

Berry Harris (1929-)**Musician****Oral history recorded September 2, 2015 (Run time 1:03:01)**

Berry Harris was interviewed on September 2, 2015, in his home, Wichita, Kansas. The interview was conducted by Teresa Baumgartner, with Steve Cless as the videographer, and his student assistant. Also present at the interview were Melody McCray-Miller and Carole Branda, representing the Kansas African American Museum, and Berry's wife, Loretta.

Born November 27, 1929 in Chockie, Oklahoma, musician Berry Harris has played the blues for over 70 years, in just about every club in Wichita. Berry recollects the many experiences his guitar has brought him. Among music fans he met were three white women from Augusta, who frequented his club and his neighborhood in the 1950s.

In his oral history, Berry identified one of those women as Madelyn Payne Dunham. However, Berry was never in Wichita until 1957. Although Madelyn and Stanley lived briefly in El Dorado after the war years, they moved permanently from the area shortly after Stanley's 20 year class reunion in 1955. In 1957, Madelyn was in her mid-thirties, living in Seattle with her husband and daughter. The factual record indicates that Madelyn Payne Dunham, President Obama's grandmother, could not have been the Madelyn that Berry remembers.

We have included his interview in the collection, as his memories are relevant to place and to themes that have emerged from the project, keeping in mind that an oral history is a subjective narrative. We do not always remember events exactly as they were, but as we perceive them to have been, in later reflection.

00.00-00.	Camera, sound adjustments
00.00-05.30	Personal information: Berry T. Harris was born 11/27/29 in Chockie, Oklahoma, Atoka County, between Highway 69 and the Acadia Railway tracks. He describes the places he lived in childhood, his parents and grandparents. His dad was a World War I veteran. Berry joined the army in 1948 and was stationed in Osaka, Japan, but struggles with addiction sent him home. He describes his love for guitar and music and how he came to be a musician playing in a band in Muskogee, OK.
05.31-08.47	How he came to Wichita, where he played in Wichita: He was playing at the Bomber Club when he says he met "Madelyn, Nancy, Suzanne," and also "Marilyn." He identifies the year as 1957. He also describes how these young women visited the neighborhood where he lived.
08.48-11.59	About inactive period when music tastes changed: Berry talks about wife, Loretta, and their two children. How they lost a daughter in January of 06. He talks about caring for, and his devotion to his wife.
12.00-14.55	Questions about Madelyn: Melody asks about Madelyn. He didn't know her last name, but knew who she was by the connection to Obama. He repeats that the time period was 1957-58 and estimated her to be about 18. Berry also confirmed that he was never in Wichita before 1957.
14.56-19.59	More about Madelyn and company: Berry talks about "this other girl," Suzanne Overchain (sp?): She lived at 805 State Street in Augusta. She liked Berry, who had not yet met Loretta. He even considered marriage

	with her, but made a point of saying there was no sexual interaction. Asked again about these girls visiting, he remembers daytime visits by them to his neighborhood, lot of music being played, emphasized “no smoking weed,” but plenty of drinking. He notes it was a rooming house with a lot of people around. “Everybody was just friendly with each other.” Reiterates that it was three girls and Madelyn was one. When he quit playing there, he didn’t see them anymore. He estimates the time span to have been a year or more. Someone’s mother’s friend (Loretta mentioned here) worked at the courthouse and told them there was going to be a police raid. That seems to have ended the interactions. (This Bomber Club was over by McConnell—and Boeing.)
20.00-24.28	Places he’s played: Berry started playing on Cleveland, then on 9 th Street, where he met Loretta. He talks about how he met her, their courtship and marriage. Clarification: the Bomber Club was a white club. The three young women were the only ones who came to their neighborhood. He talks about some other places he played, other clubs and other towns in Kansas.
24.29-32.45	Travel and opportunities connected to music: (Doorbell interruption.) Berry talks about how he learned about prostitution and its connection to poverty, both in Japan, and in America. He described an experience of discrimination when he was playing at Junction City. This was in 1959. He reminisced about opportunities he’s had to travel and play, including the Outer Banks of North Carolina, although he gave up an opportunity to go to Europe. He shares thoughts about going home to Stringtown, Oklahoma, the folks “on the hill,” and death. He thinks his planned trip for a festival will be last trip home. He notes where he’s playing now, “Pig-in Pig-out Barbecue” (over three years) and share some reflective thoughts about his mother and how she taught him discipline. He says, “I don’t know nothin’ about segregation. Everybody was poor; white people and black people, we was all eating out of the same bucket.”
32.46-36.35	On segregation: He talks about going to segregated schools, and the one or two times he’s been called the “N” word. He tells a story about an experience with segregation at a roadside diner, when he stood up to the owner and got his hamburger.
36.36-53.14	Importance of music in life and final thoughts: Berry talks about music as a passion and music to put food on the table (supplement income). He tells a story about playing at the Officer’s Club, eating breakfast at work and how the cook made sure he took food home to his family. In his final reflections on life and faith and struggles, he says, “I ain’t been perfect, but I’ve been good.” He has played music for 70 years, plays guitar, keyboard, and harmonica—and tells jokes.
53.15-01.02.06	Berry plays music: Berry place some of his music on camera.
01.02.22-01.03.01	Conversation with Steve’s student assistant. Ending conversation.