

**Oral Memoirs**  
**of**  
**Dick Quentin Harkey**

An Interview Conducted by

Trish Thompson

2009

Celery Soup

Creative Sanford, Inc.

Creative Sanford, Inc.

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## **Interview Histories**

Interviewers: Trish Thompson

Transcriber: Freddie Roman-Toro

The recordings and transcripts of the interview were processed in the offices of the Creative Sanford, Inc., Sanford, Florida.

## **Project Detail**

Creative Sanford, Inc. is a non-profit organization created to manage Celery Soup community theater productions. The original idea for the Celery Soup project came from Jeanine Taylor, the owner of a folk-art gallery on First Street in Sanford, Florida. Their first production was *Touch and Go*, a play focusing on the people of Sanford and their determination to overcome various obstacles, including the Freeze of 1894-1895, the fall of Sanford's celery industry, and the closing of Naval Air Station (NAS) Sanford in the 1960s. In the process of producing the show, Creative Sanford decided to rehabilitate an historic building, the Princess Theater, which is located on 115 West First Street and owned by Stephen Tibstra. The Creative Sanford offices are housed in the Historic Sanford Welcome Center, located at 203 East First Street.

## **Legal Status**

Scholarly use of the recording and transcript of the interview with Dick Quentin Harkey is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on 2009.

## **Abstract**

An oral history of Dick Quentin Harkey. In 1942, Harkey was born in Charlotte, North Carolina, and is the fifth child in his family. In 1957, his family moved to Gainesville, Georgia. Harkey attended Young Harris College and the University of Georgia, graduating with a degree in psychology. He worked first for Great American Insurance in the Claims Department and married a woman he met at the University of Georgia. After living in Atlanta, Georgia, for some time, Harkey was transferred to Fort Lauderdale, Florida, in 1967. He moved back to Atlanta for a couple of years after getting divorced, but later transferred to Orlando, on March 25, 1971. Harkey met a schoolteacher, Cheryl, through Young Republicans in April 1973. The couple married in December and had their daughter, Marianne, on February 11, 1978. After working for Great American Insurance, Harkey went to work with IMA and then later for CNA Financial. In the oral history, Harkey discusses the story of how his family came from North Carolina, stories about when he worked for Channel Nine, and stories about his time as a lawyer for insurance policies. He was active within the Republican Party and discusses the

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political and economic implications of the SunRail for Sanford and the surrounding areas. He also speaks briefly about racial tensions.

## **Dick Quentin Harkey**

Oral History Memoir

Interviewed by Trish Thompson

2009

Sanford, Florida

**Thompson** Tell me about where you're from – where you were raised.

**Harkey** Well, I was born in North Carolina – Charlotte – and I'm the youngest of five, and my middle name is Quentin. The reason my mother named me Quentin is because, in Latin, "Quentin" means "the fifth." That's how I got my middle name.

My father was a regional sales manager for a big national food company. my mother was a social worker. When I was 15, my father got transferred to Gainesville, Georgia, so we moved there. It's about 50 miles north of Atlanta[, Georgia]. My first year, I went to Young Harris [College] and then I transferred to the University of Georgia. In fact, the senator from Georgia was a professor there. I got my degree in psychology. and after, I went to Atlanta and walked the streets trying to find a job.

**Thompson** Where'd you end up?

**Harkey** You get discouraged. And I finally went to one of these personnel agencies, and this guy had a connection with insurance companies, and I ended up getting a job with Great American Insurance [Group] in the Claims Department. I went to work for them as their trainee, and they had a class in New York City[, New York], at their home office at 99 John Street, so I went up for that. There were about 15 of us, and I ended up being number one in the class. They decided to transfer me to Fort Lauderdale. This must have been in the summer of [19]67.

And while I was at the University of Georgia, I met a young lady and got married and she was from [inaudible] Georgia. We moved to Atlanta, and we rented a place on Peace Tree Hills Road. And our real estate agent was Johnny Isaacson, and now he's the Senator from Georgia. Actually, I was in [Washington,] D.C., and taking a tour of the White House, and I ran into him. And he says I still own that house – the one on Peace Tree Hills.

I moved to Fort Lauderdale and was there for a couple of years. Unfortunately, I got divorced, moved back to Atlanta, and was there for a couple of years, and

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said, "I want to go back to Florida." I transferred back to Orlando in '71, and I've been here ever since.

One of the interesting claims I handled was when the tower for [WFTV] Channel 9 collapsed in [inaudible]. I found out that they were going to install a cable for [WMFE-TV] Channel 24, and apparently they took out a cross member at the lower level of the tower. and in doing so, they caused it to collapse. It killed three or four people. I remember taking a statement from a farmer. He was out farming on his tractor and saw the thing come down – sort of telescope down – and it went so far and it fell over like a tree. But you had these [inaudible] wires that had been holding it up, and they were the size of a man's leg. They were pulled out of the ground and several of the people working out there were pushed into the ground when it hit the building. Channel 9 was off the air for about three days, and then they brought in a temporary tower to get them back up and running. That ended up being a very expensive loss for – I was working for IMA at that time.

Over the years, you have very interesting cases – when I was in Fort Lauderdale. Once this couple was from Michigan, and they had a [inaudible] where they had their horses. And then they were going to build a place in Fort Lauderdale around [inaudible] Mile, and they had rented an apartment while their house was being built, and it was on the second floor of this apartment house. It was around Christmastime, and she had gone to the bank to get her jewels [inaudible] out of the vault. Apparently, these guys were following her. On this particular evening, her 13-year-old son went downstairs and opened the door to get a drink out of the Coke machine. They were watching, so they came in, went upstairs, and said, "We want your furs and diamonds." They said, "What are you talking about?" And they said, "Don't give us any lip." and they started pistol-whipping her with the gun. They said, "Our son's coming back. please don't shoot him." Anyway, she looked like Natalie Wood and he looked like Sebastian Cabot. All we had was a [inaudible] homeowner's policy. And when I was taking their statements, he had these gold coins from Rome[, Italy] he had converted into cufflinks, and she had a \$50,000 diamond ring. And this was back in 1967. and these furs – the most we could pay was \$10,000, but I took the statement from the husband outside of the [City of] Fort Lauderdale Police Department in her Rolls-Royce, and she had her initials on the side "SAS." They hired a bodyguard to protect them and [inaudible] said, "Hey, what's going on here?" She went in with the bodyguard to look at mug shots while I took the statement from the husband. That made the newspapers.

**Thompson** Did they ever find the guy?

**Harkey** I don't remember. It was two or three guys.

I had another case where this couple was from Vancouver[, Canada]. And they'd come down to Fort Lauderdale in the winter, and they had a place right on the

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Intracoastal. They were about six floors up. and they put in a claim, because their jewels, watches, and wallet had been stolen one night. We came to find out that one of these cat burglars had come across the Intracoastal, and had a grappling hook and pulled himself up to the first balcony. And here you are – if you're overlooking the Intracoastal, you don't think about locking your sliding glass door. Basically, what he did was go from one condo[mini] to the next all the way to the top. Apparently, he had some kind of aerosol spray, because when they woke up they felt nauseated. He sprayed something to sedate them so they wouldn't wake up. All he took was the watches, diamonds, and jewels. And when he got to the top, he left with his gunny sack full of goodies. He had some accomplice waiting for him waiting on the street.

I had a case where this woman had been an actress on Broadway from about 1910 to about 1920 or '25, and she had been a friend of Fannie [inaudible]. She was telling me the story of how Nicky Bernstein beat her up. And she told me the story about how her husband was a rich furrier[?] in New York City. And when the [Wall Street] Crash [of 1929] happened, he had such a loss that he went to commit suicide. He tried to do that in New York City, and he jumped off the building. And I forgot how many stories she said it was, but he hit the canvas canopy and slid off. And the doorman went to help him, and he said, "No. don't help me." It didn't kill him. And she said he went to Chicago[, Illinois] and found a taller building and did himself in.

**Thompson** I shouldn't be laughing, but you'd think he would realize that God had a different plan for him when he jumped off a building and didn't die.

Tell me – I want to hear stories about you when you were young. Stories about Central Florida and what you remember of how things have changed.

**Harkey** Well, I moved here March 25<sup>th</sup>, 1971. And I can remember going to the grand opening of [Walt] Disney World in October of '71. I can remember I was standing there, and they had all the dignitaries walking towards the Magic Kingdom [Park], and here comes Claude [Roy] Kurt[, Jr.], the Governor [of Florida]. And these women that I was standing next to said, "That's Kirk Douglas." Another one called him another famous actor, but it was Claude Kurt. So I thought that was interesting that these women thought he was Kirk Douglas. He was a women's man. He was a lady-killer. He was on his second or third wife when he became governor. Remember, he married this woman<sup>1</sup> from Argentina<sup>2</sup> that was quite a looker.

When I lived in Fort Lauderdale, I dated this girl that was from Palm Beach. And she was a schoolteacher. And they were more like ordinary people – not rich or anything. She invited me up one weekend to go to a wedding, and they had the

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<sup>1</sup> Erika Mattfeld.

<sup>2</sup> Correction: Germany.

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*University of Central Florida*

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wedding on the other side of the canal in West Palm [Beach] and then they went to this place called “The Sail Club” on the north end of Palm Beach. And they just had food and booze flowing, and I can remember the couple. They went through the regular routines of a wedding reception afterwards, and they walked off onto the dock. And I guess they got into their parent’s cabin cruise, and sailed off into the sunset. And I said, “Now, that’ the way to get married, and have that type of reception, and then cruise off into the sunset on your honeymoon.” That impressed me.

I got involved in Young Republicans [YR] when I came here. This was in 1973. This was where I met my wife-to-be, Cheryl [Harkey]. And I met John [L.] Mica, Rich[ard T.] Crotty, [Antoinette] “Toni” Jennings, Jeanie Austin – who’s now dead and gone, but she was a real leader in the Republican Party. Her history was fascinating. She was from Oklahoma, got married when she was 14, had her first kid when she was 16. When I met her, she was in her late-thirties and was running for president of the YRs. I was running for treasurer that year, so there was a slate of us running for office that year. I became the treasurer, she became the president, and she was working as a secretary at Western Electric [Company]. She ended up working her way up to being the chairman of the Republican Party of Florida, and she ended up raising more money than any other state chairman. Then when George [Herbert Walker] Bush became president, [Harvey LeRoy] “Lee” Atwater was the chairman of the Republican National Committee [RNC]. She ended up becoming co-chair of the RNC, so considering her start, she really had a successful...

In fact, our club was voted the number one club in the country, and we became the biggest club in Florida. I can remember we had a casino night, and a couple of guys – years before that – had made up this casino equipment. And we raised – we had a budget of \$14,000 in 1973 for our club – and we raised about \$3,000 on casino night. From there, I became a claims adjuster and had interesting claims, like the ones I’ve mentioned before.

**Thompson** When did you all get married?

**Harkey** In a fever. We met in April and got married in December. so it was love and heat at first sight – love and passion. Then we had our daughter. She already had a little boy from her previous marriage – Greg. Then Marianne [Harkey] was born in February 11, 1978, so we brought her home on Valentine’s Day. I thought that was appropriate. Valentine’s Day for a little girl.

Over the years – I was with Great American for six years. Then I went to work for IMA for a while. And then I went to work for an insurance company for [inaudible], and I ended up with CNA [Financial Corporation]. And in ‘92, when Mica ran for office – he had been state rep[resentative] in ‘76, and I was his campaign coordinator. And he was up there for four years – ‘76 to ‘80 – and then in ‘80 a guy by the name of [William D.] “Bill” Gorman, who had been a state



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and Stories of Central Florida*

*University of Central Florida*

---

senator for Orange County, decided he wasn't going to run again, because Ken [inaudible], who was the Clerk of the Court, decided he wasn't going to run again. so that left open that state senate position, so Mica ran on that against Toni Jennings, so of course, Toni Jennings won by about 500 votes. He was quite successful and had a very illustrious career.

A little side note is that about three years ago, I went to the Orlando [Regional] Realtor Association. They give out an annual award recognizing a person in public service, and they named the award the Toni Jennings Public Service Award. So they invited Mica, and he wasn't able to come. so I went to receive his award, and I said, "Let me tell you the rest of the story. Mica and Toni Jennings ran against each other years ago, and now it's kind of ironic that he's receiving the Toni Jennings Award for Public Service."

**Thompson** But I want to hear personal stories too. I think you started a good one with—you got married in a fever. That's like the old song. Where'd you get married?

**Harkey** We got married—oh, let me tell you another story. In YRs—in the Young Republicans—when I met her and John Mica and all the others, we were meeting at the Maitland Civic Center. We had this thing called the "Order of the Elbow." and the "Order of the Elbow" was—drink. What we would do is, we would meet once a month and set up a little card table, and usually we'd have someone sitting there selling the tickets. Well, Peggy Spagler was selling the tickets that night, and we got raided by the ATF [Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives]. And they accused us of selling liquor unlawfully, because you'd buy a ticket, go over to the bar, and get your drink. We thought we were legal. we found out we weren't. Anyway, they arrested her since she was the one selling the drinks. They didn't arrest the guys pouring the drinks. she was the one who was taking in the money. They arrested her and took her to jail, and we finally bailed her out about five o'clock in the morning. We ended up having a trial. Lawson Lamar was a young prosecuting attorney at the time. John King was a young judge and then Terry Griffin—he was an attorney in the YRs, so he was the defense attorney. One of the people that was in the YRs at the time was Scott Vandergrift[?], who was the Mayor for Ocoee for years. So we all went in and we testified. and after that, Terry moved or a directed verdict and he told Lawson Lamar, "You know what? You're barking up the wrong tree." [Robert] "Bob Egan was the state attorney at that time, and when he heard he had lost that little case, he razzed Lawson Lamar., and one time, I saw Lawson years after that night and kidded him about it and he said, "Yeah. Bob Egan razzed me about losing that case."

**Thompson** So you were saying that that's where you met your wife and then you got married. Now, did Cheryl work?

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*University of Central Florida*

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**Harkey** Yeah. She was a schoolteacher. When I met her, she was teaching. I said I always wanted to marry a schoolteacher. I just thought they were the greatest. She was my dream come true. We have two granddaughters. Kelsey's 15. Morgan's 11.

And then Cheryl's parents live here in town. He's a World War II veteran—got a Bronze Star [Medal] and in the Italian Campaign. And they've been married for 68 years this November—quite a few years. Her father's been having problems. He had a near-death experience about a year and a half ago. He had colon cancer, so they did the surgery. He just about didn't make it. We thought he was going to die a couple of times. He's managed to keep getting stronger and stronger. He's an amazing character. He's from "The Greatest Generation." They're tough. So Cheryl's over there helping her mother take care of him and she needs assistance.

**Thompson** What's the biggest change you've seen since living here since '71? It's been 40 years.

**Harkey** The overall growth of the area and the population is not going to stop growing. The SunRail, to me, is going to be a great connector for our community. I was talking with—who heads up the [Central Florida] Zoo [and Botanical Gardens]?

**Thompson** Joe Montesano[?].

**Harkey** He's looking forward to where these school kids can hop on the commuter rail and visit the zoo. And people hopping on it to go to a [Orlando] Magic game, and the other thing is that the new Lake Nona [Medical City] that's being built there on Lake Nona. The Veterans [Affairs] hospital there will be opening next fall, and they're anticipating a million visitors a year to that facility. Assuming the Governor<sup>3</sup> makes the right decision tomorrow.

Once we get in that initial footprint for SunRail, there's a spur that goes over to the [inaudible] OUC [Orlando Utilities Commission] utility plant right there in Taft. It goes around to the underbelly of the [Orlando-International] Airport, and then it goes over to the—well, if you look at [Florida State Road] 417 and where the new Medical City is—on the north side of 417—right in that area is the tracks. And half a mile away is the new Medical City. The beauty of it is that Orlando has a hundred foot [inaudible]. You know, you see almost the tracks. Now these coal[?] trains[?] are a 100-125 cars long, so they're quite lengthy. And they have four coal[?] trains[?] a week that come here, so all they'll have to do is do enough double tracking do they can pass. Eventually, they may get them out of here, but I'm not sure when that's going to happen. but that's the beauty. Once we get this thing up, then all these veterans will be able to hop on that commuter rail and—phase one is the one we're looking at right now. that would just be 31 miles from [inaudible] to Sand Lake Road. We get that in, and it looks like it's going to be

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<sup>3</sup> Richard "Rick" Lynn Scott.

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*University of Central Florida*

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the spring of 2014. They'll be able to take a bus to the new VA [Veterans Affairs] facility, but eventually it'll be where they can take a train.

**Thompson** Well, the train will stop in Sanford, right?

**Harkey** Yeah. We're going to have four stops in Seminole County: Sanford, Lake Mary, Longwood, and Altamonte [Springs]. We'll all have our own station.

**Thompson** And it'll be right at the same place where...

**Harkey** Well, the Sanford station is actually going to be on the north side of [Florida State Road] 46, right where [West] Airport Boulevard comes into 46. So it's not going to be at the auto train location and it's not going to be where the old station used to be. That's been torn down – the old Amtrak station.

**Thompson** So Airport and 46 – that's right there before you go over the...

**Harkey** It's just a little east of where [the] Wayne Densch [Performing Arts Center] is. That's where the station's going to be. In fact, I think there's some electrical transformers close to that area. I was talking with Mark McCarty, the new [Sanford] City Commissioner...

**Thompson** He's a real friend of Creative Sanford[, Inc.] and Celery Soup. He built our snowman.

**Harkey** In fact, I saw him last week. And they had the groundbreaking for the new performing arts center<sup>4</sup> in Orlando, and he's talking about putting together a trolley from Downtown Sanford to go over to the new station once that's built.

**Thompson** Well, we have a shuttle that comes from Amtrak, and it comes right here beside the [Sanford] Welcome Center. And people bring their suitcases in, and leave them here, and then they can spend the day.

**Harkey** Oh, so they were currently doing it – these are the British tourists that come in here?

**Thompson** Well, no. it's whoever comes in on Amtrak – usually Americans. They bring whatever their baggage is off the train.

**Harkey** Oh, so you already have a little shuttle service. I didn't realize that. That's the excitement of the commuter rail. In fact – this was about two weeks ago – the Congressman met with people from northwest Orange County and Lake County, because there's the Florida Central Railroad that goes from Downtown Orlando – you know where the Bob Carr [Performing Arts Centre] is? Behind the Sheraton [Orlando Downtown] Hotel are some tracks, and those tracks come

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<sup>4</sup> Dr. Phillips Center for the Performing Arts.

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*University of Central Florida*

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right into the CSX [Transportation] tracks and they go out over to [Florida State Road] 441 and sort of parallel go up through Lockhart, through Apopka, up towards Mount Dora, Tavares, Eustis. So those tracks are there, and they're looking forward to creating their own Orange Blossom Express.

We had a nice meeting about two or three weeks ago where the Congressman brought down the chairman of the board for this company called US Railcar, and they used to be called Colorado Railcar. and those were the vehicles we were going to get for our railroad, but they went bankrupt. Well, a company out of Columbus, Ohio, called US Rail purchased them, so now they're still making the same vehicles out of Columbus. So the people over on the Florida Central would be looking at using those vehicles to provide that commuter rail service and they say eventually the people from The Villages could come over.

They would go as far north as Eustis and Tavares on this proposed commuter rail service they're talking about. Eventually, we can have service going over to the airport, and to the new Medical City, and Apopka, and Tavares, and Mount Dora – in that area. This SunRail system – once it gets going, it'll just keep migrating out and it'll provide our community with opportunity. Florida Hospital is planning on having a "health village." They've got 80 acres down, and it would be where people would live there, and they'd have a complex where they'd have offices, shops, dry cleaners, restaurants, etc.

**Thompson** For the families of people who are living in the hospital?

**Harkey** No. It'll be for the workers there. They've got 17,000 employees. I think Lars Holman[?], who's the CEO of Florida Hospital, said the [Florida Hospital] Health Village is going to cost about \$250 million. They're planning of doing a development in that blank area between the courthouse and LYNX [Rapid Transit Services]. It's just vacant. It's going to be developed into quite a complex, so there's a lot of economic development coming with this SunRail.

I've been approached by people from outside – from the Northeast saying, "When this happens, here's what we want to do." The other ripple effect of the SunRail is the \$432 million that Florida is paying CSX. they're reinvesting it all back into Florida. They're putting \$40 million into upgrading the Jackson Port and the S Line, which runs down the center of the state. They're upgrading that. And then they have this [Winter Haven] Integrated Logistics Center [ILC] in Winter Haven that they'll be building, and when it's fully developed it'll employ about 8,000 people.

The other thing is that the Panama Canal is being expanded and will be completed so they can have these super cargo ships come through. CSX has a line that goes over close to the Port of Manatee that they can extend to dockside, and that would become a major harbor for exporting and importing in the IOC. And Winter Haven will become a major distribution hub, not only in Florida, but

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and Stories of Central Florida*

*University of Central Florida*

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for the entire east coast. It'll take the big truck traffic off of [Interstate Highway] 95 and [Interstate Highway] 75 because of this. This is the ripple effect of how that money is been reinvested by CSX into the state to create more jobs. So the naysayers aren't really doing their homework. they're just looking at the cost and saying, "We can't afford it." Hopefully, the governor will make the right decision there.

This would have been in 1955, and one of my older sisters was going to Appalachian College in Boone, North Carolina, and she met this football player and they married. They're celebrating their 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary several years ago. He was from Hollywood, Florida, so we decided to go down to Hollywood, Florida, for vacation that summer. This was in 1955, before we had the interstate. Gosh, we started out, and we were going into South Georgia. All of us were in the car, except my oldest sister. she was already married so she didn't go on the vacation with us.

**Thompson** So it was your mom and dad and four kids?

**Harkey** My father was, like I said, the regional sales manager, so he was actually in Miami working. so it was five of us driving down in the car. We got as far south as Folkston, Georgia. And my brother was driving, and I remember it was raining, and he was going too fast, and there was this car up ahead. I remember it was a 1952 Ford, and there was an African-American couple in there that had stopped, because a herd of sheep had gone across the road. and he misjudged his speed and we ran into the rear of them. Luckily, it wasn't a bad crash, but it did bend in our right front fender, so we did have to go to a shop and have that pulled back out. But otherwise, we kept moving. We spent the first night in Jacksonville, and then we got down to Fort Pierce. My oldest brother and older sister were taking turns driving, so they got into Fort Pierce. And we had a '53 Buick at the time – straight [inaudible]. And we came up to a traffic light and my mother decided to change drivers. So as they're rolling over each other, my mother forgot to put it in park, and one of them put their foot on the gas. we shot out into the middle and there came a '51 black Buick and we broadsided it. That stopped us, and, of course, Beverly [Harkey] got the ticket.

We called up my future brother-in-law's parents and told them what happened. Well, he had an old '49 [inaudible]. Well, he got in the car and came to pick us up. And I didn't think he was going to ever get there, and I didn't think we'd ever get back to Hollywood. but we were there for the week and my father spent his time going up to Fort Pierce checking on the car. Luckily, they got it fixed within the week. He had had to go up to Fort Pierce to get it down to Hollywood, so we could drive it back home. On the way home, we didn't stop and we didn't go back U.S. [Route] 1. We took [U.S. Route] 27 – right through the center of the state.

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*University of Central Florida*

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We actually stopped in Orlando. And we had a big discussion, because one of my mother's aunts lived in Williston, and she wanted to go over and see her and it was mutiny. "No, no., we're not going over to see Aunt May. We're going home." Finally, she said, "Okay." We were in Orlando probably around Park Lake or someplace like that, when we pulled over to have our mutiny, and the mutineers won. I thought I wasn't going to live to make it home. Until I started driving – this was 1955, so I would have been 13 at the time – I was afraid to go anywhere, because I didn't think I would make it back alive.

In '57, when we moved from Charlotte to Gainesville – we moved in the summer – and my brother was going to be in 12<sup>th</sup> grade. He didn't really want to move, because it was going to be his last year in high school. Since it was going to be his senior year, he was thinking of living with somebody, rather than moving to Gainesville. That Christmas, he and my oldest brother went back to Charlotte for Christmas parties. My oldest brother had been out to California with some friends, and they had worked out there, and just gotten back. And this one guy, who was a friend of my oldest brother,<sup>5</sup> had too much to drink. So this guy at the [inaudible] said, "I'll take him home." but he didn't realize we had moved and my older brother didn't think about it. The house we had over there on Kingston [Avenue] – the people we had sold it to – they had taken in these boarders. so when – and back then, you didn't lock your door/ so he just went in through the front door, went upstairs, and put him in bed. The next day, he woke up and saw this guy on this other bed across the room and he said, "This looks familiar. Where am I?"

The guy said, "You're at 715 East Kingston Avenue." He said, "Oh my God." He got up and ran out front door. He was so embarrassed.

**Thompson** And he never told him who he was?

**Harkey** I think the lady we sold the house to was laughing, because it was so funny.

**Thompson** It sounds like you had some wild brothers. Now, how many boys and how many girls?

**Harkey** Three boys and two girls. It was girl, girl, boy, boy, boy. I was the youngest. Robbie became an attorney. He went Emory [University] undergrad and Emory Law School. And he was with Delta Air lines, Inc. for 35 years and was very successful, and lives in a very big, expensive house out there in Atlanta.

My other brother was a lobbyist, and he lives on the [inaudible] outside of Charleston[, South Carolina] and he had a scare when Hurricane Hugo hit there. His house, luckily, was spared, but he's only about a block away from the ocean there.

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<sup>5</sup> Robbie Harkey.

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One of my sisters stayed in Charlotte—the oldest. When they put through [Interstate Highway] 85 years ago, she married one of five brothers. And when the parents died, the farm was divided up, and I-85 went right through the farm. She has 23 acres on the northwest quadrant of Mallard Church Creek Road and I-85, which is not that far from NASCAR [National Association for Stock Car Auto Racing]. so she's sitting on a gold mine and she has four kids.

**Thompson** And it hasn't been developed?

**Harkey** It's coming out that way. It just keeps growing that way. My other sister lives out in Helen, Georgia, which is about 75 miles north, and they have an Oktoberfest up there. What they did is they turned Helen into a Bavarian village. Years ago, these businessmen from Gainesville, Georgia, were in Bavaria[, Germany], and they came up with an idea and said, "Let's go back to Helen and ask all the owners if they'll convert their storefronts into a Bavarian type of..." So they all agreed and it's now a resort. They have tubing there and we went up there in [20]07 for my sister and her husband's 50<sup>th</sup> wedding anniversary.

**Thompson** Did you have any stories around racial lines? Around integration? Anything like that?

**Harkey** Well, I can say that when we were growing up, we had maids in the house. In fact, Geneva was part of the family, and my mother paid her \$7 a week. She would come over and cook breakfast, lunch, and dinner. She was a great maid that we had. My parents were always very accepting. They weren't bigoted types. My mother, like I said, was a social worker for 40 years.

**Thompson** I was talking to somebody about the book titled *The Help*. and the people in the book say that the employers wouldn't allow their black help to use their bathrooms. I never heard that before.

**Harkey** No. When I was growing up, I knew that either you were black or white. Water fountains were segregated.

**Thompson** But in your home when she worked for you, she used your bathroom?

**Harkey** Of course.

**Thompson** You see, I had never heard that either, because our Ovella was like a second mother to us. We had an amazing story. I'm down here in Florida, and she lives up in Knoxville[, Tennessee]. And I hadn't seen her in a year or two, but for some reason, I just started thinking about her and thinking about her. and I said, "I've got to send her some money." I talked to my husband and I said, "I've been having these dreams about Ovella and I want to give her some money." He said, "Well, how much money?" I said, "I want to give her \$5,000." I had never given her more than \$100 at any other time. Maybe at Christmas, if I was up there, I'd

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and Stories of Central Florida*

*University of Central Florida*

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give her \$50 or \$100. I didn't call her or say, "Money's coming." I just wrote her a little note telling her that I loved her and put in a check. and she called me and she said they had been praying for a new roof on their house. That was what they used the \$5,000 for.

My point is that somebody – not your family, not your close relative – you've got such a close connection that their prayers came to me for some reason. Luckily, we had the money and we could spare it. I had never heard of this and a bunch of us are going to go watch *The Help* when it comes out.

Gino had said they had hired a lady and she kept going out to the garage or someplace. And he said, "Why are you doing that?" And they said, "Well, we can't use the bathroom in the house." He said, "What do you mean you can't use the bathroom in the house? Of course you can use the bathroom in the house." That must have been a common thing – maybe Deep South, because I had never heard of it living in Tennessee.

**Harkey**

Well, my final story will be when I got burned as a kid. I was eight years old. It was in May of 1950. And the Retans lived down the street from us, and we had this thing of cleaning our bicycles – you know, the sprockets – how to get them oily. We had decided to clean all of our bicycles. Take the rear wheel off, take the sprockets off, and clean them with gasoline, put them back together. We had these little Maxwell House coffee cans, so we did it and cleaned them off. We were eating supper, and then Robbie and I went back down to the Retans', and somebody left a book of matches on the back steps. So, for whatever reason, I went over, opened the matches and struck it, and then I just tossed it without noticing where I tossed it. Then I turned around and walked over and was looking down into the [inaudible] when it exploded. It was like a cannon, and this gasoline shot out my left leg, and caught me on fire, and I started screaming. Luckily, we had a hose that was set up with the pistol grip, and so my brother – he told me to roll and he put it out.

I was in the hospital for three months and I underwent eight skin graft surgeries. Initially, it was just my baby doctor who was treating me. They had just put this gook on me. My mother said, "This is not going to work. Something's got to be done." The doctor apparently thought she could handle it, but my mother went to the nurses and said, "You know, you need a specialist." so they brought in Dr. Jacobs. He was a World War II doctor and had seen a lot of war injuries. and so he's the one who did the skin graft surgeries on me.

**Thompson**

With all those parts, I was afraid you were going to tell that, when it exploded, the parts were like shrapnel coming out of there. They could have injured you too.

**Harkey**

It was the gasoline that blew up, not the parts themselves. And luckily, it was below the knee. They said if it had been over the knee, it would have probably



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and Stories of Central Florida*

*University of Central Florida*

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crippled me. It was third-degree burns. That was the traumatic event of my life. It changed me a little bit.

**Thompson** Well, what made you afraid of driving until you started driving? Were they just such wild drivers?

**Harkey** I just wasn't in control and I didn't trust anybody. Once I started driving, I didn't have that fear, because I started driving.

Wait, there's one more story I've got. This was at the [inaudible] Methodist Church there in Charlotte. And we were about a block away from the church and me and Hugh Walker—he was the youngest of five—he just had one brother and three sisters. We hung out and we were in the [Boy] Scouts [of America] together. The church usually had Wednesday night supper, and they had these big five gallon size peaches that they would use and throw the cans out back. Well, we saw those and said, "Those would make great tom-toms." so we started beating them. And we went over to where the choir director had his teenage group practicing, and we were outside beating on those things. My mother and both of my oldest sisters were in the choir, so he knew them real well. When he heard us beating on those things, he came out chasing us. Well, we ran out to the back of the church, around to the north side of the church, between the pastor's [inaudible], around the front of the church. He was closing in on us, but he had on these wing-tipped leather bottom shoes. and then we got to this area of the sidewalk where it had a thin layer of sand. As soon as he stepped on that sand with those wing-tipped leather shoes, his feet came out from under him and he just busted his rear end. My friend Hugh Walker—I call him "Wookah." I said, "Wookah, should we go back and help him?" He said, "Hell no." My mother said he never mentioned it to her, but he was probably so embarrassed that he busted his rear end.

*End of Interview*