a contract, I learned this from old newspapers, got the contract to build a new county courthouse which was quite elaborate. It was a full city block, a two story; it had a dome with a clock in it and the architect who designed it later became very prominent in that area. However, before the building was finished, which took about a year, William disappeared. And I was never able to find out if he died, if he went bankrupt, if he embezzled and went to prison. I have no idea. I have searched, looked, and I can't find out what happened to him but the two men were living in the same house and he just vanished. You know, his names disappeared from the city directory, disappeared from the census records. And I've never found him again. I looked for him in New York and never found him again. So then John Henry worked, as a pretty much as a mason for a time and then, by the time my father was a boy, he had a job with the city itself and he was in charge of building a brand new city sewer system which my father helped with when he was 11 years old. As a water boy. He built sewer, daddy told me that in that era you built, you dug deep ditches with a shovel and so to build a sewer line which had to be way, way deep, it took six men across to shovel the dirt to make the ditch and they, there were two in the middle that shoveled dirt up to the next ayer. They were, would make a tier system (phrase unclear). And daddy worked as a "water boy" carrying water back and forth all summer every day to the men with a bucket and they would drink and pass the bucket back the other way, back and forth and meantime he would bring the buckets back and forth. He told me this story, which is a very few stories that he ever told me, when I was quite old. And he said that he was paid fifty cents a day, or was it fifty cents a week? In any case, he felt very, very rich because none of the other boys that he knew had anywhere near that much money.

ME: And this would be about—

PH: That would be in 1911 census so this was about 1921 or so.

ME: And so, your grandmother. What was her name?

PH: My grandmother was Hanna Enright and she was much younger than my grandfather. She was a 2<sup>nd</sup> wife. His first wife was her aunt. And when her aunt died, she came to Florida to take care of the children. By that time there were four of them. And then, of course, two years later she married him and then she had five children. So my father was the oldest of five and he had four younger siblings and four older siblings, half siblings. Hannah didn't marry until she was about 28 I think. Her mother was Bridget Cox and her father was Edward Enright. Bridget and Edward, or Edmund, also came to New York separately and married here in New York in 1872 and Bridget's parents, who were James and Mary Cox, were the ones who arrived in 1863 during the Civil War. When James and Mary Cox arrived, they brought their middle three children. And they left Bridget, who was about seven at the time, and their baby Thomas, who was about a year, in Ireland. So Bridget came when she was older, about 17, and Thomas didn't come until he was almost a grown man about 19. But they all came to New York eventually.

ME: Now, in 1863, middle of the Civil War. Where the Harris relatives there at that time too? Do you know?

PH: I don't know how long they stayed in the City. I know they had one baby in the City, during the month of July 1863 during the riots, and then by the 1865 census they were living in Herkimer County. So the Coxes and the Harrises lived in Herkimer County which is what they call the center of New York, upstate New York. And when Edmund Enright arrived, he was a grown man then and he married Bridget. They probably knew each other in County Kerry. The Coxes and the Enrights were both from Kerry and I have found their home, their place in County Kerry.

ME: So did they, any of them fight in the Civil War?

PH: No, not as far as I know. I'm pretty sure they did not. I think the older generation was a little bit old and the younger ones were children during the Civil War.

ME: So your parents came from California...I mean from Florida and your grandparents had moved down there, John Henry and his wife.

PH: Right.

ME: So, what did your father do then after he was in Florida? Did he stay there, grow up as a young man? Then, did he meet his wife there?

PH: Yes, my mother was born in Melbourne, Florida and she moved to Jacksonville as a teenager. And they met there. My father, he didn't quit school but he had to go to work. His father had a stroke. John Henry had a stroke when Daddy was about a junior in high school and so Daddy was, half the siblings by this time had left home. Some of them were married and Daddy was the oldest at home I think and so he went to work. And he was going to a Catholic

school and the priests and the nuns tutored him at night so that he could finish high school and he did graduate from high school with his class in 1928 I think. But he worked for two years full time in his last two years of high school. And he actually, he was an Eagle Scout and he was a strong athlete. In the summers he lifeguarded at Jacksonville Beach. He (hesitates), oh, I've lost my train of thought Ask me another question (laughs).

ME: Okay.

PH: Oh, oh, I was going to say, he earned a scholarship to Georgia Tech. He wanted, his dream was to be an architect but he had to turn it down because he had a family to support. And so, he was the breadwinner for his family. His father actually lived for five more years but he had repeated strokes and he was not able to work again. And there was also an older half-sister who lived with the family who also worked. And my grandmother took a job across the street, at the school (word unintelligible) and so they all just pooled their money and they made it.

ME: So your father met your mother?

PH: At a dance in Jacksonville, Florida.

ME: And they were married?

PH: My mother was about 15 and daddy was about 18 and they didn't marry for about 6 years because, first of all, they were very young and daddy was supporting his family. Finally, all the siblings were old enough to get jobs and help and so then he and mother got married, 1915, no, in 1936. Mother was born in 1915.

ME: And what about her family?

PH: My mother's family was not Irish. They were, um, I guess my parents were compatible in their hardships. My mother's father died when she was one year old. She was the youngest at the time and her mother, who had five children, actually remarried a few years later. But her second husband died. Shortly after that she had her 6<sup>th</sup> child. So her children also worked from the time that they were very young and mother graduated from high school when she was 15 (16? word not clear?) and went to work.

ME: Do you know where her background was?

PH: Yes. She, well, my mother's side I call "all American" because ultimately they were English and French, and probably that's all. I traced her family back through the Civil War and the Revolutionary War and all the way back to Jamestown, Virginia. The Huguenots came to South Carolina in about the 1760. And some came to South Carolina in in, when was the Edict of Nantes? In 1765 I think, somewhere in there and the other French group moved to Philadelphia and then to South Carolina. But mother's family goes all the way back to America so when I

wrote my book I included all the history in which her ancestors lived, as well as, as much as I could find about the Irish.

ME: So your parents married in Florida and you have, they had 6, how many children?

PH: They had 7. One died, and I was the first and then a daughter after me, died early (phrase unintelligible). There are 19 years separating my youngest brother and myself (something else in here I'm not getting).

ME: Before we move onto your life and your childhood, is there anything you can think about your family, the Harrises or the Enrights or the Coxes that, stories you can remember?

PH: Stories (pause, papers ruffling) I should have prepared for this better.

ME: Oh, that's fine. We can always catch up.

PH: Okay.

ME: I have other questions too. So rest your mind.

(There seems to be some kind of a break in here. Not clear)

PH: (Pause) I didn't know, I guess that's what I'd like to tell you. I didn't know my family history until I was 60 years old. My Irish relatives were many, I had lots of cousins and aunts and uncles, and we spent a lot of time together until I was 15. And everyone was cheerful, everyone got along. Christmases were just amazing. We gathered at my grandmother's house, which was owned by my aunt because my grandmother was essentially destitute, um, and everybody gave everybody else a present although, and we used our allowances. But we might have only spent a penny on some knick knack from the dime store which was where we shopped. But we wrapped things for weeks for everybody else and so the packages, little as they were, spilled out from under the tree in that living room until you constantly had to be pushing them back. But I never knew the history; no one ever spoke of the past. We celebrated St. Patrick's Day by wearing green and mother used to make a green cake and although she was not Irish she'd cook corned beef and cabbage for St. Patrick's Day and we celebrated that. But they never, they didn't tell us anything about their childhood in New York. Well, it would have been my grandmother. I never knew my grandfather because he died before I was born and my grandmother and one aunt that I knew very, very well, my Aunt Marie, who was born in New York. Well, she went to Florida when she was about four but no one ever, ever spoke of it and I didn't really know. So when I decided to do genealogy and see what I could find out about them, I asked a few cousins who were essentially half cousins, the children of this older set, half siblings, and they told me a few things. They told me, well, one cousin told me that after my grandfather had had his first stroke he went, was sent, or both, whether he was sent or it was voluntary I'm not sure, but he went to their house in DeLand, Florida where his oldest son lived

because he got along better with Leo than with anybody else. And this was another cousin named Margaret and called Peggy. And while he was there, she was just a small girl so she didn't remember him a lot, but she remembered that he was very involved with her little sister who was a toddler but she also remembered that he would wander off from the house from time to time and her mother would have to call her father to come and find him. And then he and the next door neighbor build a still in the neighbor's garage, this being the era of prohibition and they got in a lot of trouble for that. He was, pretty much I think, an alcoholic by that time and he later went back to Jacksonville. And, he just wasn't able to work. And then my cousin Peggy told me that when her grandfather died, she never saw him again after that. They didn't have money to travel in those days, so when he died DeLand, Florida is now an hour or two from where they lived, but when he died her father had to take a train and he had to borrow a coat, jacket, so that he could go to his father's funeral. The other story, to back up, what started me on this journey to look for my Irish (word unintelligible). I went to the funeral services for my Aunt Catherine, who was my father's youngest sister and the last of the siblings to die. And I met this other Peggy Harris who I had always known but not really well because we lived in different towns. She was quite a bit older than I. And in conversation with her she mentioned, we were talking about family, of course, as you do at these occasions, and she mentioned this Aunt Margaret for whom we were both named. And as I say in my book, I was startled by that because I hadn't been aware that I was named for this Aunt Margaret So later I got my uncle (Sam? Name unintelligible) who was the widower now to my Aunt Catherine to take me to the cemetery where her grave was and this is what her stone looked like. It only has this one name, Margaret, and nothing else on the stone and, let me look back, it was the first burial in the family plot, (word unintelligible) 1924 and she was newly married and she died at 24. And I figured why—

(Another apparent break. Machine stopped)

ME: Okay, here we go.

PH: It's just that that's what set me on a journey to find—

ME: That's what got you started?

PH: Yes. I was looking for Margaret and when I started asking questions about Margaret I started learning, I got the story of John Henry and the still in the grage and other little tidbits and realized that this story was bigger than a single person and I found that this Margaret who died young was named for her Aunt Margaret in New York who had also died young of tuberculosis in New York who was named for her Aunt Margaret of County Kerry. So—

ME: So there was quite a tradition of naming there.

PH: Yes.

ME: What about the other members of the family? Were there nicknames?

PH: Oh yes, there definitely were.

ME: What were some of these?

PH: Everybody did, almost everybody did.

PH: You mean in my generation?

ME: Yes.

PH: Okay, well the nicknames weren't in earlier generations as much as they were in mine. I was Margaret, called Peggy and my next sister was Priscilla called Prissy, who when she was grown, insisted that we revert to calling her Priscilla. And then Pamela was called Pam. And then my brother was named John William Jr. and he was called Bill and the next two were Ellen and (name unintelligible).

ME: So more shortened names?

PH: Yes.

ME: All right. So let's spend a few minutes on your childhood and what you remember about your traditions because it's kind of interesting to know, to see if they carried through, things that you might not have realized came from the Irish traditions, that you mentioned, like all the presents under the Christmas tree.

PH: When, may you know, when did the Irish adapt the Christmas tree? Because that was of German origin and I don't know if they did this in Ireland or if they took it up when they came to New York?

ME: I don't know. I know that my grandfather, that was the Irish would have a cup of wine at Christmas and (word unintelligible) Christmas Eve that was it. The German side of the family the presents rolling out over the edges. But whether they combined it or where it came from I don't know.

PH: Well, I guess they learned it when they came to America because there were many, many, many German immigrants, there were immigrants from everywhere in New York at this period. And I guess they just learned it from—

ME: Or maybe had the ability to do things.

PH: —other groups. That too.

ME: Now you first remember then in Jacksonville.

PH: Yes.

ME: And what were some of your favorite places in Jacksonville? And what kind of places in Jacksonville? What kind of places did you go to? Vacations or—

PH: Well, we lived in the city, in Jacksonville City, so it was about, I don't know, 20 miles to the beach so we'd go to the beach for vacations. Occasionally we went to visit another aunt and her family, to visit family members in another town. But we didn't take vacations other than that. I remember when I was very young, Jacksonville, Florida was a little bit different climate from what it is now. I've read the Army Corps of Engineers changed the climate when they drained the swamp so there'd be more land mass to build homes on, build anything on, especially the lower end of Florida which used to be pretty much all open (phrase unintelligible).

ME: The marshes and Everglades.

PH: Yes, but it rained every afternoon. The, it was so hot and steamy, that it rained every afternoon; it, there was a thundershower, it rained every afternoon and in the morning or at night it would cool down and in the mornings the moisture would rise again and in the afternoon it would rain again. I said thundershowers but it probably wasn't so much thundershowers as showers, so we'd put on our bathing suits and go outside and play in the rain in the afternoon. It was almost everyday occurrence. We roller skated on the sidewalks, there was a swimming pool within walking distance, 6 or 8 blocks, so we'd walk with our friends to the pool in the summer. We just played outside a lot. We did that. There was a climbing tree in our front yard, the neighbors also came and climbed on. There was a garage in the back that my younger siblings would climb up on, though they weren't supposed to, and my brother, who like to jump, jumped off the garage. One time he broke his arm. That was a big deal.

My sisters and I played with dolls. We did the traditional things.

ME: How about music? Did you have music in your childhood?

PH: I wish that we had had more music. I always yearned to play the piano and we didn't have a piano. My aunt did, my Aunt Marie had a piano which she allowed me to play and she even offered to pay for piano lessons but my, we lived across town and mother wouldn't let me go back and forth that far so I didn't get to take piano. I would have had to practice on her piano anyway.

ME: But you had cousins there, so what did you do with them?

PH: We played "Mother May I". Do you know that game? And Red Rover, send somebody right over, dodge ball, we played with our dolls, the girls played dolls and the boys played with their cars and trucks. It was pretty simple. We roller skated a lot.

ME: Were your parents, what kinds of things did they do? What kinds of skills did they have? How did they spend their time? Did they (phrase unintelligible) work?

PH: My mother was strictly a homemaker. She was a very, very good cook and spent a lot of time doing it. She was not a very good housecleaner but she worked at it. With six children it was pretty hard. (Laughs). My father was ambitious. He worked, as I said, from a very early age, doing lots of different kinds of jobs. And he loved sports. He played football and basketball and baseball and anything that was available in high school. And he had letters in (word unintelligible) and basketball, different awards that his team won. He was in Eagle Scouts. And he worked in a men's store (phrase missing) in the city of Jacksonville before he and mother got married and then he got a job in a sporting good retail store in Jacksonville. And in working he took a course in drafting. As I said, he had been interested in architecture and he took a course in drafting at the (railway station? phrase unintelligible) in Jacksonville and then he was sent to Marietta to work as a draftsman for B29 fighter airplanes. So we lived there for four years.

ME: He was too old to fight in the war.

PH: Yes, he was older. He was in his 30's and he had a family, the two children another one born during the war so he did not join. He was too old to be drafted.

ME: Age played a role.

PH: Yes. He was very proud of building the B29, which was the plane that dropped the bomb on Japan. And then after the war he went back to Jacksonville and he went back to work for Mr. Dunlap at the sporting goods store, but he dreamed of having his own business so he bought an industrial sewing machine and set it up in his and mother's bedroom and learned to make chenille aware letters for high schools and so forth. And ultimately he thought he was ready and he set up shop (Harris and unintelligible word/phrase, name of company?) and Mr. Dunlap at the sporting goods store (unintelligible phrase) helped him by encouraging the schools to buy daddy's awards and he did this for several years. And when he did that, he bought our first car.

ME: So, he was quite successful then?

PH: Well, he had to have a car. Previously he had to ride the bus from where he lived to downtown but the business building was in a warehouse (unintelligible phrases). So he had to have a car. So that was our first car and there were four of us (unintelligible phrase.). It was a red Chevrolet. It was brand new. And he did that for, I don't know, six or eight years, I haven't counted. But ultimately, he wanted a bigger, he also, he was everything. His brother helped him a little bit and finally he was able to hire some employees to sew but he was the salesman and

the accountant and the everything, manager. So, and he had pretty much cornered the market. His letters were much nicer than anybody's had been before so he was selling them to all the schools in the area around north Florida. But Jacksonville was a bigger center, I mean Atlanta was a bigger center. So he moved us to Atlanta when I was 15.

ME: So that's why you moved.

PH: That's why we moved, so he could move his business there.

ME: You said your dad attended Catholic school until he had to stop to work.

PH: Yes he did.

ME: How about your family? Did you go to Catholic school?

PH: I went to public school in Marietta. That's where I started school in the first and second grade. I went to a Catholic school when I was in the third grade in Jacksonville when we moved back. When we first moved back, we lived with my grandmother and two aunts and the school was within walking distance from their house. Then when Daddy found us a place to rent, it was across town and there was no Catholic school on that side of town. So I went to public school from then on. And went to catechism classes on Friday afternoon or whichever day, one day of the week. That was through the eighth grade. And then, in the ninth grade, Jacksonville built a single Catholic high school and the other Catholic elementary schools which had been (unintelligible) through 12 before then, of which there were 3 in different places in the city, consolidated their high schools into one, so I went to that school in the ninth grade and then for the tenth grade we moved to Atlanta and I went to public school, 10, 11 and 12.

ME: Just out of interest, did you find much difference between the public system and the private system?

PH: Yes I did. A lot of difference.

ME: Good things or bad things?

PH: I wasn't aware of differences when I was in elementary school, but the move from the Catholic high school, I was, I guess I was more observant by that time. But when I went back to Atlanta in the 10<sup>th</sup> grade, I was shocked at how the students, the boys really, would talk back to their teachers. It would never have been tolerated where I had come from. And it was a hard shelled Baptist environment and I had some feeling of discrimination from time to time. It was very different. I was isolated there for a time. After that I made two very, very dear friends with whom I got back in touch at my 50<sup>th</sup> high school reunion. And we've been corresponding by e-mail since that's several years now.

ME: Okay. And then what is your best memory of your family? When you were, best memory? We've talked about Christmas already.

PH: (Something unintelligible in here). Best memory. My best memory. That was one. I should have prepped so I could think about these things. My best memory. Um, my parents always loved us, I won't say unconditionally because they were strict and my mother reminded me (unintelligible phrase) not to be so selfish but I never doubted their love. My Aunt Helen, who died when she was in her 30's, as a single woman, was my favorite. She was my father's youngest sister. And all the children loved her. And I loved her. She's one of my best memories. She worked at a dime store. She was very shy. And she started to work as a clerk there and was promoted to office work and so she worked in the office at the 10-cent store until she got sick.

ME: How did she die?

PH: She had breast cancer.

ME: You were probably at a pretty young age.

PH: I was 15, well maybe 16. We had moved to Atlanta and she got sick soon thereafter. And I was very, very upset. I didn't get to see her when she was sick. Of course, when she died we went down for the services and I was just devastated. And after the funeral services, you know the family gathered and it was such a big family and we always had a lot of talk and a lot of laughter and a lot going on. And so this is what happened. And I went off by myself and my father noticed. He was always the one to comfort me when I had a problem, not my mother. And so he came to ask me what was the matter. And I said I was so sad and I couldn't understand how everybody else was so happy.

ME: That's a common—

PH: You asked me my best memory. And I couldn't understand it. She was the first person I had ever loved.

ME: So, do you think that maybe you know, the Irish usually have a celebration of life. I'm wondering if that was a wake? Do you think that might of, (unintelligible) you know you take about enjoying things or—

PH: No idea. It was just an occasion to enjoy one's company. And by that time, it was started to disperse a little in Jacksonville but most of them are still there.

ME: So you've remained close, extended family?

PH: Yes.

ME: Wonderful. We've talked about holidays already, Christmas and St. Paddy's day. Sounds good. How about foods, special foods, did your mother make special foods other than her green cake. Did you have special foods?

PH: My mother made the best turkey and the best turkey gravy ever. She was a good cook.

ME: Very lucky. And your dad made the best letters so he was a good sewer. Did they pass down their skills to you?

PH: Ultimately he, the business got competition in Atlanta and elsewhere. And he wasn't able to compete, in a small business because you know larger companies could do it on a bigger scale. So he had to give that up and he went back to work as a manufacturer's representative in sporting goods and he had to travel again. He was doing that the year I graduated from high school. And that was the year that mother went back to work because that was an interim when he wasn't getting paid anything. And so she went back to work for a year or two.

ME: What did she do?

PH: She was a secretary. That was the only year that she worked. Well, I think she worked when I was small but I don't remember, until my next sister was born. She worked for about three years.

ME: So where did they spend their retirement?

PH: In Atlanta.

ME: So that's where they were living?

PH: Daddy did very well and he expanded until he had a distribution center and so he set that up in Atlanta. Then he could hire salesmen to go out and he could stay at home. And he did that until he retired, I don't remember when. He did that for a long time. That was very successful.

ME: You talk about coming into your knowledge of the family, the Irish part of the family, later in life. Do you know of anything from your great grandparents or your grandparents that was handed down that you can think of?

PH: No.

ME: What about photos or pictures of them?

PH: Well, I found photos when I was researching and this is the first one I got. A cousin sent me this. This is the New York Margaret in the center and these are all her siblings. This is the

Bridget who is my great grandmother. And Bridget was the oldest, the one who was left in Ireland. And then, this is my, the Enrights came later, this is my grandmother.

ME: So on page 106, in your book *Shade of Oaks*, the story you wrote about your Irish heritage. This is wonderful. So Hannah and her sister Julia, so this is your great grandmother?

PH: :This is my grandmother and her mother and her little sister. And then Bridget is Hannah's mother.

ME: Wonderful. Some of the other pictures are on page 98.

PH: No I don't have any artifacts. I have a few things from my father but...This is my grandfather, John Henry Harris and his first wife, Catherine Cox.

ME: But Hannah—

PH: This is not Hannah, this is Catherine—this is the first wife. The second wife was Hannah, Hannah Enright.

ME: Right.

PH: But this is John Henry, and this is John Henry with Catherine and their four children. This is Leo, Maria, James and Margaret. And this is the Margaret who died when she was young at 24.

ME: I'll bet you were thrilled to find those pictures.

PH: I was. And I had never seen them. The cousins had them, you know, tucked away. And, in fact, these, this one was found as a surprise, it was just, this picture of the siblings with the daughters, it was in an attic of my Aunt Catherine. Her daughter found it. We couldn't date it when she found it and then later I found a newspaper clipping in New York and that dated at 1902 because the whole Cox family had a reunion in 1902 at the home of their father. Their mother died young, not too young, but she died in '59. But the whole family had a reunion in 1902 in Little Falls, New York, and they got a big spread in the Little Falls weekly newspaper and that picture, of the girls, and these little individual pictures of the sons and of James; those are not in the book (word unintelligible). And the (word unintelligible) told me where the origin was, which was Tarbert, County Kerry.

ME: So you got information from that?

PH: (Phrase unintelligible). So, do you want me to tell you about (phrase unintelligible)? To go Ireland and visit Tarbert? (Unintelligible).

ME: Yes, yes.

PH: And as soon as I found out about Tarbert, of course I wanted to go there. And my husband didn't want to go and drive and I didn't want to drive because, you know that they drive on the wrong side of the street so we took our son and his wife to do the driving. And we wandered around Ireland for 18 days and ended up in Tarbert, which was my layout plan. And at that time I didn't know all the mythology about Ireland; I didn't know the Irish history. I was just totally ignorant. But I knew about the family. But I began to wonder why all these many, many, many Irish who were on page after page of the census records in New York, so I'd read about that. So we got there. I wanted to see and touch everything in Ireland and we managed to travel. We went into Shannon and went down to Cork, well, actually to (word unintelligible) in Wexford. That was before I knew the Harris connection to Wexford so I didn't investigate the (word unintelligible). But we drove the coastline of Cork and Kerry and ended up back in Tarbert. And I had just been taking in the scenery and I had the reputation of being the family photographer until that time and I had the heavy camera around my neck all that time and I took very few pictures because I just couldn't take it all. I was afraid, I knew I couldn't capture it, I couldn't capture what I was feeling and I was afraid I would miss something if I started to (word unintelligible). So I took some pictures but I didn't take a lot. When we got to Tarbert then my son understood that I was looking for something personal. So we were stopping at cemeteries and we found some Harrises and some Coxes but not the right ones first names that I knew about so far. And so Clint, who had been driving and had become accustomed to (word unintelligible) and had been learning some Gaelic/Irish to read the road signs, and he said "Okay". We'd collected a library full of maps and he said "Okay, here's a place that looks like another church and maybe there's a cemetery there, something cil, c-i-l. So we got back in the car and we drove another winding road and we found, went to the place where this was labeled on the map and there was no church. And there was no cemetery and there was just another dairy farm. So Clint sees a farmer up on the hill and it's beginning to rain, and he goes over and calls over the fence and tells him what we're looking for. And the farmer says, "No, there's no church here. There's a little (word unintelligible) down in the valley, in the swamp and you're welcome to go if you want to but it's kind of overgrown. So Clint came back and gave us the message and so we got out of the car and started walking through the wet grass. The farmer'd had second thoughts and he came back and he said, "You're just going to get wet down there." He said what we really need to do is go into town and talk to a local historian. His name is Patrick Lynch and he has a gas station next to the school. So we did that. We piled back into the car and went into town, down the hill, and found the school, found the gas station and go into this. The gas station has a little tiny grocery store so Clinton and I go into the grocery store and Patrick Lynch and his wife (phrase unintelligible). It's just a little grocery store. And Clint is just exuberant (laughs) so they were taken aback a bit but Clint told them what we were looking for (phrase unintelligible). And so Patrick Lynch said, "Well, I'll help you if I can. Tell me the names you're looking for." And I said "Cox and Enright." And he said "Cox, Cox". He said, "My great grandmothers was a Collins (name not clear) and one of her sisters married a Cox and went to America." So I took a deep breath and said: "Well, my James Cox was married to Mary Collins and she, and they went to America from here." So he said, "Sit right here (Laughs) (phrase unintelligible) like no American could (word unintelligible). And so he went to the back

of the store, which is where they lived and he came out with this great big piece of butcher paper on which he had handwritten his family tree. So we spread it out on the counter and he traced it back to Mary Collins and all her sibling sand his great great grandmother. And she was there, Mary Collins. Mary Collins married James Cox and went to America. She had six siblings and she had seven daughters. And of all her sister's names, what did I say, not six siblings, she had six sisters, and all and her own name were the names of her daughters. I had the names of the daughters; he had the names of the sisters.

ME: That is unbelievable.

PH: And we just looked at each other and he said "We're related." (Laughs)

ME: Lucky.

PH: Well I'll tell you something. The Irish say there are no coincidences. And so Patrick Lynch is now a very dear friend and we correspond, most just at Christmas. But he has tried to help me find a proof of my Enrights. He said the Coxes are all gone from Tarbert but there are many Enrights there. And I had a survey map that shows Michael Cox's tenanted land. Michael was the father of James, and living in that area now is an Enright family. So, this is late in the afternoon, so overnight, he said, "Come back in the morning and I'll take you up there." So we spent the night there, in Tarbert, and the next day we went back and he had arranged for us to go up to meet the Enrights. And that was Dan and Maureen Enright who greeted us as if we were the Holy Family.(phrase ?) And Maureen is a good correspondent as well, a dear, dear person. And it was Dan who said "Americans don't know how to make tea" and they took us into their kitchen and we had tea and soda bread and we tried to make the connection.

ME: And you established a connection?

PH: Yeah, and we don't go back far enough to be able to prove that Dan and I are cousins but we probably are, you know, somewhere. We just don't know for sure. He can only go back to his grandfather and his father. And he's inherited the farm from him and his grandfather. And now he's retired and his son (phrase unintelligible) And they still live (phrase unintelligible) It is a beautiful dairy farm.

ME: Is this, did you start writing just recently or have you always been a writer?

PH: No, no. I'm strictly an amateur writer. I've never written anything before. But when I started to learn what I was learning, it was such a revelation and some things were epiphanies. And I know all of this stuff. None of my siblings knew either and certainly none of our children knew it and I had to record it. I had to put it down because telling them it wasn't going to stick. They hadn't done the research and they weren't going to remember. And I was collecting pages and pages and pages of documents like death certificates and birth certificates and census pages and odd things, just whatever I could find on each person and each group and it was too

much for anyone to come behind me who didn't already have an interest. And I was afraid it would kill it all. So I have to put it into this hard cover so that my family would keep it. And that's why I did it in a quality document. My mother spent five years in a nursing home. And so, but daddy left her well off all right and my sister was in charge of paying for everything so that drained a lot of funds but when she died, there was still a little bit of money left and that was divided by six. So my share, you know it was not a huge amount but I set it aside because by that time I was working on the book, and that's the money I spent to make a quality book. Didn't know any better way to celebrate her legacy. I don't think she actually had the diagnosis of Alzheimer's but she had dementia and she misremembered things so that by the time I was doing this, when I'd ask a question, it would frustrate her because she felt threatened that she should remember something and she couldn't, so I had to quit asking her things because it upset her too much. I had to go around it, just take the tidbits I could find.

ME: Well, this is fabulous. Okay, let's see if there is anything else here. Well, you've gone to Ireland to do your research, you've written a book about it, so all of this comes down to what Irish means to you today, right?

PH: I can't think of a better heritage to have than American on one side and Irish on the other. I can't think of any other ethnic group in the entire world that I would have chosen. I just love them both.

ME: Did it feel like going home to go to Ireland?

PH: I think it felt like I was going home for Bridget. I have fretted about Bridget, who was left behind and old enough to realize she was left behind. And I asked my Enrights in Tarbert: Who did they leave Bridget with? Why did they leave Bridget there? And Maureen was just trying to reassure: "I'm sure she was being taken care of by her grandparents. She was fine." (Laughs) But I felt like I was going home for Bridget because they never got to go back, none of them, none of them ever got to go back.

ME: So you are completing the circle?

PH: Well, I just didn't want them to be forgotten. When I first made, when I first started doing this, I made a trip to New York. I'd never been, well I'd been to New York City but I had never been upstate New York. I went by myself. And I went to the local libraries. And one place gave me a well it was a little history center actually, gave me so cards that told me the Coxes were buried in a (word unintelligible) cemetery in Little Falls. So I went there and, um, it's a steep hillside, a Catholic cemetery in Little Falls and I pulled into the gates and immediately the sign says "Dangerous, winding road" and so I parked and started to walk up this dangerous winding road. And I didn't know where to look. It was summer and it was huge and it was steep and I had walked about ten steps and I came to an obelisk, I've got the picture right here, that had the names of Joanna and Margaret Cox, daughters of James and Mary. And I hadn't expected to find them; I was looking for James and Mary. So, of course I started looking around and, here it

it. I was walking all around the grounds the area, and I couldn't find them and couldn't find them and was starting to get upset. And I suddenly discovered that I was walking in a ground cover of wild (word unintelligible) and forget-me-nots. And I started to cry. I thought, "I've got to find them, I've just got to find them". And I couldn't so I went to the church and I, well, you're going to read this book and I don't want to tell you all about the book but the secretary of the church was not amenable to talking to people about genealogy. I guess she'd had others before me (laughs) and so she, she kind of gave me the brush-off. But, anyway, I was trying find them and I did. I made another trip back and found that, well, it's really weird but, that James' and Mary's names are on the other, well, around the corner, on the same obelisk and I hadn't looked and seen it there. I was expecting to find another stone. But anyway, they were all there—

ME: I've noticed some of the cemeteries in Ireland, they've got all of the generations on the same stone, right underneath other.

PH: How interesting.

ME: Very.

PH: Lots of cemeteries, they're very interesting some of them are crumbling—

ME: —and old.

PH: You think stone will last forever but it doesn't.

ME: Well, Peggy, this has been wonderful.

PH: Well, thank you very much.

ME: Anything else you can think of that you want to say? I know you want to get this on your record as a tribute to your family, which is wonderful. I'm really anxious to read the book. The book is "In the Shade of Oaks" by Margaret Louise Harris, a story of American heritage.

PH: I consider my, my father considered himself American; he was very very proud of it and he got it from his father I think. John Henry worked from the time he was a young boy. I don't think he finished high school and the census, when he was about 14 and his brother was about 15, and the younger children were listed as being at school, he and his brother were listed at (phrase unclear. Coal miners:?) And I know that he worked from then on, according to the records that I have. But he, and he had a huge family, but he was a success in Jacksonville and he built his family a brand new house in what is now a historic neighborhood in Jacksonville. A year before, his daughter Margaret died and about that same time, his youngest son was divorced from his wife and left town, leaving a daughter with the former wife, which was a total disgrace to the family, which is probably why he left town. And it was shortly after that, oh, and then the other daughter, my Aunt Marie that I always knew, was abandoned by her husband

and she had a young son. So I think that, all that happening right together, right after he had taken on this debt of a mortgage on this brand new beautiful home, probably had some bearing leading to his stroke and they lost that house. And the family moved back into a regular house. They'd always rented before. I've forgotten where I was going with this. But John Henry was a success. And my father told me when they got this new house they had to get a car because it was beyond the trolley line. So it was my dad's job to wash the car every week and when he did, he found a nickel under the seat when he cleaned under there. (Laughs). That was his—

ME: He was rewarded.

PH: Yes, and the fact that his father had hired him as an 11 year old to work on the sewer line even before that. So I think that he respected his father although John Henry was reportedly a harsh man. But he must have told him that you're working to build America, you're lucky to be able to find work to do. And all through the Depression this family all had jobs. He died in 1933 and he was sick in all the years since 1928 till then; this was the heart of the Depression, lots of people were unemployed. But they were never unemployed. They didn't have high paying jobs but they all had jobs. And I think it was instilled in my father to be proud of his country and they were prepared. They didn't look back. Looking back was too traumatic, too painful. They looked ahead. They looked to the present to dine together, to have Christmas together, to have Easter together, and to look ahead.

ME: Very nice. Well, I've exhausted—

[End of Interview]