

Moorestown Historical Society
Oral History – West End Community Center
Marie Harvey, in conversation with Richard Grey and Keith Harvey
Recorded on [INSERT DATE HERE]
Transcribed and edited by Shannon Reilly, October 2024

Transcription Methodology

Because one can't completely avoid the "observer effect" in translation nor transcription, my intention is to be true to the speaker's words while acknowledging that I will, in small ways, interpret the text. These transcripts assume that the reader will use them in combination with the recorded interview.

Here are a few guiding principles that I have applied to this transcription:

- Punctuation in the text reflects the inflection in a speaker's voice as I interpreted it.
- When the inflection is ambiguous, the text defaults to grammatical correctness.

00:00 **Marie Harvey:** Yeah, Mr. Adams went along with me. And then we had Eartha Kitt. We had the Ink Spots. We had... My goodness, it's so terrible! How you can forget over the years! Oh, Uncle Mister and them...

00:19 **Richard Gray:** Mmm-hmm

00:20 **Marie Harvey:** Oh, they were the Ink Spots weren't they? And when Mister got to that part where the man said, [Sings] "Ooo-oo-oo-oo" and you know he was flat anyway. [Sings] "Ooo-oo-oo-oo..."

[Laughter]

00:35 **Richard Gray:** I'm still trying to get an image of Uncle Mister doing that...

00:38 **Marie Harvey:** But you have to get that song and play it and listen to it, just to imagine what they'd look like. And I had Roland Brooks. Roland was the lead singer. Roland, Mister... I don't know who the others were. Tommy probably could tell you.

00:58 **Richard Gray:** Okay. And you said that you, you just went up to Mr. Adams and asked him to put...

01:05 **Marie Harvey:** Uh-huh. And we had about five lead people, and I cannot, for heaven's sake, maybe Miss Hall, remember?

[Indecipherable short talk between Richard Gray and Keith Harvey]

01:17 **Richard Gray:** So, you were saying, Mr. Hall, you just went up to him, and you said you wanted to put it on. And then he asked you, what you were doing...

01:24 **Marie Harvey:** And so, we made up these little tickets. Took them around town. And you know, people never had nothing to go to. So, the Rec Center was full.

01:35 **Richard Gray:** Was it really?

01:36 **Marie Harvey:** It was packed. We must have sold at least 150 tickets.

01:41 **Richard Gray:** Wow!

01:42 **Marie Harvey:** Mother even went.

[Laughter]

01:47 **Keith Harvey:** Grandmother went!

01:50 **Marie Harvey:** And when it was over, everybody cheered. Uh, one thing, Mr. Adams and I disagreed with, some of the people wanted to see it again, and he said, "No, Marie. You've been successful once. Don't try it again." [Laughter] And I went ahead with my hard head. But we did. We had about forty to fifty people come out, and they paid 50 cents a ticket, and we had some money coming in. I didn't keep the money. Gave it to Mr. Adams, you know, to help us with the other programs that we might want to give.

02:21 **Richard Gray:** Right. That's something. Okay. I heard Mr. Adams, I read Mr. Adams... He was the, I read someplace that he was the first Black Eagle Scout in the United States.

02:35 **Marie Harvey:** Really?

02:36 **Richard Gray:** Yes, I read that someplace I didn't...

02:37 **Marie Harvey:** Uh huh.

02:38 **Richard Gray:** ...different, finding all kinds of things about him. What kind of man was Mr. Adams? He seemed like he was a... really just a, a generous man.

02:46 **Marie Harvey:** Uh-huh. And then I went to him, told him, I want to be a Girl Scout leader, that the Black girls should have some folks, somebody to take them to camp. And he helped me.

02:58 **Richard Gray:** Is that right?

03:00 **Keith Harvey:** You were... you did the Girl Scouts, Ma?

03:01 **Marie Harvey:** Huh?

03:02 **Keith Harvey:** I said you did the Girl Scouts?

03:04 **Marie Harvey:** Uh-huh.

03:05 **Keith Harvey:** Wow! Really?

03:07 **Marie Harvey:** I had the first Black Girl Scout troop, and I don't know why they all hated Mott, but none of those girls... [Laughter] They were jealous of all of us, you know?

03:18 **Keith Harvey:** So, Aunt Mott was one of the Girl Scouts?

03:20 **Marie Harvey:** I... She was one of my Girl Scouts.

03:23 **Keith Harvey:** Yeah.

03:25 **Richard Gray:** You remember anybody else other than Aunt Mott that was one of the Girl Scouts? What remember anybody else who...

03:31 **Keith Harvey:** Who else? Who else was a Girl Scout?

03:34 **Marie Harvey:** I had Rosa and Ramona Carter, and I think both of them are dead. I had Ethel and Barbara Spencer. These kids had never been to camp in their life.

03:48 **Richard Gray:** Really?

03:50 **Marie Harvey:** And I had... Who else? All the little girls that were about that age.

03:58 **Richard Gray:** Right, right, right.

04:00 **Keith Harvey:** What were their ages? What were they? They were like, ten, eleven?

04:04 **Marie Harvey:** They were ten or eleven. I was eighteen so I was about, I'm six years older, about eight, eight to six years older than them.

04:12 **Keith Harvey:** Okay.

04:14 **Richard Gray:** You guys went to camp, you said? You took them to camp?

04:17 **Marie Harvey:** Mmm-hmm. And I think with some of that money that we raised from that show, we got a little Girl Scout uniforms, and we were going up to the Community House. They had a dinner every year, but we didn't have a Black troop, so Black girls didn't get to go. So that year we were going, and I made them all come to the rec center. Mr. Adams said, "So what are you going to do now, Marie?" I said, "I have to teach these girls how to set the table." They didn't know how to set a table, you know. And I said, we have to set a table; we want [to go] just like they go. And so, we sat down. I had them all sit down. And I said, "Now, where do your knife, fork, and spoon go?" Not one person could tell me. And so, we learned where you place your knife, fork, and spoon and your napkin. I said, "What do you do before you start eating when dinner is served?" And you take your napkin, put it in your lap. And Mr. Adams just stood there with his mouth hanging open.

[Laughter]

05:27 **Marie Harvey:** I said, "Mr. Adams, the only reason why I know, because I had to go to work for these rich white people to earn money, you know, for my school clothes." Where to place your glass, you know. And so, we did all that. We practiced, and you had to make the food, to take your own food. So, I did meatballs and spaghetti, a little help from Bert and Jenny, with a

salad. I think we did some iced tea, you know. So, we were really ready. We had on our uniforms, and we went up there.

06:04 **Richard Gray:** What camp did you go to?

06:06 **Marie Harvey:** Huh?

06:08 **Richard Gray:** Where did you go for the camp?

06:09 **Marie Harvey:** Moorestown Community House.

06:12 **Richard Gray:** Oh, you went to the Community House...

06:14 **Keith Harvey:** You went there for the dinner?

06:16 **Marie Harvey:** The dinner was at the Moorestown Community House.

06:17 **Keith Harvey:** Yeah, no, but where? Where was the camp? Where did you go camping at?

06:20 **Marie Harvey:** Oh, I don't know what the name of the camp was. I don't know. It was a Black camp.

06:28 **Keith Harvey:** Oh. it was a Black camp.

06:31 **Richard Gray:** Was it in New Jersey?

06:32 **Marie Harvey:** Mr. Gosnell, Miss Gosnell used to take us when we were little girls.

06:36 **Keith Harvey:** Oh, wow!

06:40 **Marie Harvey:** Yeah, Miss Gosnell. And I never learned to swim. Well, they got to go but once a year. I would try so hard to swim, I ain't never learned how to swim. That's why I pushed these kids to learn to swim, you know? And I took them to camp and we played baseball, and I nate [phonetic] they said, "Alright, each, each team give their leader a name" and Motty jumped up, I wanted to smack her.

[Laughter]

They said, “Well, what do you want to... what name do you have, Marsha?” She said, “Pinky Marie”. Well, Pinky Marie was my name for the rest of the time I was there.

[Laughter]

07:25 **Marie Harvey:** And we had a baseball team. I taught them how to bat. So, you know, our team would play against some of the other teams. And that was the first and only time, well, I think we went to camp two years, and that was it.

07:41 **Richard Gray:** You said play against the other teams. What were the other teams you were playing against?

07:45 **Marie Harvey:** Well, Moorestown was one team represented, but then Palmyra, other places...

07:54 **Keith Harvey:** And you guys were all at the camp together?

07:57 **Keith Harvey:** So, so, so Black kids then...

08:00 **Marie Harvey:** Mm-hmm all Black, all Black.

08:01 **Richard Gray:** So. Interesting. So, there were other camps like that...

08:04 **Keith Harvey:** Yeah, but like each town must have had other troops.

08:08 **Marie Harvey:** And then I took them once I said, “You all have never been hiking. We're going to hike.”

08:14 **Richard Gray:** Uh-oh!

08:15 **Marie Harvey:** Yeah, uh-oh! is right. ‘Cause I tell you I don’t know where I would get these ideas from. But anyway, we took a wagon. Somebody had a wagon. And this wagon, I loaded it up with hotdogs and hamburger rolls and we walked out to where father's ground was.

08:34 **Richard Gray:** Out there where the [Undecipherable]...

08:37 **Marie Harvey:** Hiked out there. Uh huh.

08:38 **Richard Gray:** So, you walk from...

08:40 **Marie Harvey:** ...from Moorestown, uh huh, I took all of them girls with me...

08:44 **Richard Gray:** All the way out to where Aunt [Undecipherable] live... Oh, wow!

08:48 **Marie Harvey:** Mm-hmm. And we went way over in one of the fields, and had dug a hole, and to see I had been to camp before, and we built this big campfire, and we roasted hot dogs and hamburgers and stuff today, kids would say, "Are you crazy?" You know. And they had the best old time.

09:12 **Richard Gray:** That's something!

09:13 **Marie Harvey:** And then we walked back. They were so tired!

[Laughter]

09:19 **Marie Harvey:** And we made sure, I had them, "We have to make sure we get all the sparks and everything out." We could have burnt down half of Mount Laurel. Well, we could have you know.

[Laughter]

09:32 **Richard Gray:** But you didn't.

09:34 **Marie Harvey:** Mm-hmm. No, we didn't. And Mr. Adams just loved me, he went along with everything I did.

9:40 **Richard Gray:** Is that right? You remember the first time you went to the West End like, how did you get connected to the West End Center? Did you go to some programs? Or...?

9:48 **Marie Harvey:** Well, no. See Mother, Mother and Father were just different, than other Black people. When Mother heard these other kids were being sent to camp in the summer for two weeks. We went with the Palmyra team. And then Miss Gosnell had a little team one year,

and she made sure we got to go with her. But other girls didn't get to go. They wouldn't have had the money. You know, it was poor times. You know? Yeah.

10:24 **Richard Gray:** So, you just went to Mr. Adams and asked him if you could create a program?

10:29 **Marie Harvey:** Mother, Mother.

10:31 **Richard Gray:** She did? She went to Mr. Adams?

10:35 **Marie Harvey:** Mm-hmm. They told her how to get us signed up. So, I just thought in the back of my head, "Now one day I'm gonna do that!"

[Laughter]

10:45 **Marie Harvey:** It's dumb.

10:50 **Richard Gray:** That's something.

10:51 **Marie Harvey:** And then when I remember when I first went to high school, they never had a female basketball player, but I said, "I'm gonna be the first." I remember my next-door neighbor, they kind of talked with their tongue tied and so Peggy said [Marie changes her voice] "How you think you're going to do that? You think you're going to do it 'cause your name is Gray?" And then they just... [mimics Peggy's voice]

[Laughter]

11:17 **Marie Harvey:** I would wake everybody in the community up every morning out there practicing at the rec center before I went to school.

11:29 **Richard Gray:** And were you the first Black...?

11:30 **Marie Harvey:** First Black. Made that team.

[Laughter]

11:36 **Richard Gray:** How was that experience feeling...? How were your teammates? How did they treat you? How did they choose?

11:39 **Keith Harvey:** Did they accept you, everybody, your teammates, kind of, you know, how did they accept you when you're playing basketball? Your teammates?

11:47 **Marie Harvey:** Yeah, the white girls were nice.

11:50 **Keith Harvey:** They were, okay?

11:51 **Marie Harvey:** Mm-hmm, they were pretty nice.

11:52 **Richard Gray:** I guess because you could play.

[Laughter]

12:03 **Keith Harvey:** So, so, Mom, I'm just curious when you... what was, what was, what was the junior high school, or the elementary, that was Number Seven that you all went to?

12:18 **Marie Harvey:** Seventh grade... You mean for you?

12:23 **Keith Harvey:** No, no, no, no, no, no for you. Like, like, the school was the, what was...? That was Number Seven, right?

12:27 [Some overlap] **Marie Harvey:** I was in Number Seven. You'd stay in Number Seven until you were in ninth grade.

12:35 **Richard Gray:** And you started from kindergarten to ninth grade?

12:37 **Keith Harvey:** And when did, when did, when did, um, Grandfather and Grandmother move into town because, because you, you guys didn't start at kindergarten, right? You came in when you were how old?

12:48 **Marie Harvey:** It was such poor times; they could not afford to bus us poor little Black kids to a Black school. So, they, we, we had to go to their school, white school, but they didn't bus us. We had to walk two miles. We'd be out there. Mother would have our boots on. They

didn't carry us to school because Father had to be out on that farm at like four in the morning. He'd be working. He couldn't come get us and take us to school. And I just remember being very cold.

13:30 **Keith Harvey:** Now, this was the school when you lived out in Lenola, and so there was a school out there. Wonder what was the name of that school?

13:37 **Marie Harvey:** Number Seven.

13:39 **Keith Harvey:** Number seven? Number Seven was, that was a white school?

13:42 **Marie Harvey:** No. Number Seven was my school.

13:44 **Keith Harvey:** Yeah, what was...?

13:45 **Marie Harvey:** Number Nine was the white school.

13:46 **Keith Harvey:** Oh, so, so they named them. Oh so everything was a number, and...

13:51 **Marie Harvey:** And Number Six must have been Lenola.

13:53 **Keith Harvey:** Okay, okay.

13:55 **Marie Harvey:** The kids would call us "nigger." But you know, I didn't care about that. We just ignored that. But they couldn't stop you from learning. And we were ahead of these kids on boogie [phonetic]. When I came to, I was in second grade when I came to Moorestown, and that was traumatic, more traumatic than going to the white school.

14:22 **Richard Gray:** Going to Number Seven?

14:23 **Marie Harvey:** Mm-hmm. Black kids were mean. They... Ole' Alice Meekins would look at you. I never had nobody shake their fists at me. [Laughter] I said, "What does that mean?" They said, "They going, she going to get you after school."

14:41 **Marie Harvey:** Get me? [Marie changes her voice.] “She's gonna beat you up!” And that was so hard. We'd run for our life every day. All but Aunt Jenny, and Aunt Jenny would play like she was tough. She said, “Come on!”

[Laughter]

14:58 **Marie Harvey:** They left her alone.

[Laughter]

15:02 **Marie Harvey:** But Richie and me, they chased us every day, and they used to chase Bert. But then Bert and Cora Meekins got into a big fight, and Bert was beating Cora so bad she bit her. Bit her on the arm so bad, Mother had to take her to the doctor.

15:19 **Richard Gray:** Is that right?

15:20 **Marie Harvey:** Uh huh. And, you know, it just went from there. Mother used to hear us crying, and she'd be out there with a broom in her hand, chase those kids. I mean, she could run too.

[Laughter]

15:43 **Richard Gray:** I know Grandmother could run! I thought I could outrun Grandmother one time... and she, boy...

15:47 **Marie Harvey:** And Miss Muse's brother used to work out there. He said, “Run boy, run! Get him Miss Gray! Get him!” Mother and that broom just whisking at his butt...

[Laughter]

16:04 **Marie Harvey:** But we got through that trauma, and then after that, I was tough, you know. And I think I was getting a little older. And you know how you teenagers begin to kind of form a little bit when the boys were all looking at you, and when I found that I just “Shut up!” I'd tell them, “Go, sit down!” I became a boss. Mr., Mr. Wearshing do you remember him?

16:37 **Keith Harvey:** Mr. Wearshing, sure, he's one who taught me how to swim.

16:43 **Richard Gray:** Mr. Wearshing? Uh- huh, yeah, yeah. Yeah,

16:45 **Marie Harvey:** He used to come to school, and, you know, for recreation, they let you have a little go outside. He tried to teach me how to play baseball. The boys would all giggle and act simple. I would say, "Wait a minute! Get in that line and stand there!" I would. And I'd have them all. And Mr. Wearshing would say "Thank you Marie."

[Laughter]

17:09 **Keith Harvey:** Ganster.

17:10 **Marie Harvey:** Then he taught us how to bat. He put special attention on me. I could bat. How to hold my bat up and not, not to chop the ball. And I don't know...

17: 24 **Richard Gray:** So, he would come to Number Seven and do that instruction.

17:10 **Marie Harvey:** Uh-huh.

17:29 **Keith Harvey:** Interesting. Mom always liked Mr. Wearshing, and I just remember because, because he was a swim teacher too, over at... Mr. Wearshing taught me and Greg how to swim over at the Community House, so that, that's where... That's the only reason I know him, because we were in the pool. He used to do that.

17:49 **Richard Gray** And he, did he teach at the, he taught at a different school, and would come there to the... Mr. Wearshing?

17:56 **Marie Harvey:** Uh-huh.

17:58 **Richard Gray:** Okay. I've heard a lot about Mr. Wearshing.

18:02 **Marie Harvey:** He was a physical ed. coach, so he went around from the different schools to give kids a little physical ed. And then there was another man who was a music teacher, and he used to come in and give the kids music lessons. And that man ain't never got through a song

and I didn't help him either. 'Cause he said, "We gonna sing roofers, rafters, Johnson and Bert." And I said, "What in the world?" And he'd "Boom, boom, boom, boom: roofers, rafters, jumping... roofers, rafters, Johnson Brown. What in..." and said, "You haven't paid your rent and didn't do this." And one of those... It was one of them old nasty songs... talking about colored people.

Keith Harvey: Oh, so, ohhhh... yeah.

Marie Harvey: I helped the kids make noise.

18:57 **Richard Gray:** Who was that? Who was that teacher?

Marie Harvey: I don't know. He wasn't there long. Uh-uh. No, all I could remember was him coming to *our* school and want to teach us some old, dumb, Black song.

Richard Gray: So, did Dad, because I know that, I know Mom and Dad and Aunt Virginia had their wedding...

[Phone rings: brief interruption/break in the recording. Keith Harvey pauses the recording.]

19:35 **Richard Gray:** Back to New York. Next time I come back, I want to come on a visit you, at your house, not here.

19:41 **Marie Harvey:** And then the last big dream I had was that, BTU, yeah, Howard and I had tried to do it once, twice. We flunked every time. But we moved back to Moorestown again. I said, "I'm going to try, Howard, to move things." [Undecipherable] You know, nobody can do anything. And so, I remember going to church, and I asked the, the new minister had just come in, what was his name? Not the one you all liked so much.

20:20 **Keith Harvey:** No, it was... Who was before?

20:22 **Richard Gray:** Oh, Minus, Reverend Minus.

20:25 **Marie Harvey:** And I went to Reverend Minus, and I said, “Our youth group is not... [Undecipherable]?” And I said, “Can I work with them?” He said, “Well, Marie, we have a person. Her husband's sick right now, and she's going to take it over as soon as he gets better.” So I go, another couple of months go by. So, I went back again, and I said, “Well, do you think I could start it for her?” I said, “When, when he comes back, she comes back, I'll gladly step down and I'll help her.” So, he said, “Well, okay, you can try it.” So that day, I asked him if I could have just a few minutes in the church before service started preaching to, to talk to the kids. And I tried to pick the most popular kids, and I saw Michael Joy, who is the one used to...

21:29 **Keith Harvey:** George Rice, George, George Rice.

21:33 **Marie Harvey:** Yeah, George ...cut the fool all the time, make the kids laugh. And I said, “George, we're starting a group, teenage group, BTU.” And I said, “And one thing I just want to tell you is they say that teenagers can't do anything.” And I said, “We're going to show them that we're the best, not, not second best, but the best in church.” I said, “Will you come?” And he said, yes. And then I asked Michael, he was, he said, yes. Well, you know, if you get the head honchos, right, somebody gonna follow. And that night, he had about eight people. And I then one of the guys, I don't even remember what his name was. “Well, what are we going to talk about on a Sunday night? People want to get ready for school sleep.” I said, “Well, we're going to talk about life.” [Marie changes her voice] “Well, we know about life. I don't like old people in the young people don't know about life, but we know.” I said, “Okay.” So, I said, “Why don't we talk about what's wrong with a little drink? Yes, if you know how to handle it, you know what's, what's wrong with a little drink before you go to bed at night or you're going out?” {Changes her voice} “Nothing. I don't see nothing wrong with it.” So, I said, “Okay, well, that'll be one of our subjects.” So, I called the Alcohol Anonymous, and they said, I said, “I want some

of your youngest alcoholics to come.” And you know, those guys were just getting started good, so they accommodated us. And then it was next Sunday's topic going to be, and I said, “Well, our topic tonight is going to be, what's wrong with drinking, a little drink?” And I said, “You know, adults, everyone's welcome to come.” Well, honey, they were out there. Everyone wanted to hear what this was about, teaching these kids something bad. What's wrong with drinking?

023:52 **Keith Harvey:** Mom, somebody's at the door. Come in.

[Someone named Lisa comes to the door. Conversational talking.]

24:26 **Richard Gray:** I'll be back on Saturday. Love you. And I'll see you. Next time I'm going to see you I'll see you at your house.

24:36 **Marie Harvey:** We'll finish the story.

24:36 **Richard Gray:** Yeah, okay, I know you got plenty of them. I want to hear the one about Grandma, Grandmother taking a butcher knife to that man that kicked you out of the, kicked you out of the, I guess was the drug store, and she said she took you back, and that man was going to apologize and she had a butcher knife underneath... That's one Uncle Pete told me.

24:54 **Marie Harvey:** I don't remember that!

24:56 **Lisa:** You've got all kinds of stories, huh?

24:58 **Keith Harvey:** Yeah, she's got some stories.

[Interview with Marie Harvey concludes.]