

**Index of digital audiotaped interview with Carl Vernon Harris, Ph.D.,
retired Wake Forest University faculty member, Classical Languages
Interviewed by Anne R. Phillips, Ph.D., on March 11, 2009, at
Salem towne
Index by Anne R. Phillips**

L = Lucille Harris

A = Anne R. Phillips

C = Dr. Carl V. Harris, Lucille's husband and retired WFU faculty

**Dr. Harris was born in Morganton, North Carolina, on December 29,
1922.**

**Began school in 1929. "I was very much a child of that Great
Depression."**

**Parents had very little formal schooling—"my mother practically
none"; his mother made an orphan at the age of two.**

Seven children in the family. Three brothers and three sisters.

C. was next to youngest.

His siblings dropped out of school early; not one attended high school.

**The Great Depression figured in large way. From an early age he
wrestled with the issue of being "an intelligent vs. a literate person"
person.**

**In the classroom for forty years, he came to appreciate persons of very
different backgrounds, various abilities, and types of mind.**

He said his "mother was a *summa cum laude* in intuitive knowledge."

**Father worked for more than thirty years in a tannery, very demanding
physical labor.**

**Family lived in rented house, owned by the tannery company. No
electricity. In all his public school years C. studied by lamplight. His
father mended their shoes on an iron last by lamplight.**

**With iron heated on stove, his mother ironed carefully his overalls—
"my main attire throughout public school years"**

**Next door neighbor family was African American. Their circumstances,
economically, much better than his. Harris spent much time with
them—almost "a second home." His parents allowed him that kind of
freedom.**

“Learned early in life that intelligence and high character know no color line.

It was these folk who expressed as much or more interest in [his] mental development” than anyone in C’s community.

Miss Caroline Jones owned her home. I always called her Aunt Caroline. In her early 70’s and 80’s C spent much time with that family. They had orchard, large chicken lot, vegetable garden, beautiful flower garden. Harris did chores for those neighbors: pulled wire grass, fed the chickens, picked up eggs, picked up fruit--plums, pears, apples. “It really was a situation in reverse in the 1920s and ‘30s: a Caucasian lad in an African American setting in that role.”

Aunt Caroline’s daughter from Philadelphia, Elizabeth Bargas, came to live her mother in later years of Aunt Caroline’s life. Daughter had had a high school teaching career in Philadelphia. Through this family and visitors from small African American communities around Morganton, Harris learned about African American people and that intelligence and high character know no color line. “I cannot stress that too much. “ C. believes that “so much of the still sad music of humanity centers around interpreting differences as deficiencies.”

Did not like first grade, “feeling herded” or the recess period that bothered him. Teacher told Harris’ mother that if he did not read well he would not pass first grade.

But in the second grade, he “found my world—felt liberated and emancipated.” Glad that later in life he could tell his teacher that she helped him immeasurably in life’s journey.

Graduated from seventh grade in 1936, and asked to deliver address of welcome. [In those years in North Carolina, there were eleven grades of school: grades 1 through 7 as elementary and grades 8 through 11 as high school years.]

In high school liked Latin and algebra and plane geometry—that teacher knew her subject so well and made Harris want to be a teacher; he was surprised to be named valedictorian.

Worked his way through Mars Hill Junior College, having “very little—almost no—money.” Minister of his church on June 16, 1940, took Harris with two of the minister’s children to Mars Hill to look at entrance plans.

Lived in president’s home, Dr. and Mrs. Hoyt Blackwell. Felt close to them. Harris fired the furnace and did other chores in exchange for board.

At Mars Hill, love of affair with Greek began. Dr. R. L. Moore was Harris’ teacher of Greek and “one of the best.” Harris was asked to tutor in Greek. During that time, he also felt he wanted to be a teacher. College years were very full. Given an award: the Award for Scholarship, Character, and Manners.

On to Wake Forest College. Worked for his room in a professor’s home: Dr. Max Griffin of the English Department. Entered Fall 1942. C. also student assistant for a Dr. A. C. Reid of the Philosophy Department and went to summer school in Summer 1943 to reduce his school load his senior year. Student pastor for two churches during his senior year. Learned a great deal that senior year.

After WFC. academic years at Yale began in 1944. Earned the Master of Divinity (M. Div.) degree in 1946. “Two full years and two ‘long’ summers.”

1946-47, worked for S. T. M. degree, Master of Sacred Theology. Regular course work. Substantial thesis. Translated Origen of Alexandria, Egypt--a practical treatise on prayer that had not been done. C. “fascinated” by Origen. Peri Euches was one of the earliest works on almost every word on prayer in the Lord’s Prayer. Knew then he wanted to do study on all the works of Origen, if he did Ph.D.

Then did first three years teaching at Mars Hill College. Met Lucille Sawyer, “a best thing in my life [who] later became my wife and best friend.” Ability to discuss with Lucille problems related to God, man, and the universe continue to be best joy of his life. They married August 6, 1955.

Last two years of graduate study at Duke University.

Heavy load of coarse work and the dissertation.

Completed Ph.D. 1950 to 1952. Dissertation on Origen of Alexandria, Egypt, which was published in 1967, while Dr. H. was teaching at Wake Forest.

Origen was one of first scientific theologians. Outstanding Biblical theologian who studied Hebrew and wanted to find the best manuscript for the New Testament. Dates: 185- to 253 or 254 A.D. Branded as heretic, primarily because of his belief that the world has always been, but it is continually being created.

Origen also believed that God was so incompressible good that the devil himself would be saved. Universal salvation.

“An educator God.” Concept appealed to C.

After Duke years C. did very meaningful work in penal institutions in Virginia. Had been so busy with graduate study at Duke that Harris did not have time to go looking for teaching job.

Also helped his parents, getting older, to get moved to better circumstances.

1952-53, worked Williamsburg, Virginia—twelve-hour days in mental hospital. Learned much. Wanted never to forget what he had observed in the mental hospital and in the Virginia state penitentiary. Taught fifth, sixth, and seventh grades of English in the prison at Richmond, Virginia. African American men—three classes--and Caucasian--two classes. That was “my education” not to be had in books.

Making just enough money to pay interest on school debts.

Then one-year teaching at East Carolina, Greenville, N.C.

Served as Director of Religious Activities, taught survey courses in Bible. One Old Testament or Hebrew Scriptures, and one New Testament. First team teaching in Marriage and Family—single at the time. Had had course with Dr. Olin T. Binkley in Marriage and Family.

Two years University of Dubuque in Iowa, Presbyterian-related.

After first year, he and Lucille married Aug 6, 1955.

Taught in the Department of Religion at Dubuque and also Greek. Had wonderful Greek class. Marcus Barth, son of Karl Barth, was on

Divinity School faculty at Dubuque. Divinity school students took Classical Greek with Dr. H.

Thirty-three of his forty years of teaching were at WF. Typical load was five courses and fifteen semester hours of teaching.

Dr. Cronje Earp and C. were the Department of Classical Languages and Literature. Dr. Anne Tillett, in Romance Languages and Russian, did some teaching of first-year Latin with Earp and Harris.

C. and L. were charter members of Wake Forest College faculty who moved to the new campus in Summer 1956. Lived in Faculty Apartments for forty-two and a half years until they moved to Salemtowne ten years ago.

From 1958, they watched trees grow on campus. Joy and challenge. Teaching of ten different courses: eight in original language, two in Greek Civilization, survey course in Greek Literature in translation. Years very full and demanding.

C. quite affected by WW II and the Holocaust. Wanted to remember always “the screaming headlines” of concentration camps. “Nazi German, a most literate nation of the earth,” [but how to account for the bestiality.]

So C’s first class of each semester was his philosophy of education: Knowledge for WHAT? What gives meaning to any knowledge. Students later made reference to this mantra. Apart from spiritual moral or idea, education can be curse or blessing. This was challenge to C. No substitute for excellence. How profound this concept: KNOWLEDGE FOR WHAT? In letters at C.’s retirement, students referred to this question.

Ten hours of Greek language study for his students at Wake Forest. Taught Plato. “Can virtue be taught? More caught than taught? Is to know the good to do the good.” The relationship between knowing and doing.

Taught Life and Death of Socrates. One semester of New Testament Greek – loved working with his students in that.

**At Yale studied under professors:
 Roland Bainton, Church History;
 Luther A. Weigle, theories of religious education and American church
 history;
 Richard Niebuhr, Christian Ethics; and
 Liston Pope, Social Ethics**

Harris drew on all that background in his Wake Forest teaching.

**C.'s major students: semester in Homer. Also early dialects. One
 semester in Greek tragedy and one semester in Greek comedy.
 Larger classes in Survey of Greek Literature and Greek Civilization
 work.
 Classical Greek class was every day, five days a week.**

**Grateful for Dr. R. L. Moore at Mars Hill College.
 Dr. Cronje Earp said, "My best students have come from Mars Hill."**

**Part of Dr. Moore's training at Wake, who studied probably under Dr.
 Pascal. For all those years--fifty years--taught at Mars Hill.
 Professor of Greek and president of the college.
 Wife as bursar, keeping Mars Hill out of the red.
 Dr. Moore still alive when Harris went back to teach at Mars Hill,
 though in declining years.**

**"We could talk the sun out of the sky about my interest in religion and
 philosophy."
 Forty years of teaching at Wake Forest.**

**Dr. Earp wrote weekly letters to C. at Dubuque, 1954-1956.
 Before opening of Wake on the new campus.
 Because Earp's training primarily in Latin.
 Dr. Hubert Poteat, in Latin, did not want to move to Winston-Salem.**

**So at WF, beginning in 1956--demanding years, heavy courses.
 Building the course was very important.
 Through it all, "my deep interests in religion and philosophy have been
 there."**

"Interests absolutely vital.

**C. desire to bring a bit of heaven to earth.
 Much work to be done in organized religion.
 Interfaith relations work is critical.**

Truth and reality- words to get away from anthropomorphic concept of God.

Be involved with people's problems on this earth and diversity; justice and mercy.

**Dealing with problems of people: diversity and marginalized people.
 Agape means inclusive, unconditional caring.**

**Favorite quote from Emily Dickenson
 He who fails of heaven below
 Will fail a bit above,
 God's residence is next to mine;
 his furniture is love.**

Expressing that love. Dealing with the hurts, wounds, difficulties.

**Lucille says to speak about times of integration.
 WF faculty divided on issue.
 Time when faculty about evenly divided.
 Dr. J. Allen Easley's leadership for integration was important. How we needed to be in the forefront re: integration.
 Much admiration for J. Allen Easley.**

**Lucille said, "Both sides afraid to take a vote [on integration.]
 Did not know how vote would go, and not sure when issue would
 Get back on agenda.**

Early 1960s.

Students, as well as faculty, divided on issue of integration—about 50/50.

Students had idea to find an African student, Ed Reynolds, who had come under influence of North American missionaries, to be first black student to apply to WF to integrate the campus. Reynolds was not allowed to come first to Wake Forest. Reynolds went first to Shaw University in Raleigh. Some faculty for and some against integration.

Various faculty opinions:

Dr. Earp not in favor of integration. C. welcomed integration.

A – very hard thing in 2009, to conceive of this resistance to integration.

C. “Painful at times, since we were a two-man department.”

Elemental, basic thing--to be integrated.

C. told that he would have very few African Americans in Greek.

“I had to deal with that kind of thing.”

From C.’s childhood – that intelligence and high character know no color line. “I so believed that.”

In C’s work, wanted to live out that philosophy and to share with young people those ideas.

A – our personal journeys so important—from childhood to adult work.

“I looked forward to a school setting [where integration exists.]

So WF voted by narrow margin to integrate.

Dr. Bryan very strong in emphasis and in the work of integration.

Anne asks:

WF resistance – nature of arguments against integration. Biology professor spoke against integration and said there were differences in basic intelligence. Plus other professors [had been] so embedded in childhood conditioning [with thoughts against integration.]

That made C. all the more grateful, as a lad in 1920s and 1930s, to be so influenced by African Americans who had expressed so much interest in his mental development.

Favorite hymn of Harris: “In the Bulb There Is a Flower,” a hymn of hope written by Natalie Sleeth, wife of Yale professor Ronald Sleeth.

Dr. H. sings this hymn, which he first heard at a memorial service in Chapel Hill. Makes sense “theologically.”

[He sings:]

**In the bulb there is a flower,
 In the seed an apple tree,
 In cocoons a hidden promise
 Butterflies will soon be free.
 In the snow and cold of winter, there's a spring that waits to be.
 Unrevealed until its season,
 Something God alone can see.**

**There's a song in every silence
 Seeking word and melody,
 There's a dawn in every darkness bringing hope to you and me,
 From the past will come the future,
 Unrevealed until its season, something God alone can see.**

**In our end is our beginning, in our time infinity,
 In our doubt there is believing,
 In our life, eternity,
 In our death the resurrection,
 At the last a victory,
 Unrevealed until its season,
 Something God alone can see.**

**After the song Lucille reminds Carl of his childhood in Morganton
 when he sold chewing gum in Sam Ervin's law office in Morganton,
 N.C. Ervin "would invariably" pat C. on the head.
 Lucille said C. ate up all his candy profits.**

At WFU, Dr. Harris was given two awards:

- 1. 1988 –1989 - last teaching years, "Award for Excellence in Advising Students; "I took that work seriously."**
- 2. Senior award for outstanding teaching: The Jon Reinhardt Award**

**"I loved my work, and I believe in the ripple effect--speaking of
 theology and religion--of the efforts to live a life of service."
 Goodness is its own reward.
 The ripple effect we hope will help to bring a bit of heaven to earth.**

From an early age, his desire to teach. C. at age 5: his mother heard C. say, when C. watched his brother go off to work in a furniture factory, “I want to preach or teach.” Did not want to work in furniture factory.

Anne asks Dr. Harris to sing “There Is a Balm in Gilead.”

Based on Jeremiah 8:22, “Is there no balm, no healing ointment in Gilead. [“Is there no physician there?” Dr. H. quoted to me in early April telephone conversation. A.R.P.]

[Dr. Harris sings:]

There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole,

...

Sometimes I feel discouraged and think my work in vain,

And then the Holy Spirit revives my soul again.

There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole, . . . to heal the sin sick soul.

If you cannot sing like angels, if you cannot preach like Paul,

You can tell the love of Jesus, how He died to save us all.

There is a balm in Gilead to make the wounded whole

There is a balm in Gilead to heal the sin sick soul.

Jeremiah 14. [Dr. Harris called me after the interview to correct the Jeremiah reference.

The correct reference is Jeremiah 8:22.]

Dr. Harris added that he was quite hesitant, “trembled,” to tell these things on tape.

End of interview.

Anne’s note: Lucille Harris is to speak on tape on Friday, March 13, 2009, and tell about her teaching in the Music Department at Wake Forest.