

**Interview with
Michael Harris
by Matthew Moore,
June 20, 1997**

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Released Form signed by Michael Harris
June 20, 1997, at Camp Washington Carver, West Virginia

Transcriber not identified
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Michael Harris Interview

Matthew Moore: This is Matt Moore. I'm with Michael Harris at Camp Washington Carver. [June 1997] And I'm this interview with the Oral History of Appalachia Program. Could you kind of give me some background information, such as birth date, hometown....?

Michael Harris: My birth date is February the 14th, 1947. I'm a Valentine's baby. And my hometown is Bluefield, West Virginia.

MM: And when you're working with the camp, where is your hometown then?

MH: Uh...my hometown, as I've been working with the camp the last 13 years, has been Charleston, West Virginia.

MM: Okay. Your current occupation

MH: My occupation right now, I am a choreographer and instructor of ballet, modern jazz, also am a tumbling instructor for the United States Gymnastics Federation, as well as I work on a part-time basis with my business, Land Care business that I own and I work part-time with an accounting firm.

MM: Okay. Are you married? Children?

MH: I'm married. I do not have any children. My wife has a child by a previous marriage, who is about 26 years old. And we have one registered champion German Shepherd, who lives with us.

MM: All right. Could you tell me a little bit about your education?

MH: I was educated in Bluefield, West Virginia, up until 11th grade. I dropped out of school, I went to California, San Francisco, California, uh, eventually was educated at San Francisco High School, and then went to San Francisco City College, San Francisco State and the University of California at Berkeley. I have a, I have a associate degree in, in communication,

Michael Harris Interview

and I attended the University of California at Berkeley as a student of dance.

MM: That's pretty interesting. Your age at the time you were working at the camp?

MH: Uh...my age at the time when I was working at the camp, I started at the age of, of 30-, uh, 34. **MATT:** Okay; Uhm...could you tell me maybe a little bit about the past that led you to become a staff member here at camp?

MH: Well, the past, that I come from, I was born up in a small coal community town, which is, used to one of the most popular towns here in West Virginia. I was introduced to this camp as a nine year old young boy, by a friend of mine who used to come up here every year. As a young boy, I was in 4-H. At that time we could come-, we could go to camp up here for \$24 for the whole week. We had, the only thing we had to bring was a pillowcase and a blanket. I was very shy, withdrawn. On my first day when I was up here, I was sort of on the nervous side. At that time Mr. Wesley Lynch was the camp director. And I think that week in June, it was probably maybe close to 200 kids that was here at this camp then. The camp was basically-, the theme of it was mostly 4-H activities, crafts, uh.... lots of crafts, Bible verses, and in the evening time we would always have a camp fire with the director of the camp portraying the old great chief. And I think the first campfire that I was, that I had attended happened in fact, that probably brought me out of myself. Because that camp gave you a sense that you had to participate. You had to learn songs for your tribe. When you were, when you were designated to a certain tribe and the tribal Indian tribes, Native American tribes that most of the instructors at that time knew were the Cherokee, the Delaware, the Seneca, and Amingo, those were the mostly uh, popular Indian Native American tribes that used to roam the Virginians at the time. A lot of them were congregated here in West Virginia, because of its vast condensed mountains and hills; it was very hard-they knew it very well. And they could go in and out of these hills and not be detected a lot. So they gave us those kinds of sense of cultural experience. And being a young, black Negro boy at the time, gave me a chance to meet other young people from around the state of West Virginia. A lot of the kids who attended here, used to go off to a church camp, which is called Hilltop, West Virginia, which is the national with the West Virginia Region for Baptist Churches. And they used to have camps there which was located out of Oak Hill. So

Michael Harris Interview

this camp and that camp used to compete a lot for children, you know, to attend each year. But I think this camp was probably the most eye-awakening camp of all of them. I remember being told one day that I had to go hiking and I, I was a chubby little kid and didn't like to hike, didn't hardly like to do anything. I hated ...I think my biggest experience was I did not like the bugs here. And they used to be all over my head and ears and stuff. And I didn't want to go hiking with those bugs following me around my head. But uh, eventually I think, going up to the last day, I did get a chance to go hiking in the woods and it was absolutely magnificent. And from that day forward uhm, I sort of fell in love with this camp. And I came back one more year the following year and I've always liked to come back. But proceeding, the other proceeding years I wasn't able to come back to this camp. But I did have a chance as a 4-H'r to come here two years to, to get that rich feeling and to meet and plus, me being a young kid, I was interested in all the little pretty girls. [chuckles] So that was a part of my wanting to come here all the time.

MM: Okay. Do you remember some of the people that were influential on your character at the time?

MH: Uhm...(MM: From the camp?) from the camp ... not, not directly. Except for the, except for Mr. Lynch, who was the Indian chief. He also had a great big gray sort of black German Shepherd, who was ver influential. And then I had a friend, his name was White, good football team. The big rivals back then was West Virginia State College and Bluefield State College. They were the two primarily black schools here in West Virginia. And so, when, if West Virginia would go down to Bluefield, I mean, the town at the t time, had maybe what, eighteen thousand people probably grow up to maybe thirty thousand, with all these people coming in for a weekend game, vice versa. People were, Bluefield was coming up to West Virginia State, and people from all over the coal fields, that lived in coal fields, would travel up through here and go to West Virginia State up to Charleston, go near the Capitol. And they would have the same thing, thousands of people crowding into Charleston one weekend for a big football game match. And folks would say, "Uh-oh, black folks are coming into town. West Virginia State College must be having a big game." So, those type things. And those were the activities up here, mainly during, during-, that I vividly remember. Now, as far as other activities, when the 4-H camp season was over, I, I don't recollect any of that, any other thing going on.

Michael Harris Interview

MM: So, how do you think this camp has influenced your heritage, in particular, or maybe strengthened your character?

MH: Well, it has influenced me to the fact that being a shy kid, it gave me the self confidence that if I left home for a week or so without the loving care of my parents or my brothers and sisters, that I could actually make it on my own, my other friends-, and meet other friends. Yes, as young kids, kids are probably, probably a little bit more forward and sort of cruel to each other than we adults. But at least, you know, they are mostly up front about what they do to each other. And you know, if anybody put any shaving cream on you or tried to put a bug in your bed, you know it was the bully of the camp, then they were the ones responsible for it. And a lot of times, if you thought, thought that you wanted to challenge the again. How many would you get to do that? If they didn't have a choice, but they had a choice of a certain section of Africa to live, because Africa is about 3/4 bigger than this country, okay, expands this country three times. Maybe four times. And you set 'em in a place where they have to actually make a living, they have to actually live off the land. How many of these prisoners would actually decide "that's all I have to do? I can be free, but I have to go and live in Africa? The darkest jungle of Africa, no water, no heat, and I have to fend for myself?" How many of these two million prisoners would want to do that? You tell me.

MM: That's a good question. Probably not too many.

MH: They look at me and say, "You're kind of crazy, you must be some kind of crazy little nigger." Say, "You used that in very derogatory terms, sir." You think I'm negative because I said something like that, because I'm banishing or trying to get rid of some people that really don't need to be here. And it's not only black, but it's a lot of whites, as well as Chicanos. I mean, England used to send everybody down to Australia. And the Caucasians who were so bad in England, (**MM:** They ended up here) they ended up here being slaves, and that was the reason why we came over here. Because they couldn't hack the hot weather and the bugs and the snakes and the mosquitoes. So they were dying of malaria and everything else. Now, since you, acted with blacks, who think that this country is so bad and so wrong, you're not looking at the benefits that we're receiving at this particular time. Yeah, I think liberalism in this country is

Michael Harris Interview

probably bad, due to the fact that we've always relied on the master to give us things and the master to, to, to assign certain of us and the rest of us had to fend for ourself. So the guy said, "So, what are you getting at your point?" I said, "My point is that our parents, you have to look at them like Jesus Christ. Whatever sin was bestowed upon us as a race of Samuel White, who was from the Bluefield area who was constantly one of the, the chaperones and leaders here. He was instrumental-, he would come here all the time. I...did not, you know, felt that I, you know, liked it. But there was other things that I basically liked to do. I think the most influential things that happened to me was when I, when I became one of the few black hippies and move to California. I'm a product of four brothers-, three brothers and three sisters, whose parents were both in the educational field. I lived as a hippy in the uh, in the for about a year until I decided, "Wait a minute, I have to change. I don't like smelly clothes and long hair and beer. Let me get me a job and all this." So eventually I got a job and went, went back to get my GED. And then eventually went and went to college, etc. etc., after that. While in San Francisco, I think the biggest influence was the family that I, that I started to live with, that I met through a choreographer and a director there. That when I saw my first, first dance ensemble, which was basically made up of college kids at San Francisco College. I fell in love with the girls. I was.... And they convinced me to start dancing. So, which I did not for awhile. I became a stage hand crew. And then I had a young lady to convince me to go back to school, which, which I really appreciate. And then maybe about a year and a half later I started putting on my first tights to learn to, to start dancing the Katherine Dunnan technique, which is Afro-Cuban or Afro-Haitian dance. And I studied that under the directorship of Mr. Zach Thompson, who was a well-known choreographer, who used with Katherine Dunnan. He did a lot of off-Broadway stuff. Well, he was one of the first, he was, he was in one of the original movies or the second movie of King Kong, which they did the choreography, which she did with one of the choreographers, too back in 1950-, uh, '54 or '55. And also one of the Tarzan movies. So he was one of the principal dancers with her that she choreographed. He also made, this guy, Zach Thompson, made the one of the spreads of Ebony Magazine years ago as a international dancing sensational star. He had uh, he had danced at one time, with uh, and the uh...oh, I can't think of the other primary actors and actresses this guy's been involved with. But with him and his family, they were the one, the instrumental that sort of really changed my life per se. Because as you all know, back in the early '60's, late '60's, the strike, the Civil Rights Movement was in full swing

Michael Harris Interview

on top of the Vietnam War. So I personally should have been a professional baseball player, because I used to switch hit, right field, left field, and uh, I was, I had, I had the talent to be a professional baseball player. But that, that era of that year and see, Martin Luther King was assassinated and then John Kennedy and then his brother, it just ... it changed a lot of young, black men's minds to take off in other directions.

MM: Yeah, that's.... I don't know much about that period. But I would have liked to have experienced some of those things.

MH: Uh, from there, as I studied and uh, and began to perform in the Bay area and the Southern California area, I was able to land a job in Paris, and I lived in Paris for four years as a, as a dancer and as an assistant instructor on the left bank of Paris, and also worked with the uh, with the New York Theater Company out of New York City for a couple of summers, as a, as an actor in a couple of plays that they would produce over there. Plus, I also performed at the Moulin Rouge, which Rouge is the oldest burlesques theater in Paris that Las Vegas has basically, Las Vegas was created from, from the Burlesque type theater. Rouge is the, probably the founder of Las Vegas showgirls today. Now, understand, Las Vegas is covering up their showgirls because it was to be more family-oriented. So, it's probably best.

MM: Yeah. Have you kept in touch with any of the people from the camp?

MH: No, uh, one other person, there's a young lady that I met when I came back through West Virginia in '77, that when I started working back in West Virginia in '77, there's a young lady that still stays here, she's a widow friend of mine. And uh, hopefully, I hope she'll be able to come to camp. Because if I, if I recollect, I don't think she only came one or two times. But that's the only other person, other than her, and just Samuel White, a young man, is about the only other two persons I knew who went to this camp.

MM: So your networking was primarily in California and ... (**MH:** Yes). Okay. Uhm, what do you uh, remember about some of the other adult activities that were held at the camp here?

Michael Harris Interview

MH: Uh...during the time of 4-H, or during the time of...? (**MM:** Yes, of 4-H) the 4-H. The other adult activities that would be held here, they had meetings from different black mining organizations, like coal miner's union, they had some churches who was not affiliated with the black Baptist affiliation here, would come up and meeting during the summer time and winter time. There were uh...meetings, parties, uh, hoedowns. I understand that a couple of times came through here during the spring time, West Virginia State College, since this was at one time, administered and the overseer was West Virginia State College. And they used to have baseball training up here for some of their boys spring training. And they would have spring training and football and, and winter training up here for the football players. So they would, a lot of times, state college would bring their boys up here around, around uh, the end of July. That way they'd get 'em away from the little girls on campus, and all the parties on campus. And they would come up here and train and practice and stuff. And that used to really help their situation out. Because that, at that time back then, they used to have very bully of the camp, you did. If not, you just kind of left 'em alone, you know. So uh, that, this camp had that kind of impression among a lot of kids, especially kids that were sort of shy, and it only made them stronger to be able to face the world. Because in anybody's con-, surroundings, it may be peaceful and serene, but you know that once you go beyond that for a day or two, things change, the rules change, personality changes, uh...the way you, your habits or the way you talk or if you can go to a kitchen or to go to the restroom, you have to wait, you know, you just can't just go. And here they taught us the discipline of making up the bed, and learning to brush your teeth, to comb your hair, to take pride in your little area and stuff. And that's what is so unique that we've been able to bring back to this camp, after this camp had been almost swallowed up by nature for four years. And I must say that, due to the fact that one of the founding people of this camp, Mr. Peter, well, we call him Peter Jesus, uh, Norman Jordan, and another-, and the commissioner of the Department of Culture and History, Mr. Norman Fagon. If it hadn't been for those two people, this camp, well, possibly Norm Fagot. If it hadn't been for Norm Fagot, this camp would have probably would have been probably in disrepair. Because there were politicians wanting just to go ahead and just sort of bulldoze some of this. Until some of the older blacks who heard-, got wind that they were getting ready to maybe to, to decimate this camp, you know, really started protesting and, and directing letters to the legislature back in '74, I think it was, either '74 or '76, that they had to save this camp.

Michael Harris Interview

MM: After the Civil Rights?

MH: Yes. Yes. And so uh, and so the state eventually had put the Chestnut Lodge as a historical site, they got it as a historical site. They were able to get funding. I'm sorry that the fact that, you know, I know they did a lot of work up here as far as the plumbing. They had to re-, they had to do a whole new plumbing job, a whole new water shelter job, which cost, you know, several, several hundred thousands of dollars. But I wished they could have revamped the uh, the cabins. Because right now the cabins are good for sleeping for right now. But when you get up out of the night and you want to go to the restroom, you have to go 300- over a hundred yards to go to the bathroom. Or if you want to go to the outhouse, you know So, that part of it still needs some ironing out to do hopefully. But we'll get into that.

MM: Okay. Uhm...as far as your African American identity, how do you feel that the camp is, has shaped that, if it has?

MH: Well, first of all, I'm an American first. Okay. A lot of people, and a lot of my black friends cringe when I say that, okay. I have my extended roots of Africa has been cut off due to the fact of slavery and separation by the Europeans. That part of my language and really my heritage I do not have. True Africans have a lot of customs, a lot of spiritual customs that we American blacks do not understand, and will probably never understand, and probably wouldn't want to understand the things that they do in order to survive. So, first of all, I'm an American first, then I'm a black American second. Okay. I do have an extended history of African. Due to the fact of the color of my skin. So that's obvious. Uh, but I do recognize that that is one of the founding structures that I have within myself. I feel that a lot of American blacks put too much emphasis on Africa in a sense that our foreparents who were slaves, who were brutaed, who some who died, who got hung, who did a lot of sharecrops, basically paid for this land with their blood. I mean, we're not like the other society who were running from depression, or religious, you know, expression, or try to reap some kind of economic wars by coming over here. Because as you well know, in parts of Europe, if you're not part of a certain dynasty, you cannot own land, you can't own diddly-squat. So a lot of them they save their 1money and stuff. They came over here, okay. But, as far as the Native Americans who were here and I must be honest. This

Michael Harris Interview

country wasn't discovered. This country had already been occupied (**MM**: Yeah) okay, had already been occupied and people were living on the land. So, if anybody really deserved a true meaning of this land, would be the Native Americans and the Africans who were forced to live here. Except for the Native Americans, they were living here. But we Africans, we were forced to live here. So, we basically have roots here. I speak to a lot of, lot of high school kids, as well as junior high school kids and college. And I have beefs with professors who are studying Afro-American studies and stuff, in which they have a documentary of a lot of history, etc., etc., and they explain to kids, "Yeah, you should not hide your history." But I ask them a lot of times, I say, "How many of you all would like to pack up and live in Africa? In certain parts of the bush of Africa?" Okay. "How many of you could stand to live like that for maybe a year or two?" Okay. Uh, I say to some of the so-called radical blacks, people like the [blank space] I can't, just to name a few, I said, "Since you think a lot of brothers who committed different crimes in the last several years, among brothers, among black people as well as other races of people. And they blame their, their, their mischievous deeds on racism, and you guys running around and you profound on this racism stuff, what you really ... it could, at some time, [blank space] in racism. But it's really not, you're using it as an excuse. How would you like to take all these brothers who are in prison for murder and dope and etc. and etc. and say, "Okay, release these prisoners and we'll take 'em to Africa and put 'em in a certain bush and jungle and whatever. You're free. You know, your debt to society is paid." How would you like to take two million of these brothers and how many of these brothers would sacrifice their freedom to go to Africa to live for the rest of their life and be banished for this coun-, for this country if they had the opportunity to, to be free people, has already been paid for a couple million times and over. They paid for our sins. All we got to do is reach there, get ourselves educated. And since land is supposed to be the important that's success, then we need to learn how to own land, how to run businesses, and do business among ourselves. The thing that ticks me off is that you have all these blacks who get educated and they go to these universities, then they leave, and they go work for IBM, they go work for blah, blah, blah, then they buy a \$200,000 house, they get a Mercedes, and then they're locked. They might want to leave and start to own a business, but they're locked. So my point is, you professors at these universities, are teaching, especially the young females and blacks, the wrong type of uh, of uh, of self-preservation. You're teaching them to go out and get all these good jobs in these big factories and companies. But you're not

Michael Harris Interview

teaching them to how to plow. You're not teaching them how to start using their hands and their minds to start putting down roots, to start businesses, to do their own business, to start farming. What's gonna happen in 25 years when all the corporations have all the farming land? What's gonna happen when all the electricity turns off and we're thinking about computers educating our kids, and the kids uses the computer to to [inaudible] ...and pretty soon you'll be able to use a computer to talk into to do your writing for you. You won't even have to learn to write any more.

MM: It's true;. It's really pretty sad how, how things are run today.

MH: And you would think that 1997, that as a people of America, that-, since I'm part of the baby boom generation, we were supposed to have been in a situation in our life that we didn't have to work very much. It was supposed to have been a 30-hour week, 4-day week type thing. Instead of being a 30-hour week, it has come to-, a 40-hour week has become a 60hour week. And maybe an extra spare job. And who's the fault of that? We Americans who vote, who continue to vote for the same politicians who only do so much for the few and the masses, the mass of people do not receive anything. I'm sorry, I didn't mean to go off.

MM: All that's fine, that's yeah. But the camp did give you, as an African American, a nice place to come and visit with other people from around the state and other African Americans?

MH: Oh, yes. I found one of my first loves... well, it was a love that I fell in love with when I first came to this camp. I guess all the boys liked her. And eventually, I found out years-, found out later that there was a young girl who wrote me and uh...uh, I really didn't know who she was. She wrote me a couple of times and I had no idea. And unbeknownst to me, after, after I did the whole hippy thing and the California thing and the Europe and Paris thing for almost 12 years, 15 years, I came full circle back and ran into this young woman, who had just lost her husband maybe three years before, in a nightclub at a bar with her and a friend. And we became, and still didn't know who she was. And it was after we dated for a while, she figured out and I figured out-, well, she figured out more than I did, who-, where she met me. And she met me here at this camp.

Michael Harris Interview

MM: That's an interesting story there (**MH:** Yes) Uhm...so, generally, could you maybe give me some more about the importance of the camp?

MH: The importance of this camp here in West Virginia is that integration was Thurgood Marshall's dream. And I had probably utmost respect, as well as I have for Clarence Thomas. Unbeknownst to a lot of my black friends. But ... integration also has killed the discipline that blacks had among their children. And I'm not saying that segregation-, we should go back to segregation. I think that the fact that integration has led a lot of black Americans to go off in the different fields. And the reason why I say that is because at one time, being a teacher in any state in the South or in the North or West, was a very important position. You had power, you had respect. Parents respected teachers. Here on the black side of the fence, or on the white side of the fence. And we relied ... we had faith in teachers. Whatever they said at the time was the rule of the game. But whenever integration came about, it broke down, they didn't destroy the white schools. They abandoned all the black schools. And they made a plan of putting all the black schools in the white schools. And they took all the teachers and put them in different schools. And there you had a different type of culture for awhile. You had parents wanting to do good. A lot of those kids-, when white schools found out that they could use black athletes, even though they didn't want them on their team. But when they found out they could make them a good winning school and their names in the paper and old alumni seeing their school in the paper that had good football teams and good basketball teams, well, they opened blacks in open arms. And especially, black athletes. And didn't matter if you could read or write. As long as you could do something with a ball, you were welcome. And so, you had certain athletes, jocks, who got away with a lot of stuff. And a lot of athletes who didn't, okay? You had black coaches who were assistant coaches, but who really never had input in a lot of these decision-making. And so, that, to that day, is why you have this sort of culturally sort of interculturally [inaudible] ... type situation that is happening in the inner cities that have now filtered into the small towns and country sides here in America as perfectly-, especially here in West Virginia. The churches are now suffering in that sense. You say-, most people say, "Well, the most integrated day is Sunday, because whites go to their church and blacks go to that church, their church." And probably true, in a way. But, if you had churches starting to integrate, if they were forced to integrate, then you would have the same kind of [inaudible]...that maybe

Michael Harris Interview

may happen and then it may not. Because you have churches now integrate on ...people go to different churches now on their own because maybe they don't like that church any more, or a certain church. Okay? And so you do find a certain church that will-, may have a black preacher with a whole white congregation or vice versa. Okay? So, this camp is bringing back that unity that was broken up. Because we accepted the idea of integration, but could not foresee what was gonna happen to our young people once we, once we put them into all of these different schools without enough black role models there to guide them through the way.

MM: So it kind of broke down the extended family network..

MH: Yes, it broke down the extended family network. It broke down the whole discipline, the pride network and everything. Because ... that's when it really came into competition. Okay? If you were a light-skinned black girl, quite naturally they'll put you in the cheerleading squad, because you were pretty. If you were a dark-skinned young girl, nah, even though you might be talented, and maybe could do more flips and jump much higher in a straddle split jump, you might not have gotten it, you might not have been put on the squad. Not unless you have a strong parent that's involved in PTA and got in there and fought for that child. But if that child was from a one-parent family who worked two jobs, didn't have a chance to go to PTA, then they felt, most teachers ... well, you know, if the parent don't care, you know, why should we care? And that's what's happening in the school system now. You have a lot of young parents, parents that are 20 that have 9 and 8 year old kids out of wedlock who is working 2 and 3 jobs who can't go to PTA meetings, who can't go to school, and that child is disrupting and I've seen it. I've seen white instructors who would discipline a little white child, but they'll leave that little black child alone because their afraid they might be called a racist. And I've seen it. And they just leave 'em alone. And that's what is happening here in this country. And a lot-, on top of the National Education Association out of Washington, D.C. should probably, is my opinion, should be disbanded, and let the states or the community take that federal money and run their own schools.

MM: Okay. So, the issue of whether African American kids are missing something by being sent to integrated camps....

Michael Harris Interview

MH: You mean integrated schools? No. (**MM:** Or schools) Well, integrated camps, no. Now, I don't think they're missing anything. If a child wants to go to an integrated camp, that's fine. This particular camp that I've been working with for 13 years, I've always been impressed on having other children participate in this camp. If black children can go to a school that's 80% white, and the faculty is 90% white, then how come white kids can't come to and their parents can't bring them to a location like this that maybe 80% faculty, and 80% black. They're still gonna get the same kind of education and outlook. And probably a good awareness of people, especially with us and knowing how to deal with us, you know, knowing who you can trust and who you cannot trust. Knowing the bad black, as well as the bad white. Knowing who you can run with who can give you positive outlook among the two of you running together and being away from those people, that's gonna give you negative. So, that's what ... that's what's needed. This camp, and like other things that's needed here, for kids to understand. And I think that uh, uh, no, we don't need to go back to segregation. If there were segregation in a sense as far as education, I don't know, I may have reservations for that. Providing that the segregation teaches positive education, rather than racist education, then yeah. But if you have education that is teaching education along with racism, be it black or white, then no, I'm not for that. And there, you know, there are organizations-, you know, you have that, you have this kind of education now that has been going on for years when you have the private schools. You know even when you have the whites who can afford certain private schools to send their kids to, who are basically have that upper aristocrat, who'll look down on other white folks, as "I'm better than they are, because I am a part of this elite group." You know, racism comes in all forms of colors and you have racism among white folks, as well as you have with black folks. And when I say that with black people, we had it with black people during the time of segregation, where you had the, the teachers or the doctors at the time, children were more in tune to get information on scholarships quicker than the poor blacks. The poor blacks would not-, sometimes when granted the opportunity learning of a scholarship at Howard or Phipps or A & T, or West Virginia State. But a lot of these doctors and preachers daughters, that were, that were prominent people of the community to find out about these things and they would make sure that their daughters and sons would hear about it and they would see to it that they would fill out the right papers and get into these schools and get these scholarships. Whereby you may have industrial, smart young black child who may be a child, a bastard child. But

Michael Harris Interview

because he has thick lips and big nose, and comes from sort of a shady side of town, he probably was not afforded that opportunity. He doesn't need, he doesn't need to be anything but a shoe-shiner or a barber shop. Maybe he can go into barber or maybe go into cutting crafts and wood and stuff like that. You know.... So, you had those kind of classes among black people, too. And my criteria is that to this day, a lot of black people still keep that kind of thing hush-hush. They deny it. And when I speak of it, when I speak of it, I have a lot of people think that I'm a traitor because I let people know about this. Or that I'm saying something that is not true or that I should not say it. Yeah, it was down at one point in time. But they do it all the time. But the thing is, black young children and kids that are in the educational field need to know this, as well.

MM: Okay. As far as gender differences at the camp, did you experience any different activities, separate by gender?

MH: Well, when I, during 4-H camp? Or the African American arts camp?

MM: Either one. **MH:** Either one. Well, the gender difference while at 4-H camp, all the children, at certain evening times, the boys had to-, you had to dress up to go to eat and the girls, you have to have [blank space]

END OF SIDE 1 - TAPE 1

BEGIN SIDE 2 - TAPE 1

MH: do you want me to continue? (**MM:** Yes, sir) The gender here at this camp, which basically, the boys at one time would sit up a certain table and then the girls would sit at a certain table. I think we had one dance. And that was probably the highlight of the whole camp. Because that time you really got to-, you got to really try to get intimate with someone that you liked. Okay? My profession as a choreographer and an instructor came to me when I was about 8 years old. We used to-, when I lived in Bluefield, we used to have a little recreation center across the railroad tracks that all the black kids went to, the only one in town. And it had a little

Michael Harris Interview

pool. That little pool was probably maybe two feet deep. And that little pool would have so many black folks and little children in it on a Saturday or a Sunday afternoon, than any other day of the week in the summer time. But that was the only time that we could get wet. And then on Friday and Saturday nights, they used to have dances. Somebody would rent the place out to have a dance. And I visioned myself years ago back then dancing, because I was the type person that loved to dance the Jitterbug, the Swing, all the kinds of crazy dances, all the kind of Dick Clark, American Bandstand type dances back then. And if the pretty girl was the one that was getting all the attention and everybody was up dancing with her, then I would go to the chubby girl, because I wanted to dance. And for one day, and one time in my life, I visioned that I was going to be choreographing to this kind of music, the James Brown music, the-, Martha Reeves and the Vandellas, the-, the Stevie Wonder, and.... And I don't know why it came over me that particular night, that particular time in my life. And at that time, when I said 8, I think it was more like 14. And unbeknownst to me, that actually really happened. It was like a thought. It wasn't a dream. It was a thought that came over my head, and I never did forget that thought. And, and I think it came back to me again when I was living in Paris, I was living on the [inaudible].., which is the island of Paris, the center of France, living in a small little [inaudible] ... up on the 6th floor and it came back to me and I said, "wow," that thought that I had, that sort of dream, knowing that I'm actually here in Paris, teaching and learning, how is this possible? And to this day, I don't know why that it was possible. Because I was supposed to have been one of those black boys dead in the mud in Vietnam. And probably one of the main reasons why I was not dead in the mud in Vietnam, I had two friends of mine who informed me very well what to do to get out of the war. First of all, I had high blood pressure that I had not realized that I had had at the age of 16. Even my parents didn't even know. Secondly, I went in and I had such bad grades uh, and I was so dyslexic at that time, that even though I had those bad grades and high blood pressure and flunked my physical and overweight at the time, I was surprised they still wanted to take me. And I remembered the staff sergeant or whoever, the corporal or whoever, said, "Well, son, you didn't do too well." And, and I must say, I did kind of smoke a marijuana joint because I wanted to be high and they said it would raise your-, raise your blood pressure. Still I didn't realize that my blood pressure was off, off the clock, at that particular age. And uh, "But we can control that, son, if you still want to come in. You just have your mother to sign this paper and your dad sign this paper," in which I never did. And I think a year later's when I went

Michael Harris Interview

off to California. And uh, but I never really checked into that part of the system in my life, because I really didn't realize that my blood pressure-, that I had a family history of high blood pressure until I came back 20 years later back into the state of West Virginia because I never had any problems with it. Because when I lived on the East-, West coast, I was into more of the vegetables and fruits and etc., etc., the rice, etc., etc. The same thing in Europe. And when I got back here, going to a family reunions, 20 years later and pigging out and barbeque and stuff, it came back on me again. So uh, I kind of went off there.... What was the question again?

MM: I...I

MH: Okay, that's fine, that's fine. But anyway, but uh, getting back to my vision, you know, it was a vision that came to me per se, why I am who I am right now as a choreographer and instructor, is the fact that God, basically, it was a niche that I discovered when I was really, really young. Like I said, I should have been a baseball player because I was talented in baseball, as well as the other sports. But this particular thing, was very sort of uh, [inaudible] for young me to be involved with because of the homosexuality about it, and what it entails. True, there's a lot of guys that are gay, a lot of friends of mine who are gay, a lot of friends of mine who were gay who are now dead who were dancers from AIDS. One of my mentors, who is gay, who has know-, who passed away maybe 6 months ago, that influenced me to get in this profession. And it's really something. When I look back at that, you know, those guys, young men, that are gay, a lot of them weren't gay; A lot of them weren't gay. A lot of them were probably molested, perhaps at one time, as young boys. A lot of them probably were very shy and had been hurt by girlfriends, and just were accosted by certain older men, and took up the gay lifestyle. For me, I'm lucky, because I've, I've always knew my gender. And I knew that, that kind of lifestyle would not feel good to me. It's like masturbating ... the way I look at it. And when I approach a lot of guys that I've talked to who are like that, I think 90% of guys that I've talked to who are gay who may be had some attraction to me, was the fact that they were somehow accosted by another person. Okay, and they were down in their part of life. Which I've been down in my part of life. But I've always had the opposite sex view of life as far as a mate. And I felt that uh, I've always felt that when man or woman cheat themselves of the

Michael Harris Interview

opposite sex, that they're cheating life, that they're not giving life, it's trust due. And in order to enter death, you must suffer. And yeah, you may suffer with the opposite sex partner some day, some days are good days. But it's the suffering and the responsibility that's going to get you from the flesh and the escape from the flesh into the next life. And if you read it biblically, that's what we're here for, we're here to suffer in order to get into the next life, as well as we're here to do a teaching job for other homosapiens or humans, while we're here. And if we don't fulfill those things, and nurture those things, then we're not worthy to continue, is my opinion of life.

MM: You mentioned that your hometown is Bluefield. Now, when you went to California, did you experience any, you know, being Appalachian, African American, did the, did you experience any discrimination as far the [blank space]

MH: No, back then, matter of fact, California in the late '60's was probably..[guess probably maybe from the 60's up through probably '75, which I was not there in '75. But it was probably the best place for a lot of blacks to be. Because there was a lot of job opportunity, people were much more nicer. Uh, I found that a lot of the elite black folks who you have, I can't think of the county in Maryland, in Virginia, that have a lot of rich, rich, black people that are doctors, 21 lawyers, engineers. They were probably, to me, when I went visiting as a young boy, the probably most snootiest, the most, most uppity black folks that I've ever encountered. If you didn't a degree, or you wasn't born into a degree, you were second class citizen to them. That's amazing how a lot of black people seem to forget those type things. When I went to California, it was wonderful. I worked for a very good Jewish family there. I lived, I lived probably in some of the most plushiest places I ever lived, just by knowing people and having, having money and a place to rent, or renting rooms out. Sausalito, I don't know if you've ever been to Sausalito, California, which is one of the richest little towns in California. You know, piece of this area, which we're sitting under a canopy sort of picnic uh, dome right now. This area right here is probably about 25 feet by 20, or maybe 30 by 20. You know, that little piece in California, just to put a house or something on, right in the middle of San Francisco, may cost you \$200,000, just for the land. So, in that area, I never denied where I was from. When people would tell me, "Where you from, man?" I would tell them I'm from West Virginia. "It's good to see you, blah, blah, blah." They would look at me and they would say, "Well, boy, you don't seem like one of

Michael Harris Interview

them hillbilly type guys, or one of them Beverly Hillbilly type people." But I never did deny where I was from, even when I was in Europe. And uh, when I lived in Southern California for awhile. And that's the thing that I think people should, should try not to deny, is to be in denial of their, once they come. And I found California a wonderful place during the time. But then I also found that if you're gonna live there in a place like that, which I find it sort of solemn and I find the Bay area sort of Sodom and Gomorrah in a way. But it's also a fun place. You know, if you're not making, you know, \$80,000 a year, you're not really gonna have very much fun. Because it's uh, uh, very expensive. And the time I was there, when I think, it was the Grateful Dead, whoever sung the song, "Lead me back to San Francisco," that song, the two songs that they did was probably the most big attraction of people coming to California than any song ever. Because San Francisco was a nice little quiet, unbeknownst big city. But a lot of people, the only thing they knew about San Francisco was the Golden Gate. That was about it. That's the only attraction it had. Except it had a little sea life, a lot of bars and etc., etc. But it had didn't have anything else attracted to it. But then when we got there, it did have a lot to be attracted to. And that was the, not only the far eastern likes communities of the Asians, the Japanese quarters and the Chinese quarters. But you also had a very rich Hispanic quarters, as well as a very rich uh...uh...let me see, Spanish, Asian, Italian, and you had a Dutch quarter town, that was, that was different. Because I like San Francisco because it reminds me of here. It was a city which was on rolling sort of hills. You know, and you had to go up hills. And I felt as a person, even though I was good in sight-seeing places, I could always, as long as I had different structures that I could go by, I knew where I was, I knew how to get back to where I begun. And that was the kind of city that was very easy to get around, because of this rolling hills, more so than Paris. Paris was like a big, open maze. And it took me a while, but I was able to figure out how to get from point B to point C, even in Paris. When you had buildings looking the same, and some of them, what? Almost a thousand years old, you know. So uh....difference, yeah. I found the culture, it was culturally different. But when I came back 20 years later, found out that West Virginia in itself, even though I also studied at San Francisco Art Institute as an artist, had West Virginia's artistic uh, crafts and pottery, probably one of the best in the world. Probably more so than in California. And I was surprised. That was probably the most surprising thing that I learned when I came back here. Because since I was exposed to a lot of the crafts and arts in the Bay area, as well as in Paris, that West Virginia was right at

Michael Harris Interview

the top, as far as the crafts and a lot of the art work. And it's really surprising that still unbeknownst to a lot of people here. And you don't know that until you get away. And you can, you can really tell the difference. So. uh, since I've been married to my wife for ten years, you know, I've gotten her into 'a lot of black arts and stuff, and now she's sort of a fanatic, as far as what-nots and potteries and things like this. And once she, she's a business lady and her whole thing is basically business and straight forward and doing whatever it was to take in order to succeed in her profession. And then this crazy guy comes along, and we end up getting married and then her whole life is liked turned around. It took some doing. But she really appreciates it. And it's something that I didn't force upon her. It's just something that I was accustomed to having and doing and exposed to. And she was a woman that never traveled. Well, she did travel as a young girl, because of her family was military exposed. So, by being stationed at different places. But uh, other than that, West Virginia and California, I would say is similar in a way, but still, you have seasons here, you have different weather, and uh, I think West Virginia is just pretty. The only thing pretty about California is probably the ocean. And maybe the northern part of California. But other than that, it's not that much difference, except for economics.

MM: Uh, we walked out by the pool earlier, would you like to tell me a little bit more about the pool out there?

MH: Well, the pool [blank space] The pool in itself was done in 19 I think 39 or 42. It was the first original black swimming pool here in the state of West Virginia. For years my family and other families used to come up here on some Sunday weekends to go swimming. Now, you can imagine coming from Bluefield up Route 19 in order to get here. We had to go through the mountains and curves and stuff. And I would imagine if we took that route back now, since 19 now is much more straighter, more four lanes (**MM:** If you can believe that, right?) [chuckling] That's, you know, it would probably take us a good 4 hours, 4 to 6 hours to get up here. That means we would leave, like 6, 7 o'clock in the morning, and we might get here by 2...okay? And then we would stay maybe until 7, and then we would have to head-, get back home and get back home maybe 2 o'clock in the morning. But this was a fun place to come and meet the girls, as I would say, and to go swimming. Because I was a person that loved water and I loved

Michael Harris Interview

the, well, just any kind of water and swimming. Again, I didn't like bugs. I hate bugs. I guess that's gonna be my, whatever, ultimate punishment will probably doused in bugs [chuckling] flying around my head. So, I know as a black American, that I probably could not live in the jungles of Africa, or go down into the, the uh, the Wetlands of South America, because I cannot, I just hate bugs. And maybe, maybe it's because of a kindred spirit that I have that I, maybe at one time that's what was all around me one time was bugs. And it kind of shows. Because I do not like bugs on my ear. I don't mind them, I don't squash them. I like 'em, but I just don't like 'em around my head. But the pool itself was the original one of the first black swimming pools here in the state of West Virginia. And since the camp has reopened since 1981 or '82, and we've been doing this African American arts camp here for almost 15 years now, they have yet to put any money in to that swimming pool. And I don't blame too much of the, people of the Department of Culture and History, you know blame the black citizens here in the State of West Virginia for not being more vigilant and more vocal about refurbishing that pool. But at this, at this day of '97 of the 20th of June, I'm now beginning to hear some concrete evidence that they're going to refurbish the pool, but when, I don't know. As you can see to your right and my life, you see the two bunks that we used to, the two cabins that all of the kids used to sleep in when we were here, as 4-Hrs. And you can see the peeling of the paint coming off, the window frames, probably the only thing that they really invested in that particular place, was floors. They got some beautiful old hardwood floors. Because the other, the original floors are rotting out because of termites that have settled., And they had re-roofed it. But that's the still-, the frame is still the same , the windows are still the same. Everything is basically still the same at this camp. But for some unbeknownst reason, and the powers that be here in the State of West Virginia, they do not want to do anything else, you know If there was some politicians wife who came up here and wanted to have Girls State Camp here, by Jove, they would have these dorms refurnished or new ones built real quick. And that's the gospel. And that is one of my beefs that I have with the present [inaudible] ... who runs this property up here. To me, he is not doing diddly-squat, in order to uh, to bring the facility up to par the way it used to be. Now, some people may not think so. I know the young man. I've worked with him, I've done some work for him, etc., etc. But I tell him all the time he hasn't done diddly-squat! And it's a shame that the American blacks here in the state of West Virginia do not jump up in arms to protest the fact that he's not doing diddly-squat to keep this camp up to par and it's not. Myself and

Michael Harris Interview

maybe one other camp member... which she's not here this year. She hasn't been here for a couple of years. Her name is Brenda Booker. We were the only two people, the only two blacks along with the director of the whole campground have actually went out and raised money, you know, selling stuff. We raised several thousand dollars. And to this day I had no idea what they done ... not a whole lot of money, but those several thousand dollars. Maybe they used it for painting and bathroom supplies. Well, maybe they've done it, you know. But the only thing I look at is the fact, we really don't see an accounting of what is put into this camp. We don't see an accounting what is taken up when they do-wops here, how much money they make 2 with do-wops, string festivals. nothing that's really supplied to the community per se. You know, when you're collecting cash money ; you can turn in whatever you want to turn in. Okay, everybody knows that. But, yeah, it's probably on record, if we want to go to the registrar's office of records, at the state of West Virginia, how much this camp takes-, took in last year, and what was spent out. Right now this camp, the only major project that is probably this year or say the last two years, has been a new bathhouse, and that bathhouse was only built. It wasn't built to accommodate the African American Arts Camp. Ohh, the administration would think all we built this for you young black children up here, so they can have an arts camp up here and they can use the bathroom without having to go a hundred yards to go to the bathroom. That facility was built so it can take the thousands of people who need to go back and forth to the bathroom. And that's what's appalling to me. That people, "Oh, well, they got a bathroom, they got a nice place to go to." But yet, the bathroom's in these cabins are now blocked off. One has to get out of his bunk, hope they don't frighten a skunk, and a skunk does not decide to turn around and squat and walk up over a hundred yards. Or go into the little outhouse. There's no place in there to brush your teeth or a mirror. Which that's appalling.

MM: Are there any other stories about the camp that you'd like to talk about? That you remember?

MH: Well, I remember a couple of stories about this camp. First, of all, this camp, when it first began, we had to house the kids down at West Virginia Tech. Every night and morning up here to the camp, have the classes, put 'em back on a bus and take 'em back. From here at Clifftop, West Virginia, to Montgomery, West Virginia, it took a little over an hour. Our first night, or the

Michael Harris Interview

first two nights, the, the instructors were in charge, not only instructing the class at that particular class, but we also had to babysit and watch and make sure that the kids didn't run in and out of each other's dorm. Now, you're talking about a stressful time. I mean, we complained vividly. So, eventually they decided to give us some more money next year to have the, to have counselors. And so they did that. We did that for I think for two years at Tech, and then we came up to uh, uh, another little camp over in Fayetteville, where we went one year. And I can't think of the name of the camp. But the same thing we had to bus them up and bus them out. Now, these facilities at that time, back in '83, '84 and '85 and '86 were basically used for workshops, for music workshops, for dance workshops, you know, because all the beds were all taken away. And we had, we tried to complain to the Department of Culture and History that the camp was once a 4-H camp, it had beds in it. Sure, they explained to us there was no more beds in it. The rooms upstairs in the Great Hall had beds. Sure the upstairs.... But what they did, they turned the rooms into dressing rooms for the stars, for the bands, for the Marvelettes, for the Elvis Presley's who would come up here and do do-wop on a weekend. So quite naturally there was no bed room. So when the regular administration came in during the 80's and started cutting back all these funds, then they had to figure out another way how they were going to hire-, how they were coming to cut down their expenses. And unbeknownst to a lot of the campers, for the first, I guess, first five years, these kids were living-, were sleeping on beds out of a prison and insane asylums. The beds were from insane asylums and prisons. Now, we did not inform the kids they were sleeping on insane asylum beds and prisoners. Because they would have went home and told their parents. But that wasn't even there. We were glad that we had some beds. And the bunk beds we have now were built by Mr. George Shreve, which he is the campground facility maintenance here. Him and his crew built new wooden bunk beds the second year that we've 23

been using them. And so, uh, that's up now, 3, 4 years ago we had a very racial strike due to the fact that the director up here, George Jordan, did not like the fact that the original director, which was Peter Jesus, and his assistant, guy named Cabell, was trying to gear the camp into a very black, segregated type camp. They felt that Peter Jesus and Ed Cabell, at that time, felt that the Department of Culture and History was not putting enough money into the camp. Every time we would come up here, it would be filthy, it would be nasty. The bunks would be filthy, bugs, they wouldn't spray. He wouldn't do anything-, they weren't doing anything to clean up.

Michael Harris Interview

So eventually a lot of racial words were starting to, to class among, among the still now director of administration, George Jordan, and them. Until it basically blew up to the fact that, that one year we had a good camp, and, and the department had, had probably had 3, 4 of their main people working here. We had a person like Tom Pasinety, we had another person who was an engineer here. And, and what they were doing, they were using some of the kids to drive some of the vans. Because we would have classes over to Nuthall, which was a little school over there, the dance classes and some of the art classes. Well, unbeknownst to them, they're allowed a student to drive their van during the whole week, did not ask or see that the kid had a drivers license, because they were too lazy to go jump back and forth to bring some of the kids. Because they had to transport the kids only what, five miles to one of the studio space and bring them back. So this kid did this. Well, the last day of the camp, the kid decided to have a good time. So they went over to Nuthall, packed up the ballet bars in one of the vans, and him and another kid and somebody else was in the van, they decided to come back the old road, to camp at Clifftop, and hit one of those curves too fast and rolled over. Well, it scared the heck out of 'em. We were in a very deep meeting, because camp had been closed. The next thing we knew, that all of a sudden, here these two white women came in, one had a bathing suit on, looking good and fine and we were all looking at her and she's saying, "Is there anybody here named Peter Jesus, George Jordan?" And everybody looked up and one of us said, well, "Yeah." "Well, there has been an accident of a van and blah, blah...." And we kind of jumped up. And then one man said, "Well, gee whiz, isn't that something? All you dark folks, every time you turn around, you're looking at some white woman with a bikini on." Well, she did. When she walked into this meeting, telling us about this accident. So, we didn't know how serious it was at the time. But the two boys had, two boys had got hurt real bad. And one had to be hospitalized, had been taken to the hospital. The other two didn't want to go, but eventually, they did. And no one at the Department of Culture and History was at blame, not even the director at the time. And even George Jordan. None of them wold blame and stuff. And unbeknownst to me, I was ticked. Because I blamed the Department of Culture and History, okay, for not being thorough in checking out the boys. And number two, I blamed the director because he didn't follow up, the two directors: one over the camp and the guy who was running the black arts camp at the time. They didn't follow up on the kids after they left from home. Because when I found out a month later that they never called the parents, they never checked up on 'em or nothing. And

Michael Harris Interview

nobody got fired for it. No one got reprimanded-, well, they might have got repriman-, no one got laid off ... for it. And the van was completely crushed. They lost a-, that van was probably about \$18,000, on top of the hospital bill, etc., etc. And just found out about a year ago they did settle a small lawsuit claim out of that particular accident. Which by right, the parents could have taken this whole camp, if they wanted to. But the only reason why the parents didn't, because they had the love and they knew the history behind this camp. But if they knew some of the racists things that probably been permeating in the last five years, they probably would have taken the camp, just on GP. We had a young white male who was here for the first time, as well as I had several white females who were dancers of mine, who never had a problem except one of the white males was attacked and his head was almost shaved off. And I was vividly mad with the director because he did not, threw out the boys, he did not call the white males parents to explain, you know, to do any of this. And then I confronted him as he was a racist. And then I confronted the other guys, and they said, "Well, you shouldn't have been up there anyway." And I confronted him, I said, "Look, this is a state tax supported facility. This facility is for any West Virginia who wants to come here. If you had not heard, racism left here over 20-some years ago. If you want this to be a racist camp, then you go out and find \$30 to \$20,000 and you write it off yourself, if you want it to be nothing but a black camp. But until you can do that, you have to allow and treat everybody the same, regardless of what gender or what racial makeup they come from. And so, that was the big incident that happened because of these two people wanted to hold black-type things and they couldn't do that, in which they didn't understand. And I couldn't understand for two black guys who were working on doctorates and master's degrees to know that when you're dealing with state money, you cannot segregate from other people and try to mash your own little agenda. And which it's true, they were trying to form their own agenda. And the people at the Department of Cultural and History, they knew that. So they kept it disrupted, they kept it underfunded, etc., etc. And uh, so it blew up. There was a big, there was a big publicity with Fanny Syler and the newspaper and stuff. And you know, again, this guy was, you know, was basically involved in it. And he is from a well-prominent family in the Charleston area. His dad had probably-, and they still do own some of the main property in downtown Charleston that they rent out, as well as one of the founders and shareholders of One Valley Bank, that is now worth probably thirty-six billion dollars. So, you know where I'm coming from. Okay. He's one of the sons of that particular

Michael Harris Interview

family. There's about three of them. So he really doesn't have to work, you know. He likes this because this is like his get-away from home. He doesn't have to be away from his wife, his beautiful wife and three beautiful children. It's just like being away from home, being up here and having a good time ... for him, okay. And he liked it. If he had his way, he could probably buy this whole place. He wanted to. But right now he can't. So, so, eventually one of the kids did get, it wasn't too much of a-, one of the guys just decided to quit. And, and then the whole thing broke up. We had a big meeting up in Morgantown. Out of the whole meeting, I was the only one that from, from this area, some of the-, the director that is here now, was invited-he didn't go-I went, representing him and some other people. They tried to convince me to break away, that were being used by the white folks here. And that they wanted to turn his camp into a white camp. And I explained to him I didn't feel that way. I felt that the most important thing was to keep the camp going. Because if we kept it going, we could still keep kids involved, etc., etc. and stuff. I explained to him that at one time we had been offered, if we wanted to run this camp by setting up our own corporation and stuff, it's fine. But I said, "Well, gee, whiz, with two people here that had doctor's degrees, and to have all this stuff here, you mean you tell me you have folks that don't even have sense enough to even write grants or even to invite Ebony or Jet or Time or Life Magazine to come and do an article on this camp, so we can eventually attract notable black Americans who have money and funds to come and fund this camp? What is the freaking problem with you guys? You're back in that same black mentality that you want somebody to do for you when you can do for yourself. And that's the problem, the reason why we're up here now, because you're too lazy to do for yourself." "Well, we're ready to do for self now." I said, "You're not ready to do for self now. Why do you want to break up what we got going now, when we can keep that going?" So, we had a fallen out, a big fallen out. And I would think perhaps maybe with, with uh, this interview, you might want to think about interviewing a young man named Peter Je-, Peter Jesus, who now lives in Anstead, about what? sixteen miles away, who has his own African arts art gallery. And since he was one of the founders of the African American Arts Camp, he could give you some insight of what, about this particular camp. But he never was a 4-Hr. He wasn't a 4-Hr at all. But he was one of the main people who set up this second phase of this camp that's going on now. And you might want to try to interview him because he can give you some insight and stuff. Last year we ... last, last two years I was instrumental in recommending Miss Adrian Beezmar Bellafonte, who's a friend, who

Michael Harris Interview

her and I had always worked together and had always had dance pieces at the West Virginia Dance Festival for years. And I was able to help her with a couple of fund raising in Lewisburg at Carnegie Hall, which I took my dance troupe to, we performed for a couple of fund raisers at Carnegie Hall. And I was instrumental in first getting her daughter up here for camp. Because her daughter, when she came, she fell in love with it. She just went wild, and went back and told her mom about it. When the incident happened between the director and the administration here, and the director didn't show, then she was able to go ahead and decide to go ahead and run the camp. And so, she started here running-, her first year was, to me, was a disaster. Because she wouldn't listen to me. She wouldn't take any of the advice I was trying to give her. She wanted to run the camp like it was some kind of, if we were out in California and we were practicing Zin Voodoo, where everybody would breathe in the air and take in and feel everybody's and stuff. And I'm saying, "Look, Miss Bellefonte, or Miss Adrian, you're dealing with inner city black children. The only thing that they recognize as far as discipline is concerned, is that you better get your behind in line or else. You're not speaking to middle-class, Caucasian children where you can just kind of raise your voice a little bit and most of them will probably react. When you're dealing with young, streetwise black children, you have to do more than raise your voice. So when that first year, we had, we began to develop a strain of relationship of how this camp was going to run. And my emphasis was, that the camp needed to be run with, first of all with safety and with safety first. And with instruction. And at the same time, when you have things scheduled, you go on time. And when she ran the first year, everything was off schedule, nothing was on schedule, everything was off, the instructors were upset, kids were upset, and.... it was sort of a fiasco. So, we as instructors, decided, "Well, we'll just over look that this year." Okay, that was [inaudible].... She decided to take on an ambition last year by bringing her daughter here, I mean, her daughter-, excuse me, her sister, who is a well-known actress, Miss Shari Bellafonte, to bring her to expose her to the camp because of the funding. I think the Department of Culture and History thought it would be a good idea, it would give them publicity and hopefully, give some national exposure. Which it probably did in a certain sense. But again, they failed to push for the top media press. You know, The New York Times, the Ebony's, the Jet, the Essence magazines, Time magazine, Life magazine, Gentleman's Quarterly, whatever, whatever magazine. It failed to have someone in that department, in Culture and History, which is run so haphazardly, I'm sorry. They have a

Michael Harris Interview

bunch of educated fools over there, who figure they got, they got their little jobs and stuff. And they just, they don't really have to do anything. If that place was a business, they would have folded under 25 years ago, the way they run the Department of Culture and History. And that's one of my biggest beefs. You have all these government funded things here, but people don't really have to work. Once they're in, and they get their little status or whatever, boom! they're in. Not unless poli-, politics involved where they're in a position where they can easily be moved out. So, but getting back to me point was that when she, when she started her second year up here, she brought her sister and they decided to [inaudible] ... who's trying to start a recording, recording career for uses as a starting point of doing a video. Which is fine. You know, I had no qualms about that. But when you had herself and myself trying to work together, and you're giving, you're trying to communicate, the other person doesn't, does not try to communicate on a total collision. And that's basically what happened with our, our situation. Whereby we almost had a young man to almost drown up at uh, Summersville. Well, fortunately for him, there was enough around so that he didn't drown or anything. But she, it was my job to secure a lifeguard, which I did. But unfortunately for the lifeguard, and the kids, she changed the date, and she changed the day. And so, unbeknownst to me.... I did not know the guy who runs the grounds, his son was a lifeguard, or else I could have got him. So we went on up there anyway. And the boys knew the rules and stuff. They decided to go out in the deeper part and swim, which the boy did, went out and touch the buoy and thought, well, he'd rest and try to swim back. Well, he got tired. He yelled for help, a couple of guys went in and got him. And fortunately, he wasn't hospitalized or anything like that. I, as the ruling [inaudible....] I took full responsibility. So I got reprimanded and fired. I had no qualms to that. I did not protest that action, because I was basically head of that particular project. And probably I had no excuse. But probably the main thing that I would probably say about excuse was the fact that the young man and the whole camp, at that time, was under so much pressure because of trying to get her sister this recording and this choreography and stuff together, that everything was changed, the kids were up to 12 and 1 o'clock in the morning rehearsing and sleeping late and coming in, couldn't-, and they'd rehearse and they'd be tired and stuff. It got in so much of a fiasco that everybody was at each other's throat. And that, not only my programs was turning around, but the other things that I had scheduled was turned around. It got me to a point of frustration and not particularly caring. Because there were two people who were stuck on starship and not working with the

Michael Harris Interview

kids. And not seeing that the kids were, and that they're needs were going to be met. So we had...

END OF SIDE 2 - TAPE 1

BEGIN SIDE 1 - TAPE 2

MH: ...back again. Fortunately for us, no one has really been seriously injured up here. We did have a time at, before the, before the two gentlemen, the three people rolled over the hill, four years ago, which would be-, make it '93, I guess. The year before that we had a virus here at this camp, which started the first day of camp. And it was really unfortunate, because the tech crew or someone brought it in. I, myself, think that the water was infected with the virus, and it was not purified. Because when we came up here, the place was filthy, it was dirty. And that the kids picked it up either off the sinks or the showers or in the water. And the virus, like a flu virus, 48hour flu virus, affected probably over half of the campers. And we ran the camp. And we had two days to go and we had to shut down. Because everybody, directors, everybody, was coming down with something. And that was due to administration. Again, no one was reprimanded, no one was fired, no one was called in to question about that incident. But we had one incident that happened, too, which I was responsible for, which I wrote the uh, wrote the commissioner, as well as the, the director's here. And I explained the incident, explained the fact. Yeah, I was supposed to be fired. But how come these people weren't fired two years ago for this incident? And they're still working and they're still doing what they're doing and bringing home a paycheck 12 months out of the year. And that you, as a commissioner, surrounded the wagons and made 36 going to be held during the summer. No, the administration, the Department of Culture and History, I'm sorry, but it's lapsed. And it can stay there under-funded. But they do not care about this camp. This camp is always put on the back burner until a month before. Again, this applies to the administration that now runs this particular facility, George Jordan. And the used to be commissioner, Bill Drennen. Now, the new commission, I have not met the young lady. I understand she's a, the wife of a well-known director here in the state of West Virginia, through the West Virginia Symphony, Mrs. Cole, and I'm hoping to eventually one day meet her. And

Michael Harris Interview

find out where she's coming from, as far as what she thinks this camp is, can not only do for us, but for other West Virginians as well. This camp does not have to be solely for black West Virginians. Okay? It can be solely just, this camp is a very spiritual camp. It has a lot of spiritual type of feelings here in the evening and at night time. We do a thing which I created, which is called man-to-man, in which we get with the boys and have them bring out some of the things they dislike and like. And we bring up things that they need to know and what they need to respect. The girls do the same thing. They bring up things to the other women about what they like and what they dislike, how boys treat them, how they use them, how they call them the B word, and etc., etc., and how they're maybe [inaudible] ... with their body and stuff, and why they shouldn't be and why they should practice abstinence, rather than letting them be submissive to boys who, as a young boy, well, they're practicing their manhood. But they have to be strong enough to practice their womanhood, etc. We uh, I have a thing here where, the disciplines now, they clean up at night. Okay. It's sharing of duties. These are things that I implemented. Okay. We used to do the trail, the hiking trail, that I would lead the hiking trail. And we would have different [blank space] on the hiking trail, different authors on the hiking trail. And sometimes it would take us 2 hours to do this hike. But we, we were looking at authors, we're looking at naturalists, sure that there was no press brought upon this place and stuff. So, you know, let's wag the tail both ways, gentleman. So, right now, I still have a few people kind of, kind of ticked with me or envious with me that I was able to come back again, due to the fact that who's the director now, that this camp is not going to work if I'm not up here. And as far as 1997, this camp is working because myself and a new bunch of resident administrators and stuff that are here, were able to control the flow of the kids, discipline of the boys, which is very important, and also the girls, keeping the boys from the girls, and the girls from the boys. And unfortunately, I wished I was living in this day because the girls are more aggressive than the boys. [chuckles] I mean, let's face it. I, everything is sort of turned around now, you know. I mean, these girls will actually go into the boys dorms and lay up, if you allow it. And it's just, it's bazaar how the times, the pendulum has shifted, and it's changed. But most of these kids, we have several kids that are back up here now that this camp has really brought them out, has given them a new respect for themselves. We try to tell a lot of the black young boys, as well as the girls, to get rid of the N word that they say among themselves. Because if you're going to say it among yourselves, then you should not get brutally mad of a Caucasian

Michael Harris Interview

person if he says the same thing to you, too. You're, you're basically a total hypocrite and you're buffooned if you're going to do it for yourself, but yet not allow other people to do it to you, too. So we try to teach that to them. We also try to give them some kind of advice to leave here with, especially about their heritage. Especially about the black educators and, and performers that, that was now is beginning to be recognized, that paved the path for them. Probably my biggest beef with the administration of this camp, is the fact they wait til the last minute to organize and send out information and to organize every freaking year. You know, it's not like [blank space] When I, in my dance school and studio, I'm receiving information around January, and February and March about different dance workshops and different classes and stuff that's people who would show us different insects and animals, distinguish from poison ivy and poison oak, or copper heads or rattle snakes. At one time, we used to have all of that. That is sort have been placated right now. But we planned to get those kids of things back, if we get the funding to have these people to do this. And this trail would take us more into Babcock, a part of Babcock State Park, which is very beautiful trails with some beautiful scenery and, and , and a canopy of woods, almost like the rain forest, in a way. Just simply beautiful. Uh, so... out of that, this year, 1997, after complaining so long that we needed to have a, a showcase that would have a combined showcase of all the disciplines, the literature, the art, the music, uh, this year we're finally, we were able to do that with, with a couple of new instructors. A Miss Barbara Nichols, who is, who is a curator at one of the museums in, in Columbus, Ohio, and also a museum in Washington, D.C. She's a young lady that's had lots of experience, who has a doctor degree in, in the arts, who has brought a whole new enrichment on black art here, that has inspired the whole camp. Not only just the kids, but all the instructors, all the administrators, too, to get involved in the kind of stuff that she is informing us and showing us about. And we have a young lady who is out of the Midwest, who is now a professor at the University of West Virginia, who is now directing the Theater/Drama department, who is now collaborated with myself and others to help actually put on a, a musical. Before we used to do, well, one discipline would do a show, then another one would do their little show and the dance would do their part and then the music, music would do theirs and instrumental do theirs. This time we're collaborating the whole thing together. **(MM: All together)** For the first time in 14 years, which I've been begging. And again, a lot of things that you see now here is basically, and I don't like to pat myself on the back, but I've been the old bad boy at the camp. I've been the squeaky

Michael Harris Interview

wheel of the camp. And when you're that squeaky wheel, a lot of people don't like you. And only because I've had over thirty years in theater that I know how certain things are supposed to be run. And you have to take those chances to be that squeaky wheel and see what happens. If you fall off, you fell off. Last year I fell off the last day of the camp. But I've gotten put back on again today, I mean the last few, this year. So, other than that, I must say, Mr. Matt Moore, I must let you ask me another question, but I must get ready for the evening fiasco, which is dinner. [chuckles]

END OF INTERVIEW