

An Oral History of Judge Harris was taken in April 1995 by the Historical Society of the D.C. Circuit. Seven years later, Judge Harris agreed to give a more expansive Oral History, which was recorded in eight sessions beginning in April 2002 and ending in June 2002. The history taken in 2002 follows. The earlier history, taken in 1995 in one session, is included as an appendix.

Oral History of STANLEY S. HARRIS
April 23, 2002

This is the first session in an oral history conducted under the auspices of the oral history project of the Historical Society of the District of Columbia Circuit. The interviewee is Stanley S. Harris, a lawyer in practice and in the judiciary, and the interviewer is William Ross. The date is April 23, 2002.

Mr. Ross: Excuse me, Judge, I want to go over this material with you. You said you were born in 1927 in the District of Columbia. Could you tell me about your father and mother?

Judge Harris: My father was Stanley R. Harris, better known as Bucky Harris, who spent his entire adult life in professional baseball. He was born in Port Jervis, New York, in 1896 and came to Washington with the Washington Senators as a young second baseman back in 1919. My mother was Mary Elizabeth Sutherland. Her parents were Howard and Effie Sutherland from West Virginia, although originally her father, Howard Sutherland, was from Fulton, Missouri. He was a two-term Congressman at large from West Virginia from 1913 to 1917. He served one term thereafter in the Senate of the United States. That was from 1917 to 1923. He later became the Alien Property Custodian following World War I, and that's about all I can really recall of his professional career.

Mr. Ross: Did you know him?

Judge Harris: Yes, he lived in Washington during the entire time of my youth. He died at age 84, in 1950, when I was in my junior year at the University of Virginia, and so I was able to share a reasonable amount of my youth with a good awareness of him and a good relationship with him.

Mr. Ross: Do you have brothers and sisters?

Judge Harris: I have a younger sister. My sister, Sally, is three years younger than I. She now lives in Orlando, Florida. She was going to become a registered nurse and started nurse's training in Baltimore, but developed tuberculosis from one of the patients, presumably, and had to drop out of nursing school. My younger brother, Richard, is five years younger than I. He went to Wake Forest University for several years, but turned professional to play baseball before graduating. He played baseball for three years professionally. He always set three years as the target to make the big leagues, did not make the big leagues, and so he went on to, first, the front office of a baseball team in Wilson, North Carolina, and then became a stockbroker.

Mr. Ross: His first name was Richard?

Judge Harris: Richard, yes. He had played at Charlotte, which was a Washington Senators' farm team.

Mr. Ross: Right. Do you have grandchildren?

Judge Harris: We have none as yet. I did not get married until I was about thirty-six. My oldest son did not get married until he was about thirty-six, so our first grandchild will be born in just about two months, with the expected due date being June 13th of this year.

Mr. Ross: Congratulations!

Judge Harris: Thank you.

Mr. Ross: Where did you live, say during the first five, six, seven or eight years of your life?

Judge Harris: I've had a little trouble reconstructing those first few years. We lived, I think, on Connecticut Avenue, not far from the Taft Bridge, but I've had trouble pinning that down. When I was five, we moved into Spring Valley on Hillbrook Lane. I can remember

that rather clearly because that's about when one's recollection begins to be recallable. And we lived in Spring Valley until about my sophomore year in high school, when we moved to 44th Place in Wesley Heights.

Mr. Ross: Right. What sort of house did you have? You had a house in Spring Valley, did you?

Judge Harris: Yes.

Mr. Ross: And then a house in Wesley Heights.

Judge Harris: Yes.

Mr. Ross: Were these suburban? Do you call them suburban houses?

Judge Harris: Well, Wesley Heights and Spring Valley at the time, I suppose, were among our more upbeat communities on the northwestern edges of town and comfortable homes, but not at all ostentatious or sprawling.

Mr. Ross: During this entire time was your father managing the baseball team here?

Judge Harris: My father managed major league teams for a total of twenty-nine years, and he had three tours with the Washington Senators, two with the Detroit Tigers, one with the Boston Red Sox, one with the Philadelphia Phillies, one with the New York Yankees. I must confess I'm a little hazy on the details of how all of the twenty-nine years were spent with which cities. He also was general manager of the Red Sox for a period of time. He was assistant general manager of the New York Yankees before he became their manager in 1947, during which year they won the world's championship.

Mr. Ross: Did your family reside in Washington during all or part of this time,

even though he was working out of the city?

Judge Harris: Professional sports in general and, I think, baseball in particular can be very difficult on marriages, and my father, who started managing here in Washington in 1924, ended up going to Detroit in 1928, I believe, and as time went on the family always stayed here in Washington, and the separations between my mother and my father became longer and more difficult as baseball took him more and more to other cities, and ultimately they became divorced in the mid-1940s, although they remained throughout their entire lives very devoted to one another, indeed, occasionally, considered the possibility of remarrying, although each of them in the meantime following their divorce from each other, each did marry someone else one time.

Mr. Ross: So, you had a stepfather.

Judge Harris: Yes.

Mr. Ross: How old were you when that marriage took place?

Judge Harris: That was after I got out of the service. My mother was married to a man named Louis Allen, who was a television weatherman for WMAL-TV here in Washington, a station which coincidentally I later became a lawyer for. Louis was a fine fellow and I enjoyed his company.

Mr. Ross: Give me a little bit of a feel, if you can, as to what it was like to be a ten-year old, let's say, and then a teenager -- you lived in these three places in Washington, the two later ones particularly you can remember. What was the feel -- your father was away a great deal of the time?

Judge Harris: Yes, even when he was managing here, of course, fifty percent of the season was spent on the road.

Mr. Ross: Right.

Judge Harris: And, as a youngster, he invariably, that is, every day that I wasn't in school, would take me to the ballpark. I always had a uniform of the home team. I traveled with the clubs that he had once a year typically. I remember, for example, as an eleven-year old taking a road trip with the Washington Senators, and that would have been in 1939, and that particular trip was rather memorable in that we ended up in Yankee Stadium on July 4th of 1939 with Washington playing the Yankees that day, and that happened to be the day on which Lou Gehrig gave his rather immortal retirement speech, dying of ALS and stating quite memorably that that day he considered himself to be the luckiest man on the face of the earth.

Mr. Ross: What were the things that interested you most in the experience of being associated with your father and with the team?

Judge Harris: I suppose thinking back on my childhood, that it revolved so closely about the family and my father's ball clubs and my school, whatever school I happened to be in at the time. The players who played for my father were just great with me as a kid. For example, I was a left-handed first baseman as a young man and never had to buy a glove. Mickey Vernon always gave me his once he was through with them. If I took a road trip with the team, in order to give my dad a night off from looking out for me, I would be taken to dinner by the likes of Shirley Povich, one night, or Bob Considine, another night, or Francis Stann, another night, with those of course being very well-known sportswriters of the day.

Mr. Ross: I'm interested particularly in your accounts of your father to see possibly what extent they come forward in time reflected in you.

Judge Harris: Well, I suppose there's a good and a bad side to everything. My

father was of necessity one who did not permit himself to become too close to his players, because had he permitted himself to do so and had he been forced to cut a particular player, tell him he was through, it would have been much more difficult if he had been too close to them. And, somewhat of that reserve carried over into his relationships with his children. And, having grown up with that sort of a father, and he was a great guy, I often fear that I've had a little bit of the same sort of reserve with my children. I don't know whether it's been appropriate not to try to overly direct what they're doing or whether I should have been more controlling, but we are what we are.

Mr. Ross: I suppose one of the things one can learn if one chooses to in later years is the impracticality of trying to assert some kind of ultimate control over children.

Judge Harris: Yes, I've always had the fear if I attempted to exert too much influence towards one of our sons and lead them in a direction that they ultimately found themselves unhappy in that I would bear some negative feelings about that. For example, our oldest son, who is now a lawyer, I neither encouraged or discouraged to go to law school. I simply told him that if he decided to become a lawyer, he'd be a very good one and let it go at that.

Mr. Ross: So, you were very much absorbed in the team, and I guess you would have gotten to know pretty well any number of people who were involved with the team, the players and coaches and so on.

Judge Harris: Yes.

Mr. Ross: Did you ever meet Walter Johnson?

Judge Harris: I met him but I did not know him. Walter's playing days ended the

year I was born. He pitched in the 1924 and '25 World Series; that was pretty much the twilight of his career. I was not born until 1927, so by the time I was able to relate to Dad's players, Walter Johnson was no longer in the picture.

Mr. Ross: The Johnsons were neighbors of ours and we saw more of his mother than we did of their family because they lived further out, but a childhood playmate of mine was one of his sons. We used to hunt together. I had a memorable occasion when that boy said, "Do you want to catch Pa?" And, I said, "What?" And he said, "Pa's out there. Let's go on out." So we went out, and I had, of course, seen Mr. Johnson around and said, "How are you, Sir?" and so on. So, he said, "Sure." So, Pug, this is what I called him, got a catcher's mitt, and Johnson went in and came out with baseballs, and he could hold a large number of baseballs in one hand, and Pug -- there was sort of a pitcher's mound there outside of their house and a home plate, and so on -- and so he said, "Now you squat down like this," and he put a mask on me and said, "Hold your glove and for God's sake, don't move it." So, then Pug came behind me, you see, and Johnson wound up and let loose. There was a kind of hissing sound, you know, and then something I couldn't see came right at me. He threw about eight or ten balls at me and each one hit this little spot just like that, you know, so I "caught" Walter Johnson. He was a very taciturn man, friendly, very nice man, but not one to engage in long conversations with small boys.

Judge Harris: I later had some modest contacts with his daughter, Carolyn, and his son, Walter, but I never really knew him anywhere near as well as many of Dad's players.

Mr. Ross: So, you were involved with the team, and, of course, you were involved with your family. Did you like to hunt or hike or fish?

Judge Harris: No, I was never big on that, and I think back on one occasion on

which my father, who did like to hunt and later came to like to fish, took me to a farm, and there was a rabbit along a hedgerow, and I was encouraged by some of the adults there to shoot that rabbit with a shotgun. The rabbit was not moving, and I was not very pleased with what I had done after I had done it, and I haven't done much in the way of hunting ever since except for occasionally blasting a dratted crow.

Mr. Ross: Did you have aspirations about playing baseball as your brother, for example?

Judge Harris: I played all of my life in school, in the service, in college, a little semi-pro, but while I think I could field well enough to play in the big leagues, I certainly could not hit well enough to play in the big leagues. And if you're not going to make the big leagues, to me, pursue an education and let the baseball go by the boards after you've had a lot of fun with it.

Mr. Ross: Were you a reader?

Judge Harris: Not extensively. I think my family generally is not among the world's most rapid readers, and I've read some, but I would not say I'm a voracious reader. Now, of course, professionally I've had to do an awful lot of reading, enough so that recreational reading did not have as much appeal to me as if I had some other way of making a living.

Mr. Ross: Spending the day with the statutes at large is not conducive to spending an evening with Plato or Shakespeare.

Judge Harris: Particularly since the advent of television, which makes it a lot easier just to sit down and relax.

Mr. Ross: Tell me about your mother.

Judge Harris: My mother was a marvelous woman, a lovely woman, a very fine person, who maintained a loving home for all three of us. And, as I said, she and Dad had a great relationship that did deteriorate some as can happen, but all my memories of her are very fond. She later developed cancer of the tongue and jaw and died at seventy-three in 1978 about a year after my father died on his 81st birthday.

Mr. Ross: She came from partly a political background.

Judge Harris: Yes, she came to Washington when her father was elected to the House of Representatives, and the family stayed here from then on.

Mr. Ross: Did you pick up on that political scene at all at that time? Did you have associations with your grandfather and perhaps other relatives?

Judge Harris: Oh, I remember other members of the Senate that would socialize with my grandparents, and I came to know some of them as a little kid being with others. Washington was quite a different city, of course, in those days, and Calvin Coolidge was quite a baseball fan when he was President. And when my mother and father were married, the Coolidges were invited to the wedding and came. And some years later after my mother died, I went through her papers and was intrigued to find a handwritten letter signed by Grace Coolidge saying the President and I accept your kind invitation to the wedding of Stanley Harris and Elizabeth Sutherland. The wives of Presidents in those days did not have staffs and took care of their social obligations on their own.

Mr. Ross: Where did you go to school?

Judge Harris: I began at Horace Mann Elementary School, which is on New Mexico Avenue, roughly between Spring Valley and Wesley Heights, so it is essentially the same

school district. After going through that elementary school, I went to Landon School in Bethesda, Maryland, for the seventh, eighth and ninth grades. The life of a baseball manager is an insecure one. If a team does poorly, you cannot fire the players, so you fire the manager. So, while he managed for twenty-nine years, which was more than any man in the history of the game who did not have an ownership interest in his team, with those two other men being Connie Mack of the Philadelphia Phillies and John McGraw of the New York Giants, still Dad ended up being fired a number of times and one of those firings coincided with the time to pay the Landon tuition, and so I left Landon and went to Woodrow Wilson High School here in Washington, where I finished in 1945.

Mr. Ross: Woodrow Wilson was a fine school in those days.

Judge Harris: It certainly was, and one of the things people so seldom talk about in this era of women lawyers and women doctors with the limited professional opportunities that women had back then, the terribly, terribly, bright female teachers that we had in public high schools in those days were just pretty mind-boggling. They were wonderful.

Mr. Ross: That certainly is true, isn't it? That's an interesting observation.

Judge Harris: With teaching and nursing being the principal occupational opportunities for bright women in those days.

Mr. Ross: So, you went on to the University of Virginia.

Judge Harris: Well, when I graduated from Wilson in 1945, World War II was still going on. I was seventeen. I enlisted in the Army Specialized Training Reserve Program and was sent to VPI, Virginia Polytechnic Institute, in Blacksburg, Virginia, for a number of months before going on regular active duty with the Army. I spent two years in the Army, most

of which was spent as an instructor at the Engineering School at Fort Belvoir, Virginia. I was discharged in 1947 and then entered the University of Virginia.

Mr. Ross: What kind of a college was undergraduate college? What kind of a place was the university?

Judge Harris: I absolutely loved it at the time, and I think that the total student body when I was there, when I began in 1947, was only about 5,000 students. It was not yet coed. The Mary Washington College in Fredericksburg, Virginia, was the Mary Washington College of the University of Virginia. That happens to be the college to which my wife went, although I did not know her at that point. She's fourteen years younger than I. Virginia was a wonderful school at that point. Charlottesville, much like Washington, was a relatively sleepy community, grown considerably since.

Mr. Ross: You think you got a good education there?

Judge Harris: Yes, very much so. I had an unlikely pair of objectives when I got out of the Army and began to pick a school. I decided upon Virginia because I thought it had the ideal combination of a first-rate varsity baseball team and a first-rate law school. Not denigrating the undergraduate school which was very good, but the law school, I think, was higher ranked nationally and it had a superb baseball team, so the two appealed to me greatly.

Mr. Ross: And it worked out?

Judge Harris: Yes, sir.

Mr. Ross: As a boy who had grown up in Washington, did you feel comfortable with an atmosphere, the culture of the university, accepting of it?

Judge Harris: Yes, although at that point there's no question but that some of the

students, and again they were all males, some of the students from more southern jurisdictions were more segregationist than I at that point, but there always is going to be a mix of viewpoints at any institution.

Mr. Ross: Yes.

Judge Harris: And, you didn't have to go very far south to encounter that, a lot of the folks from Richmond were still quite of the segregationist orientation.

Mr. Ross: Do you remember a teacher that made the strongest impact on you?

Judge Harris: No, the undergraduate professors from whom I took courses were not really known to me. I personally never developed any relationships with them. The law school faculty I thought was outstanding, and there with a smaller community and sharing more social events I came to know a number of the professors reasonably well and had very high opinions of all them with whom I dealt, no particular one, with the possible exception of a man named Hardy Dillard, who later became Dean and later served on the Court of International Justice in the Hague and was my contracts professor and was quite an extraordinary individual.

Mr. Ross: What sort of girls did you date when you were in, say, college and law school?

Judge Harris: Nice girls, attractive girls.

Mr. Ross: Mary Washington girls?

Judge Harris: I think I did date one Mary Washington girl before my wife went there, but I tended to be more of a somewhat serial dater of nice young ladies who were integrated into my family as friends of everybody and never quite got around to marrying any of them until falling in love with my wife.

Mr. Ross: One might say you were fortunate.

Judge Harris: Yes, sir.

Mr. Ross: Did you write anything that you can recall or you have retained during those years? Did you try your hand at different kinds of writing?

Judge Harris: No, nothing beyond what I had to do for school, with the first significant writing coming, of course, after I had entered law school, writing for the law review, but essentially not doing anything other than that.

Mr. Ross: Theatrics?

Judge Harris: Yes, I did some theatrics at Landon. I was part of the group that would put on plays. With Landon being a boys' school, when I was there in the seventh, eighth and ninth grades, I was smaller and younger than the high-school age guys, so in a couple of their plays it fell my lot to play the role of the female. And in law school we put on what was called the Libel Show every year, my legal fraternity which was lampooning law school life in general and the faculty in particular, and I was quite active both in writing and acting.

Mr. Ross: I went to St. James School and we played Landon in sports at that time regularly.

Judge Harris: I might add that my principal cohort in law school and in writing and acting in what we called the Libel Show was my classmate and life-long friend, Barrett Prettyman.

Mr. Ross: Yes. Barrett Prettyman, Sr., and my father were very close friends. I knew something of Barrett when we were boys, although he was older than I was, some few years. That makes a big difference then.

Judge Harris: The senior Prettyman, Judge Prettyman, was very gracious to me, having gotten to know him through his son, Barrett. He always invited me to the Circuit Judicial Conference and proposed me for membership in the Chevy Chase Club and in general was just a marvelous guy and very supportive of me. I was very fond of him.

Mr. Ross: Did you get to know Bo Laws, who was very close to our family?

Judge Harris: Not well. My later law partner, Frank Reifsnyder, married Nancy Lee Laws, one of Bo Laws' daughters, and I knew his son, Bolitha, Jr.

Mr. Ross: Bozie.

Judge Harris: Bozie, well, but I believe that the timing of Judge Laws' death was such that I was very young in the legal profession when he died of what I believe was a brain tumor. I had met him, but did not really know him.

Mr. Ross: And Nancy Lee was a brilliant young woman. I remember her wedding so well to Frank, and then her youngest sister, Ileta, Leta Laws, was a beautiful woman.

Judge Harris: Yes, still is. I just got a letter from Frank Reifsnyder saying that Nancy Lee's health is not that great.

Mr. Ross: I had heard that. I saw him six months ago. Did you like Landon?

Judge Harris: Yes, but I'm one of those folks -- toss me in any pool and I'm happy in it. I enjoy whatever surroundings I happen to find myself in and look for the bright side of things rather than for the negative. I was very happy at Landon, I was very happy at Wilson, very happy at Virginia. I like the pools that I swim in.

Mr. Ross: Well, for those of us who had rough edges and dissatisfactions, you're almost too well adjusted one might say.

Judge Harris: Indeed, I fairly enjoyed the Army.

Mr. Ross: Wow! I was in the Navy in the Pacific on a destroyer being a little bit older than you. I enjoyed that. We didn't get hit very hard and that was the important thing.

Judge Harris: In retrospect, I was pretty fortunate in the Army in that I did play baseball for the Fort Belvoir team, but I did that at a time when I happened to be an instructor at the Engineering School, which taught not only soldiers who were engineers but also officers from the armies from other countries. I didn't realize it at the time but in retrospect, having been an eighteen-year-old kid and standing up in front of an awful lot of people, having to teach a relatively complex subject, namely topographic photogrammetry, which is the making of maps from aerial photographs, was marvelous accidental training for becoming a lawyer.

Mr. Ross: Yes, I would think so, yes. When you graduated from law school, you went into Frank Hogan and Nelson Hartson's law firm.

Judge Harris: Correct, although Frank Hogan had died in 1944. Nels Hartson, of course, I got to know well, but I did not know Frank Hogan.

Mr. Ross: I notice from the deposition that --

Judge Harris: Randy Norton.

Mr. Ross: Randy Norton's deposition, I'm having a lapse on George, your litigation partner there.

Judge Harris: Nubby Jones was the --

Mr. Ross: Yea.

Judge Harris: Edmund Jones was the principal litigation partner.

Mr. Ross: Yes, that was George Horning. I saw a lot of George Horning because

he was involved with energy law, and I remember being out at one of the bar conventions having a drink with him, and he was a colorful character.

Judge Harris: Yes.

Mr. Ross: Could be difficult.

Judge Harris: It was his difficultness that led to El Paso Natural Gas, which was our principal client in that area, deciding that they would not wish to continue to have him do their work. George Horning had been an officer in the Navy during the war. He had a tendency to think that people fit into two categories, either flag rank officers or ordinary seamen.

Mr. Ross: Ordinary seamen.

Judge Harris: And what happens in the business world, of course, is that the ordinary seaman that you sometimes do not treat so well when they're kids, ultimately become officers of your clients.

Mr. Ross: I've seen that happen. I was out having a drink with him somewhere. He had had a drink or two, and he raised his glass, and he said, "Bill, I propose a toast to my clients." I said, "Fine, George, we'll drink to that." He said, "I love my clients, but next to loving them, I love the man that sues my clients."

Judge Harris: Well, your recollection is quite correct in that George did basically trial work before he got into the work for El Paso Natural Gas. I think of him often when I go into town and look over at Rosslyn with the practically Manhattan-like appearance of Rosslyn, Virginia, remembering when it was just a sleepy little area of two-story buildings, one of which was Horning's Pawn Shop, for which I assume he was very well paid when they sold it.

Mr. Ross: Good location. Oh, he was a character.

Judge Harris: He loved to go to lunch with associates at the firm, but would very carefully never pay the sales tax on his portion of the bill.

Mr. Ross: Well, we have been going for an hour and a half roughly, and I think I've done more talking than you have, but that will not be the rule in subsequent sessions. Why don't we break now and schedule another one soon if your time permits. This concludes the first tape of the oral history of Stanley Harris held on April 23, 2002. It's adjourned.