RUTGERS, THE STATE UNIVERSITY OF NEW JERSEY

NEW BRUNSWICK

AN INTERVIEW WITH ELIZABETH BACON HARRIS

FOR THE

RUTGERS ORAL HISTORY ARCHIVES OF WORLD WAR II

INTERVIEW CONDUCTED BY

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TRANSCRIPT BY

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Sandra Stewart Holyoak: This begins an interview with Mrs. Elizabeth Bacon Harris on June 24, 1999 in Pemberton, New Jersey with Sandra Stewart Holyoak and ...

Shaun Illingworth: Shaun Illingworth

SS: Mr. William Harris is also in attendance. Mrs. Harris, where and when were you born?

Elizabeth Bacon Harris: I was born in Millville Hospital, September 24, 1923.

SS: Can you tell me about your mother and father? What were their names? Where were they from?

EBH: My father, there he is, [pointing toward a painting of her father as a young boy] [laughter] was born in, ... gee, I don't know. When was he born?

William Harris: 1892.

EBH: 1892? ...

WH: In Mauricetown, New Jersey.

EBH: Yes, and my mother was born in Kansas, and when was she ...

WH: 1889.

EBH: 1889.

SS: Can you tell me how you father, from Mauricetown, New Jersey, met your mother from Kansas? [laughter]

EBH: Post-World War I, he went to teach in the government schools in Panama. He came from New Jersey, and she came from Kansas, and there, they met.

SS: She was also teaching in the schools there?

EBH: Yes.

WH: Excuse me, may I make one correction?

SS: Sure.

WH: It's pronounced, "Morristown," but, it's spelled M-A-U-R-I-C-E-T-O-W-N. "Mauricetown," we pronounce it, but, the natives pronounce it as, "Morristown," and there is a Morristown in North Jersey, you know. So, just a little clarification.

SS: Thank you.

WH: Mauricetown is in Cumberland County.

SS: Oh, okay

EBH: Named for the river on which it sits. ...

SS: Were your mother and father married in Panama?

EBH: Yes.

SS: How long did they live in Panama?

EBH: Oh, I don't really know, but, they came back here, and he had a job in Atlantic City, teaching. By then, it was the heights of the Depression, so, he was lucky to have a job, and my mother stayed home with me.

SS: What did your father teach?

EBH: He taught industrial arts. He was also qualified to teach history, because he also had a ... Doctorate degree. No, did he have a Doctorate?

WH: ... No, he had a Masters' degree.

EBH: ... He had a Masters' from Columbia.

SS: Where had your mother gone to college?

EBH: At the University of Kansas, and I think that was all.

SS: Did her family farm?

EBH: Yes, they were homesteaders. Her parents were homesteaders, lived in the northern-western part of Kansas. We still own the property, I do, the family does, and we rent it to ... a wheat farmer whose property adjoins it. ... Very terrible place, we've been there.

WH: Just short of the plains. ...

EBH: It's where the hills are started, so, ... that is not farmable. That's pasture land.

WH: They homesteaded it back in the 1880s or '90s, and ... her grandparents came from ... New York.

EBH: ... When the free land was given out.

WH: And, homesteaded out there.

SS: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

EBH: No, no.

SS: You were always an only child? How long did your father teach in Atlantic City?

EBH: Well, they started issuing the script, what they called the script. Do you know what that was? Part salary in cash, part in this script, which they were gonna redeem when the city got back on its feet. But, he said they never would, and so, he got angry and quit. [laughter] So, we went to live on ... a farm in Leesburg. Leesburg, New Jersey, know where that is?

SS: No, I do not.

EBH: It's down there south of Millville.

WH: Cumberland County ...

EBH: Cumberland County. My uncle was there on a farm, so, we went to live with him.

SS: Did they help out on the farm?

EBH: No, my father ... sort of sat around for a while. [laughter] And then, he took a job with the shell fisheries' office that was there.

SS: Was this uncle his brother?

EBH: Yes, his brother. ...

SS: Did you ever visit your mother's family in Kansas?

EBH: It was just ... her sister, my Aunt Gerty, left, and she lived in Texas, but, it wasn't until she died and was buried, in Kansas, near her ... mother and father, ... that I was ever taken to Kansas.

SS: How old were you then?

EBH: Oh, how old was I then?

WH: When what?

EBH: When Aunt Gerty died?

WH: Oh, you and I went out there. ... This was in 1968.

EBH: Oh, yeah. I was grown.

WH: We were grown, and married, and had children. She was in her thirties, I guess. ...

EBH: So, we saw my grandparents' graves. ... Well, it was starting to get hilly, but, it was still the plains, no trees. ... Nothing green, terrible place.

SS: Did anybody from your mother's family ever come to New Jersey to visit?

EBH: My Aunt Gerty was the only one, and she was the only one left by the time I really remember. Her brothers had died.

WH: Her mother had two brothers and a sister.

EBH: One was a doctor, one was a lawyer. That's pretty good coming from a prairie hole ... in Kansas. [laughter] They ... walked, rode the pony to school, went miles to school, and I think they had, must have had, scholarships, something, to get into college.

SS: Where did you start grammar school?

EBH: In Leesburg. ...

SS: How long did you go to school in Leesburg?

EBH: Eight years. ...

SS: Where did you go to high school?

EBH: High school in Millville.

SS: Did you graduate from high school there?

EBH: Yes.

SS: Did you consider any other colleges besides the New Jersey College for Women?

EBH: [laughter] Guess they call it Douglass now.

SS: Yes, they do.

EBH: Oh, we looked them all over. We had the book and we looked, ... but, I had one of the state scholarships ... for Douglass. So, we went there.

SS: Did you have friends from school that were going there also?

EBH: A lot of the kids from my class went there.

SS: Did you visit the campus before you went there to school?

EBH: Yes, I did. My father took me one day. We went there.

SS: Where was he working at the time?

EBH: Board of Shell Fisheries, he worked for them. ...

WH: ... He worked for the State of New Jersey, and the Board of Shell Fisheries was responsible for leasing the oyster beds in the Delaware Bay, which is what he did. So, he gave out all the leases for the various plots in the bay, and, also, licensed all the oyster boats. That was great oyster country, the end of the Maurice River, which went out into the Delaware Bay, and that was his job. I'd also say her father was somewhat of an intellectual. A great reader, great reader, very, very conscious of the importance of education. ... He was one of like seven children, and, I think, with the exception of two, they all had college degrees, and this was back in 1900. ...

SS: Where had they been educated?

EBH: Well, they went to Bridgeton, in what they called the Academy, which was kind of ... a high school. It was a private school. Their father sent them there. ...

WH: They didn't have high schools in Millville at that time. ...

EBH: ... They lived with their aunt in Bridgeton, and then, they went to, well, one aunt went to Bucknell, the other went to Wilson, and the other went to ...

WH: Michigan State.

EBH: And, one went to, where did (Gee?) go? She went to Glassboro. ...

WH: Your father went to what is now New Jersey College, which was then the Trenton Normal School.

EBH: Then, he went to Columbia.

WH: ... He had his graduate [degree] from Columbia. ...

EBH: ... Well, he was in the war for two, three months. So, they didn't do much after they left.

SI: Your father was in World War I?

EBH: Yes.

SI: Did he serve overseas?

EBH: He was sent overseas, but, by the time he got there, and was training his regiment, the war was over. So, he stayed there for a while. ... Of course, he traveled around, taking advantage of the situation, as he would, and so, he never did any actual fighting, no.

SS: Did any of his brothers participate in the war?

EBH: My uncle, one of his brothers, was overseas, also, but, ... same situation, and, his other brother was a farmer. So, he's the one with whom we lived when we left Atlantic City. They didn't have any casinos, and so on. [laughter] They would have been horrified at that, oh, you know, straight-laced ...

WH: South Jersey Methodists.

EBH: South Jersey Methodists. Well, they had come to this country in the beginning as Quakers, cause they were thrown out of England. Well, there wasn't a Quaker church down there, so, they became Methodists. Oh, no, you couldn't play cards on Sunday, you couldn't do this on Sunday, ... you could breath on Sunday, but, that was about it. [laughter] My grandfather was very religious.

SS: Did you have a lot of interaction with your grandparents?

EBH: They were there in Mauricetown, four miles away, but, no, they were not friendly with their children. Children were kind of, seen but not heard was the idea. You didn't get to be friends with them or talk to them. ... As a child, I never knew any friends, because the kids in the town were what they considered trash. So, I wasn't allowed to play with them. So, I didn't really have any growing up friends.

SS: Even when you were in high school?

EBH: Well, high school, no, because, by then, the war was ... coming, it was the gas shortage, and I couldn't go there, and so, it didn't make much difference.

SS: What were your interests as a young woman in high school?

EBH: I played along the river, in high school and in grammar school. ... We lived across from the Maurice River, and I spent my summers out in my row boat on the river, ... 'cause I had no friends associating.

SS: Did you read a lot?

EBH: Yes. ...

SS: Were you interested in the sciences then?

EBH: No, no. I was more of a literary type, as opposed to a scientific literary type.

WH: She still retains a lot of it.

SS: What kinds of works did you read? Were they history, English types of literature?

EBH: Yes, yes.

SS: Did you have a favorite teacher in high school?

EBH: Yes, we all liked Miss Coombs, and the men did, too. [laughter] ... She was a sharp looking lady, despite her age, and so on, ... although, she was a math teacher.

SS: Were you involved in any clubs?

EBH: Yes, ... there were lots of clubs and I belonged to a lot of them, but, there, again, I couldn't get up to the meetings very often, because of the ... gas shortage, and getting there at night, and so on.

WH: From Leesburg, where she lived and grew up, which was on the Maurice River, four miles down from the town of Mauricetown, ... Millville was eleven miles from where she lived.

EBH: You couldn't walk there, in other words.

WH: You didn't really have an opportunity to get up there to ... participate in anything.

SS: Did you go to church on Sunday?

EBH: No. ... When my grandfather was alive, everybody went to church, but, when he died, [laughter] ... [we] stopped.

SS: Did you sing in the choir?

EBH: No, never was musical in any way. [laughter] I remember when I first went to NJC, [laughter] they would have us walk around in time with the rhythm ... of the music, and ... I couldn't even do that. I remember this ... Mrs. (Levert?), what did she say? "Miss Bacon, can't you even walk in time with the music?" I have no sense of rhythm, but, I appreciate music, and I like music, but, you don't have to be able to do it to like it.

SS: That is very true. [laughter]

EBH: ... A skinny, scrawny lady, I forget her name. Miss, I want to say, can't think of her name.

SS: Maybe it will come later. When you went to NJC for the first time, where did you live?

EBH: Lived in Jameson A.

SS: Did you live there with friends from your high school?

EBH: Nope.

SS: You lived by yourself?

EBH: By myself. Well, I had a roommate, Alma Lewis lived in Kingston. She has since died, they tell me.

SS: Who was your roommate?

EBH: Alma Lewis. That was first year. Second year, I roomed with Bobbie McMillan, who is still my best friend, and she lives in Princeton Junction.

SS: Coming from a high school where you could not participate in many activities because of the gas shortage, did you jump into the activities at NJC?

EBH: No, by then, the war was on, and a lot of it had been curtailed. People were doing volunteer work. No, I did not.

SS: What kind of volunteer work did you do for the war effort?

EBH: What did we do? I forget, we did something. ...

WH: ... I think, [in] the summers, ... she worked in a parachute factory.

EBH: Well, that I did, yes. ...

WH: But, that wasn't volunteer work.

EBH: No, I was paid, in Hightstown.

SS: Oh, in Hightstown. So, you would come back down this way?

EBH: No, I lived with Bobby's parents, gave them a little income from renting their room to me, and then, I worked in this parachute factory.

SS: Did you enjoy doing that?

EBH: It was idiot work, you know, [laughter] anybody could do it.

SS: Was there any socialization going on at that time?

EBH: Oh, for three, two months, I ironed. They had cut up a lot of the pieces for a parachute, packed them away, because they didn't have the orders. Then, they got the orders and they were all wrinkled. ... In order to be sewn, they had to be in good shape, so that we had to iron them. So, you want to stand over an ironing board all that time? [laughter] ... It was terrible, that was awful.

SS: Did you learn how to dance when you got to NJC?

EBH: Yes.

SS: What were your favorite subjects at NJC?

EBH: Oh, I liked English. Of course, everyone took English and history. I just took the basic math, because I didn't care for math. I was never good at math.

SS: What was your favorite subject? Who was your favorite professor?

EBH: Gee, I couldn't say. Don't really know, can't think of anybody that stands out.

SS: Did you take any classes on College Avenue, at the Rutgers College campus?

EBH: No.

SS: All your classes were at NJC. Did you have to attend the Dean's Reception and events like that?

EBH: I don't remember anything about that.

SS: Do you remember who the dean was when you went?

EBH: I don't really remember.

SS: Was it Ms. Corwin?

EBH: Dean Corwin, yes. That's who it was.

SS: Did you ever meet her?

EBH: Yes, at these receptions that they used to bring all the freshman to, you met all these people. Yes, Dean Corwin.

SS: Do you remember any guest lectures that were brought to the university?

EBH: No. ... Maybe, if you told me one, I'd remember, but, I don't remember, no.

SS: At Rutgers College, the men had to attend mandatory chapel.

EBH: Oh, we did, too. Oh, yes.

SS: Who usually spoke at chapel?

EBH: Prominent person of the day. I can't think of anybody, off hand.

SS: What kind of rules did they have for young women in those days?

EBH: Oh, always, you must attend chapel. You were allowed to miss one, maybe, I forget, and you lost points if you didn't, and, I remember, I didn't make them all one time, ... lost points.

SS: Did you also have other rules, such as what time you had to be in?

EBH: Oh, yes, oh, yes, all that.

SS: How did you do with all those?

EBH: All right. ... I didn't like that so much, but, ... it was a necessity, I suppose.

SS: Did you work on the newspaper or the yearbook?

EBH: Yes. I worked on the newspaper and the yearbook.

SS: Do you remember what you did?

EBH: Editing, most of the time.

SS: When did you decide you wanted to go from NJC to the Army nursing program?

EBH: Well, at that point, they had just initiated the ... five-year nursing course, had just started it that year, and so, I was in that.

SS: You signed up right at the beginning?

EBH: Yes. ... The idea was to go there two years, and then, you went to Presbyterian Hospital.

SS: In New York?

EBH: In New York.

WH: No, no, in Philadelphia.

EBH: But, I went into Philadelphia, cause it was easier, and it was closer, and all that.

WH: But, it was still Presbyterian Hospital.

EBH: Yes.

SS: When did you become aware of this five-year program? Did you know in high school?

EBH: Yes, yes.

SS: So, that was part of the state scholarship?

EBH: Yes. They still have the program, I assume, or not?

SS: Not that I am aware of.

EBH: No.

WH: No, it's all changed now.

EBH: ... Everything was speeding up for the war, to get the nurses out.

SS: Did you date any of the guys from Rutgers College?

EBH: I don't remember too many, no. There were ... so many of them and so many of us, and I was a wallflower-type, as you might imagine, and, no.

WH: She had a friend from high school still in the picture, did you not?

EBH: [laughter] No.

WH: Wasn't Ed still around?

EBH: He was off at Lehigh.

WH: Yeah, I mean, you had involvement with somebody.

SS: You were a purposeful wallflower. [laughter]

EBH: You want to be interviewed, dear? [laughter]

WH: I'm just trying to help you remember, that's all.

SS: When you were at NJC, you knew that you would be leaving within two years?

EBH: Yes. ...

SS: Was your best friend in the same program?

EBH: No, she wanted to be a doctor, so, she was a pre-med, and she ... finished and was accepted, ... where was she accepted? At Temple?

WH: Temple Med.

EBH: Temple Med. ...

SS: Did you both wind up in Philadelphia?

EBH: No, she got married. Oh, yes, she got married and ... never did it.

SS: Did you find that more opportunities were opening up for women as a result of the war?

EBH: Oh, yes, and speeding up. Opening and speeding. Oh, yes.

SS: Did you see women taking courses they would not have taken before?

EBH: I don't know particularly about that. Most everybody was full up. I couldn't say an answer to that.

SS: Did you work in the parachute factory for two summers?

EBH: I think it was two summers.

SS: When you were in nursing school, was it continuous, or were there semesters?

EBH: No, that was continuous.

SS: What did you think about the training you received at Presbyterian in Philadelphia?

EBH: I thought it was pretty hard. [laughter] Well, you worked on the wards, as well as class. You didn't have much time off, and very regulated. You were in and out at the same time.

SS: What kind of housing did they have for you?

EBH: Was one of the old row houses in ... West Philadelphia.

SS: Was it only for the nursing students?

EBH: Yes.

SS: Did you have a house mother?

EBH: Oh, yes. ... No, no more independence. I'd say less. ... [laughter] Remember that old Mrs. Hannum?) that was the house mother and she watched us like a hawk?

SS: When did you meet Mr. Harris?

EBH: Oh, after I had finished. My last six months, ... by then, the war was over, so, you either went in the Army, or you went to a VA, or you could just [stop]. ... So, I chose to go to Coatesville Veteran's Hospital.

SS: What was the name of it?

EBH: Coatesville Veteran's Hospital.

WH: ... About thirty miles west of Philadelphia.

EBH: It's a psychiatric hospital, was then, high up on the hill, and he was there as an attendant. ... Spent our last six months there. We were not supposed to date the attendants, but, we did. [laughter] ... The last few weeks is all.

WH: ... No, it was a lot more than that.

EBH: Right around Christmas time.

WH: No, long before that. ... You came there in July and we started dating in late August.

SS: Was it love at first sight?

EBH: No. [laughter] Won't you agree? [laughter]

WH: No, it was not.

EBH: ... We agree on that.

WH: ... She had a guy she was dating at the time and I kept pestering her, and she finally agreed to go out with me.

EBH: We weren't supposed to go out with them.

WH: ... I had a double date and she got one of her girlfriends up there, one of the other students.

EBH: My roommate.

WH: And, I had my buddy. Coatesville's where I was from. I lived up there. I'd just gotten out of the Navy, ... before I went on to school, but I was working in the VA Hospital. ... I had to bring my buddy along, so ... I could sit in the car and he went up to the nurses' residence and ... brought the two girls out. I couldn't get up and go there, so, that's how we got away with it. [laughter]

SS: Who was your roommate in Coatesville?

EBH: In Coatesville, Ray (Zigler?), her name was, Pennsylvania Dutch. She was from University of Penn Hospital. Wasn't she?

WH: Pretty sure.

EBH: I think so.

SS: Did anybody else go from NJC to Presbyterian at the same time you did?

EBH: No.

SS: So, you were all by yourself. How often were you able to come home?

EBH: Mauricetown, or Leesburg was my home. No, not much.

WH: From where?

SS: From Philadelphia.

EBH: From Coatesville you mean, don't you?

SS: ... I was backing up to when you were in Philadelphia. Did you get home to Leesburg often?

EBH: No, no, and I had to go this terrible bus route to get there. Oh, on and on and on. You went to Philadelphia, and then, you waited for another bus to take you to Millville, and I waited for another bus that was on its way to Cape May and dropped me off at the corner, and da-da-da-da. It was terrible.

SS: Do you remember any activities that you family was involved in as far as the war effort?

EBH: Oh, they were plane spotters. You heard of them and ...

WH: Your mother was a bandage wrapper.

EBH: She wrapped bandages, yes, and, what did my father do? He read books about [laughter] ... how things were going in the war. He was out in his own little world.

WH: ... He was an individual that there are no more left.

EBH: He could tell you anything about anything, but, he ... didn't do anything about anything.

SI: With such an intellectual father, and from your own reading, did you know about what was going on the world in the 1930s and 1940s?

EBH: No, not much. He didn't talk much. He just read. No, ... we didn't talk about things like that. He wasn't interested in conversing. He was too busy reading about it.

SS: Do you remember when you first became aware of what was going on in Europe?

EBH: ... No, and I can see how you wouldn't, because we lived in a remote place and, of course, we had a radio, but, that was about it.

WH: No telephone.

EBH: We didn't even have a phone, 'cause my father thought they were, well, I guess he'd call them instruments of the devil. [laughter] So, he wouldn't have one. So, that was not very convenient.

SI: Did you follow the national news, like Roosevelt's New Deal programs?

EBH: Yes, ... we listened to the radio, and the fireside chats, and all that.

SS: What did your family think of FDR?

EBH: Hated him, hated him. They were staunch Republicans. I always say they'd vote for the devil if he'd run on the Republican ticket. They would.

WH: They would have, they would have.

SS: They were not in favor of the New Deal?

EBH: Oh, mercy no. Mercy no.

SS: What did they think of Truman?

EBH: Well, by then, ... my mother was dead. ... My father wasn't. No, same thing, I'm sure. ... He was getting a little senile by then.

WH: They were a family who would sit and talk about the world affairs, they would talk about what was happening in town, they would talk about what was happening uptown, but, they never talked about what was happening to them. They don't open the door, you don't open the door. ...

EBH: Never discussed personal ...

WH: ... Talk and talk and talk, I can remember when I first went down, sitting at the dinner table, we would be the only young people there, so to speak, and they would be going on, the aunts and the uncles, ... back and forth.

EBH: Not like his family, very different. [laughter] Even though they were in the same social economic group, they were very different personalities, very different. ...

SS: Did you family talk about the attack on Pearl Harbor?

EBH: Yes. I remember when I first heard about it. We were sitting in this basement at Douglass, at Jameson, and heard about it, and it had happened that morning, so, ... I don't know why that took so long. I guess we all weren't listening to the radio during the day. [laughter]

SS: How did your friends react?

EBH: ... Everything from tears to ... mostly tears. ... By then, a lot of the boyfriends were in the service, or expecting to be, and they were all afraid.

SS: Did they keep you there or did they allow you to go make phone calls?

EBH: Yeah, I think we could make calls, but, the phone was like, [laughter] you lined up for a mile ... to get anything. ...

WH: Wasn't your friend Ed in the service at that time?

EBH: I think he was still at Lehigh.

WH: He hadn't gone into the service yet?

EBH: But, he was in the V-12 program. The Navy had the medical, V-12 program for pre-meds.

SS: How long was he at Lehigh before he left?

EBH: Not long, cause, then, he enlisted, of course. He wouldn't wait that long. He had to go, and then, he was killed at Anzio.

SS: Did you send letters back and forth?

EBH: To him, in the service, oh, yes.

WH: How 'bout at Lehigh?

EBH: Oh, sure.

WH: Did you write to him. ...

EBH: Oh, sure, of course.

SS: Did you save any of those letters?

EBH: I did have some of them. I guess I still have them upstairs.

SS: Were you still going together when he was killed at Anzio?

EBH: Oh, yes.

SS: How were you notified?

EBH: His mother told me.

WH: You were in training at the time.

EBH: ... Yes. ...

SS: So, you were down in Philadelphia?

EBH: Yes.

SS: Was he from the same area?

EBH: He was from Millville, Millville High School, same as I was, but, he was a year ahead of me.

SS: Was it only the last six weeks of your program that you went out to Coatesville?

EBH: Yes. ...

WH: Six months. ...

EBH: Six months. ... You're right, six months, because, well, that was the agreement, and, see, that was your tuition was paid.

SS: Did you choose a specialty, or was it a general nursing course?

EBH: It was supposed to be a general nursing course.

SS: Did you have an area you wanted to specialize in?

EBH: No, I didn't have any.

SS: Were the people at Coatesville veterans, for the most part?

EBH: Yes, they were psychiatric people.

WH: World War I and World War II.

EBH: There were still a lot of World War Is left there. I guess they're all dead by now. ...

SS: Did you continue nursing after that?

EBH: Yes. Graduated in '47.

SS: Did your family come to your capping ceremony?

EBH: Oh, yes, yes, and, I guess, they don't even wear caps anymore. I wonder if they have the capping ceremony?

SS: I think they still do.

EBH: That's nice, cause the last time I was in a hospital, of course, they were just wearing those ... [laughter] OR clothes. So, I didn't know and I forgot to ask them. I was in the hospital for five weeks. I guess I should have gotten around to asking them.

WH: ... But, she went back to Presbyterian and worked there.

EBH: I worked in maternity for quite a while.

SS: Did you like that better than the psychiatric hospital?

EBH: Oh, yes.

SS: What did you think of the care that was given to the veterans in the psychiatric hospital?

EBH: Very good, I thought. I thought very well. Very good care. They were still doing electro-shock. Well, they still do some electro-shock, I understand, but, they did the insulin treatment, which I thought was pretty bad. It didn't seem to work. [laughter] I don't think they do that anymore.

SS: Were you ever worried about your safety?

EBH: Well, you had to be careful, yes. They had some ... very bad patients. Now, there are drugs, I understand, which make better patients, anyway. They don't cure, or anything like that,

but, they do make them easier. The really bad ones were in ... separate rooms, of course, and they were in a camisole all the time. ... I got knocked on the floor a couple of times, but, you can save yourself a lot of times, and, other times, there's not much you can do about it. [laughter]

SS: How close did you live to the hospital? Was it like a dormitory?

EBH: Yes. That's when I had the Ray (Zigler?) from Pennsylvania as the roommate.

SS: So, you were right on the VA hospital's grounds?

EBH: Yes. ...

SS: Did you have certain hours on and certain hours off?

EBH: Yes. Yeah, you had various times off. ...

WH: They had more time up there than they had ... when she was at Presbyterian, because, during her training at Presbyterian, a student nurse, ... particularly later, third-year students, took on much more responsibility, cause a lot of the other nurses, graduate nurses, had gone into the service. So, the students were left with the responsibility for much of the patient care.

EBH: Yes, ... as a result, we got ... a lot of hands on stuff, that we wouldn't have had ordinarily.

WH: ... They would take responsibility like for the night shift. They might be on the ward, by themselves, in charge of thirty-five patients.

EBH: ... We were called a ... (white?) nurse. Only one (white?) nurse taking care of two or three floors. So, that was something.

SS: Was there also a shortage of doctors?

EBH: ... There was getting to be.

SS: Do you remember any incidences while you were in training?

EBH: [laughter] Well, yeah, most every night, we had more than we should have had, but, that was, "Haven't you heard there's a war on?" [laughter] I think we benefited from it's being that ... time. We learned a lot more quicker than we would have without.

SI: Was it a shock to you at first how awful it could get?

EBH: How bad what could get?

SI: How much you would have to do?

EBH: No, no, because, in one of the summers in high school, I had worked in a hospital, just to kind of see if I really wanted to do this, and so, I had a little idea. I ... rented a room, and lived with this lady up in East Falls, and worked at a hospital there for one summer and the next summer. ... They put me in the nursery, changing babies, so, I didn't really learn too much. I didn't even know you then, did I?

WH: That's the first I heard of that story. I never knew you did that. ...

EBH: Yep, two summers at East Falls. ...

WH: If you did, I've forgotten.

EBH: Lived with Mrs., I forget what her name was.

WH: What hospital ... were you in?

EBH: East Falls Medical School or East Falls ...

WH: In Philadelphia?

EBH: Yeah. I told you that before.

WH: ... I don't remember I guess.

EBH: I was all by myself. I didn't make any friends there. I was the only one my age there. Think about it, you'll remember.

SS: Did you see any of Philadelphia's cultural attractions?

EBH: Oh, yes. ...

WH: That's the kind of thing she would do.

SS: When you came back to Philadelphia, you were working in the maternity ward?

EBH: I worked in maternity, yes.

SS: Had things changed from when you were working at East Falls?

EBH: [laughter] Well, yes, it was only a short time, really.

WH: We should mention she met me at Coatesville and I was ...

EBH: ... It was during my last six months.

WH: ... Her last six months. She graduated the end of January ...

EBH: '47

WH: And, I started nursing school in February, and I came back to Philadelphia. I was at the Pennsylvania Hospital, she was at Presbyterian. So, she took an apartment, or she had an apartment with some girl, she moved out, and then, eventually, I guess at the end of my second year, ... we got married. She was working there at Presbyterian while I was a student. ...

SS: What did your family think of Mr. Harris?

EBH: They didn't know him or his family, [laughter] and his father and mother didn't know me or my family, but, they knew we were WASPy and that was important. [laughter] ... Heaven forbid I should have been, you'll pardon the expression, a Catholic or a Jewess. They would have died. One of my uncles, the uncle that built and lived in this house, he heard that my first boyfriend's father had been a Catholic. [laughter] ... He was so afraid that this young man would have had Catholic influences. I think, next to the devil, the ... Pope and the Catholic Church ... [laughter]

WH: ... It's so different today. ... Our four kids are all married and, you know, we're ... ecumenical. [laughter]

EBH: They ... could not have lived with that.

WH: Oh, no.

EBH: They couldn't have dealt with that.

WH: ... I think my family would have dealt with it a little bit better.

EBH: Better than my father or my ...

WH: And, your aunts. Your mother would have dealt with it all right. ... She was a much more understanding person. ...

EBH: They would have died.

SS: Were they worried about any influences you might fall under when you went to NJC?

EBH: I'm sure they were, but, they wouldn't say so. [laughter] They never talked about things like that. As I say, they never talked on a personal basis. ... You never really knew how they felt, what was going on in their minds, anything like that. They were all very secretive. ... All the conversation, of which there was a lot, was all very general. ...

WH: Dealt with other people.

EBH: ... Other things. You never let anybody in to let them know how you felt about something or anything like that.

SS: Do you think this was typical of most South Jersey families?

EBH: I think so. I really do, don't you?

WH: I think more so, probably. ...

EBH: You'd never let other people know.

WH: ... Of course, South Jersey was, for the most part, was Methodist, and they were pretty straight-laced. They were a non-drinking, non-swearing, ...

EBH: Non-card playing. ...

WH: Very conservative group of people, and it still exists today, not to the extent that it did then, but, it still exists down there today. You talk to some of the young people down there and you still get an inkling ...

EBH: You do?

WH: ... Oh, sure, I've talked to Judy. You can still feel it, although she's probably ...

EBH: She's divorced. ... That's like the most sinful thing in the world.

WH: ... You still get a feeling of some of the other attitudes. ...

EBH: We had cousins. Now, I'm an only child. ...

[Tape paused]

WH: Your grandmother's sister's, I'm sure that's what you're leading to, the (Turnbulls?).

----------END SIDE ONE, TAPE ONE----------

WH: ... We were talking about the Turnbulls, which ...

EBH: Oh, yes.

WH: Which was a cousin ...

EBH: I never knew we had them, until lately, and the reason was because one of the cousins was divorced. ... [whispering] "They're divorced."

WH: ... There was another issue, too. What was the other reason you never heard, didn't know about them. ... She married a Catholic, right. ...

EBH: Right. That was a Catholic. [laughter]

WH: ... The families lived fifty miles apart, never associated. ... She has since made, and I'm talking now the last ten, fifteen years, become more aware of them. ... We've had some association with them.

EBH: Now, when my aunt, the last of the six people who were my relatives, died, she died the first of the year ...

WH: January 1 of this year.

EBH: She was 103, I sent them a notice, and they came to her funeral, and so, ... they are now our closest relatives.

WH: Your closest relatives.

EBH: Yeah.

SS: You came back from Coatesville to Philadelphia in 1947?

EBH: Yes, and I had finished. By then, I had fulfilled my debt to the government for paying for my tuition.

SS: So, you had no more affiliation with the government. You were working for Presbyterian Hospital.

EBH: Yes.

SS: How long did you continue to work at Presbyterian?

EBH: I don't know. Do you remember?

WH: She stayed there January of '47 until about, ... maybe, August of ... '49, and she left there, we were now married. We got married in December of '47. ... And, she took a job out at the Institute of the Pennsylvania Hospital.

EBH: That was all psychiatric.

WH: That was all psychiatric, and the reason was, she had terrible hours at Presbyterian. This way, ... our hours were more the same. She worked a lot of night work. For example, she worked twelve to eight, when I was a student, because, ... I would be in school seven to three,

then, we'd have the three to eleven shift together. ... So, finally, my last year in training, ... she moved out there ... with the Institute.

EBH: And, it was easier work.

WH: ... It was easier work.

EBH: [laughter] Working in the nursery. Well, that included you spend some time in the ... labor room and ... all the other places. ...

SS: Were there lots of babies being born at that point?

EBH: [laughter] Yes, and you would be the only nurse there, because the nurses were still ... in the service and they're dribbling back a little by little. It was difficult. It was tiresome.

SS: Did you and Mr. Harris get married in Leesburg?

EBH: We got married in the Richardson Presbyterian Church in West Philadelphia, near where his aunts lived, and had a reception at his aunts' home. Yes, that's right.

SS: Did your entire family come?

EBH: Oh, yes, they came.

WH: With bells on. [laughter]

EBH: Yep. Remember, my uncle came. He was my farming uncle, the only one that didn't have a degree from all these six children of my family's, and he put stones in the hubcap of the car ...

WH: To make the noise, you know, so, when we pulled away, you didn't know what was wrong. We heard this funny noise. [laughter] ...

EBH: He was the only one, none of the rest of the Bacons would have done it, would have thought of doing anything like that. [laughter] But, Unc did.

SS: Where did you go on your honeymoon?

EBH: Down to ... what was it called?

WH: Skyline ...

EBH: Skyline Drive.

WH: We ... got married ...

EBH: Well, it was cold weather, of course.

WH: ... December 27th, the reason being, ... I had the week off, as a student, from school. So, we got married, then, and we had three days, and we wanted to come back, there was a big New Year's Eve party [laughter] at a local firehouse up in Coatesville that we wanted to go to. So, I think we were gone three or four days.

EBH: He wanted to go to. They were all his friends. [laughter]

WH: But, so, that's where we went, anyway.

SS: Did you continue to work after your began your family?

EBH: No, I didn't. Stayed home with my little Billy, whose now forty, how old is Billy?

WH: Forty-nine.

EBH: Forty-nine-years-old.

WH: ... When I finished training, she worked up until the time, well, ... the night that I graduated, we had been down to Philadelphia, to Presbyterian, to see the obstetrician who was taking care of her, because we were living in Coatesville, at the time. I was working ... in a general hospital. But, anyway, we come down that day for graduation and, also, for her to see the doctor, and I was graduating that night. I came down off the stage, there were only twelve in my class, I think, ... and she said, "Dear, you better get me to the hospital." [laughter]

EBH: Get me to the hospital on time. [laughter]

WH: We went ... and our first son was born that night. ... That was nine o'clock. She had started in labor like four o'clock that afternoon and never told anybody. ...

EBH: I never had much labor, you know.

WH: ... No, she never had a problem. [laughter] ...

SS: That was a big night.

EBH: Big night. Course, it became the next day by the time he was born.

WH: ... Then, ... I got a job in a state hospital up ... near Coatesville, Embreeville State Hospital, and she stayed home with Billy, and I had ... worked about three months, I guess, ... maybe five months. ... Well, I was working here full time, I was working in the state hospital six days a week, eight to four, and then, to make a little extra money, I was working in an alcoholic hospital three or four nights a week, and, after about three or four months of this, I said, "I can't continue

like this. I cannot continue to work two jobs. I'm never home." So, at that point, I went back to school and she went back to work at the VA Hospital. I went to Temple to get my undergraduate degree, and, she went back to the VA Hospital. My sister moved in with us, and her husband, and baby and that's the way we made ends meet. ...

EBH: ... Somebody to look after Billy.

WH: Twenty months, and I accelerated, I went summer sessions, pre-summer, post-summer, and all this. ... So, she went back to work then. ... Then, I went on for my Masters' degree, she didn't have to go back to work. ...

EBH: We had two children by then.

WH: Three.

EBH: Three.

WH: I went to Columbia for my Masters'.

SS: In Nursing?

WH: No, it was in ...

EBH: Nursing Education.

WH: Public Health. I got into public health when I came to New Jersey. So, I was actually in nursing only about eighteen months, I guess. ...

SS: How did the care you received as a new mother compare to the care you gave as a student nurse?

EBH: It was all pretty much the same. ... It wasn't that much time ... elapsed.

SS: You had four children?

EBH: Four.

SS: Do they live locally?

EBH: Yes. Well, one's in California now, but, that's only been recently.

SS: Did any of them go to Rutgers?

EBH: No, no. They went to, where did they go? Temple, ... where did the kids go to school?

WH: Who, our kids?

EBH: Our kids.

WH: ... Billy, the oldest, ... to Glassboro, which is now Rowan. Kathy went to Franklin and Marshall, and then, ... she went to Ohio ... I'll think about it. It was one of the schools. They had several of them.

EBH: Ohio State? ...

WH: No, but, anyway, she got her graduate out there, and then, ...

EBH: Jane went to Ursinus.

WH: And then, she got her graduate degree at Rider, and, Thomas went to the University of Delaware for his undergrad, and then, got his graduate degree at NYU.

EBH: Thomas is the one in California.

WH: ... I can't think about it. [laughter] ... Up near Lake Erie. ...

EBH: Show them the picture of Billy as a little boy.

WH: Where?

EBH: In the wooden frame.

WH: Oh, this.

EBH: Yeah, there's our first one. [laughter] ...

WH: That was his christening. ...

EBH: What is he, forty-eight?

WH: Forty-nine. ...

EBH: Forty-nine. He was born in 1950.

WH: ... He teaches high school, Shawnee High School.

SS: As a young woman who had been through college, did you see some of your friends who had not been to college ...

EBH: I don't see any of them, don't see anybody.

WH: ... She moved away, you see.

EBH: Well, there's three batches of people. There are high school people, people at Presbyterian, the people at the VA Hospital. They're these groups of people and I get them mixed up. [laughter]

WH: Well, she still sees some of the ...

EBH: My best friend in all the world I got at ... NJC, Douglass. She's still alive, but, she's ... getting sick. She has cancer of a lung and various and sundry other things.

SS: What interests and hobbies did you have besides being a mother and a wife?

EBH: Well, I did some volunteer work and I collected clocks.

WH: [laughter] ... She was ... on the board of directors for the Burlington County ... Public Health Nursing Agency. ... She was also one of the volunteers at the local library, Friends of the Library, they called it, ... and she raised the four kids. ...

EBH: He decided, when he had to take over, since I'm an invalid, he doesn't know how I did it all, right, dear?

WH: I don't know. ... Since she has not been able to do, you know, a lot of the things, ... I don't know how she raised four kids and did all of the things that she did. She was ... always doing something. ... A lot of these clocks that you hear striking around here, she re-finished them. She'd finish at night, work, and we'd be sitting down, watching television, or something, and she'd be working on a clock, or something like that, refinishing the wood on it, ... or refinishing a table, or something. She got into antiques, [that is] is where her big interests were. She became quite ... an authority, and our two daughters ... have just as much expertise as she. ...

SS: We thank you very much for taking time to talk to us and tell us about your life.

EBH: You're welcome. ...

SS: One day, you will get a transcript back and you can edit it and fill in the blanks, and we thank you very much.

EBH: You're welcome. ...

----------END OF INTERVIEW----------

Reviewed by Shaun Illingworth 7/22/99
Reviewed by Sandra Stewart Holyoak 7/28/99
Reviewed by Elizabeth Bacon Harris 8/16/99