

Hudson River Valley Institute
Walkway Over the Hudson Oral Histories
Linda Curtis

Length: Approximately 11 minutes

Interviewer (Jess Boyle): Could you say and spell your name for us?

Linda Curtis: My name is Linda Curtis L-I-N-D-A C-U-R-T-I-S.

Interviewer: First question I have for you is where did you grow up; in this area, another area?

Curtis: I grew up in the Hudson Valley; in the Lower Hudson Valley in Hastings on the Hudson which is right near Yonkers in the beginning of the Hudson Valley with the Palisades across from me. I remember very significantly, was the beauty of the Palisades down there.

Interviewer: How many years did you live there?

Curtis: Seventeen.

Interviewer: Now once you left Hastings on Hudson where did you move to?

Curtis: To Dobbs Ferry which was the next town up the river and then literally I've been moving further north to get away from primarily the growth of the area and the suburbia area. And I finally ended up in Rhinebeck three years ago which is nice and countrified still.

Interviewer: Now what other towns in the middle have you been living in?

Curtis: I lived in Peekskill. I lived in Yorktown which is a little bit away from the river and then I lived in Hopewell Junction which is in southern Dutchess County.

Interviewer: Where did you go to school and you know primary, secondary and even advanced school?

Curtis: Primary school, I went to Saint Matthew's Catholic School in Hastings on the Hudson, high school Hastings on Hudson High School, college, my bachelors, I went to Mercy College in Dobbs Ferry. And then for my masters I went to Fordham University and that was a combination of in Tarrytown, and in the Bronx and then at Lincoln Center kind of wherever.

Interviewer: A mix if you will.

Curtis: Yeah, yeah I had to take them all over the place back then.

Interviewer: Of course. Now your parents what did they do for a living? Did they grow up in this area? Were they the reason why you lived here or the reason why you stayed here?

Curtis: Well yes, you know, I mean obviously I was born in Peekskill originally, moved down to Hastings, and that's [cuts off] I don't remember I was about a year old I guess. My dad grew

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up in Peekskill, my mom grew up in the Bronx and I think they actually met at Grand Central Railroad, way before Metro Railroad existed or anything and they decided to settle in Hastings because my grandfather had like a multiple family building.

Interviewer: Now what did your parents do for a living?

Curtis: My father was a trooper, a New York State trooper and my mother was a store owner. She ran a small store in Hastings called [Porto Akola Parell].

Interviewer: Now was your father a trooper in this area, Troop K?

Curtis: He was actually a trooper at Troop K when it was in Hawthorne, before it moved up to Millbrook? [Looks for clarification]

Interviewer: Yes.

Curtis: I always get Mill- [cuts off] it's funny because I remember he had gone through a decision making process of moving up to Millbrook when the troop moved up there. And he decided against and which is funny because I ended up in Dutchess County and loving Dutchess County much more than any other part of the state that I've lived in and he, I'm sorry, splicing here. [Slight pause] Yeah at that point in time, then he started because the troop had moved from Hawthorne, he started to work at the World Trade Center on a detail down there.

Interviewer: Now what was your first job either in Hastings or anywhere?

Curtis: My first job I ever had was at the Andrews home in Hastings when I was fourteen as a waitress.

Interviewer: Now what other professions have you had as you've moved up the Hudson Valley?

Curtis: I'm one of those few people probably today that haven't had many professions. First I went into college with the bizarre concept of being a marine biologist. Always having a love for water, the ocean the, you know Hudson but fell in love with sociology at some point in time in college and ended up doing a double major in sociology and psychology. And then I decided that the best action for me at that point and time was to get a decent job that would be in social work. So I got a masters in social work at Fordham and I was in the field for twenty-five years primarily in administration. I love supervising staff and working with families, didn't like doing the direct clinical work so much. And then two years ago, decided to retire from that and start a business with my husband in the environmental field. We have a solar thermal renewable energy company that specializes in solar thermal energies, basically meaning that heating hot water and space heating

Interviewer: Now you've obviously lived in the Hudson Valley all your life, has there been one specific area of the valley that has affected you the most or is where you're currently living?

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Curtis: I think it's been all the areas, I think primarily though in Hastings because that was where I was really growing up and that's where I had. [cuts off] Yeah I would walk home from school everyday and I would see the Palisades as I was walking down Main Street down to my house and you know it's just something you never get out of your head. It's just the beauty of that which is so remarkable. And I think now where I'm living in Rhinebeck I'm not exactly on the Hudson, we tried to get a house on the Hudson, but we just couldn't, a little expensive. So I'm as close as I can get and I'm still involved in you know different organizations in the area. I'm sorry what was the question again?

Interviewer: Oh no, just about your experience in the Hudson Valley and also it carries over into the next question, are there any specific memories of your time in the Hudson Valley that you would like to share with us about the bridge or not about the bridge, just in general?

Curtis: It's funny my daughter had given me, as we started moving further up north and I became more familiar with Poughkeepsie I had noticed the bridge and I said oh, "that's really cool what is it?" and I did some investigation and I found out made contributions here and when I could. And then my daughter had given me, my daughter had asked me what I wanted for Christmas once and I said I wanted a picture of the Hudson River and so she went crazy trying to find me a picture and she found a picture of the bridge. The old-fashion picture of the bridge in the 1800s with people with the parasols and everything and I loved it I just absolutely loved it. So it's one of the main focal points in my house right now and what it does for me is just symbolic of the Hudson and it's something that I grown up with and just in love with it, one of the first loves of my life. I can't, I've dreamt of moving to Canada... my husband would have loved to move to Canada. I'd love to move to Scotland, it's one of my favorite places but I can't leave the Hudson Valley it's got too much in it and around and that's it.

Interviewer: We're going to switch now and she has more specific questions for you.

Curtis: Okay.

Interviewer 2: Alright, what about the bridge itself, does like the special meaning that it has to you, can you describe that?

Curtis: Like I mentioned before, it really is symbolic of the Hudson for me and I mean the Hudson is so historic in this area. It was the main shipping route for, and that's why it became you know a very famous area [cuts off] well populated area was because of the Hudson. And the railroad bridge and you know it's kind of... it's good and it's bad in it's symbolizing the Hudson. Because on one part it shows how we've kind of let it go to pot, the Hudson River towns and everything; Yonkers, Peekskill you know you go along the Hudson and you see rotting old [Hokes], buildings and things and in many ways the railroad bridge is very similar to that. But in other ways there's the revival feeling now amongst people to try and bring the Hudson back to what it was, you know to bring it back to, you know its clean now, where it hasn't been clean before and I think it's another step along the way for it.

Interviewer 2: Do you know much like of any of the plans of Walkway Over the Hudson have or like what's your view on what [cuts off] how the? [cuts off]

Curtis: I have you know some understanding of it. [cuts off] It's not been something you know [cuts off] I've followed but you know in activist newsletters and things like that, you know, and Scenic Hudson. You know, I definitely follow it, but it's not like I can give you detailed information on it.

Interviewer 2: Is there anything you would like to see for the bridge in the future?

Curtis: I'd like to see it saved; I'd like to see it saved. I think it's a significant part of the history of New York State, especially with the railroad bridges going across from the east to the west side, to the Catskills. And the Catskills is a whole nother lost legacy, the old hotels and everything and the railroad bridges were a big part of that.

Interviewer 2: Do you think with making it a walkway, do you think it will attract more people to the Hudson Valley and how and why?

Curtis: Oh sure, it's going to be very good for visiting and for, you know, I would imagine a lot of bikers on it and things and kids hiking in school groups. Those windows are great; kids are going to love the idea of windows in the floor. It will probably freak out people my age but, but you know little kids are going to love it.

Interviewer 2: [To Boyle] Is there anything else?

Interviewer: Are there any other memories about the bridge or just your experiences here with the bridge that you would like to share with us?

Curtis: Not that I can think of really off hand.

Interviewer: What was actually... I know you've moved up the Hudson, what was your first experience with the bridge?

Curtis: I think one of the first times I drove up to Poughkeepsie on Route 9 on the highway section of it and just seeing how formable it is. And then there is the other bridge which seems so such, it's a bigger bridge, you know but it's not nearly as impressive as the railroad bridge. It's just very old and still standing and we can keep it standing if we don't let it, you know rust.

[Curtis slightly laughs]

Interviewer: The other question we have is, this somewhat arbitrary and this might be something you'd like to answer if not please, but they're planning on making this bridge a New York State park once it's completed. Do you maybe (have) a suggestion of a possible name for the park anyone in the area you feel should be given the honor of having the park named after them?

Curtis: Yeah, Pete Seger, the Pete Seger Bridge. [Slight pause]

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Interviewer: Is there anything else that you would like to share?

Curtis: No.

Interviewer: Thank you very much.

Curtis: Okay thank you, that was fun actually. [proceeds to shake hands]

Interviewer: Thank you very much we really do appreciate it.

[End of Interview 10:55]

Transcribed by Paul Contarino