

# *Personal History*

## A Precipitous Alteration Windham, Ohio 1940-1955

The population and employment for Windham Village was in for a rapid change when the Federal Government purchased over 21 thousand acres of land a stone's throw from Windham. The name given to this purchase was the Ravenna Army Ammunition Plant. Laborers were needed and housing to accommodate the many families who came seeking employment. To fill some of this need the Maple Grove Park Apartments were built.

My husband had left employment in Mississippi paying 30 cents an hour to take a job at the Arsenal for 65 cents an hour. We moved into apartment 15F which rented for \$32 a month. It was a 2-bedroom apartment heated with a coal furnace. The bathroom had a shower, a lavatory and toilet, but no bathtub. We heated the water with a heater connected to a large tank. The clothes line was in the front yard and the water so discolored my wash that I was hesitant to hang my laundry outside.

The family was happy and content. We later bought land outside of town and built a home. I still live here with my daughter and grandson.

The Arsenal is still here but obsolete. However, the National Guard has training facilities there and it could be made functional if the need should arise, as it was during the Korean War, the Cuban Missile Crisis and Vietnam.

The population of Windham is now about 3000. Many new homes have been built and a new elementary school. Life goes on but at a much slower pace.

*-Jessie Chase*

Maplewood Career Center



Jessie in front of 15F - May 2000

**In order to understand the magnitude of the effect the Ravenna Army Ammunition Plant had on one small town, some background of the Arsenal is needed:**

The Arsenal consisted of 22,000 acres of farmland and forest when purchased by the government in 1940. It was in full operation in 10 months and employed over 18,000 workers.

*The Portage County farmers were given thirty days to sell everything they couldn't take with them, and the auctions went on from dawn to dusk each day in August 1940. By September it was all over. The farmers formed a sorry parade on the country roads-250 families, 1300 people-the greatest permanent mass relocation program in Ohio history.....*

Excerpts taken from *Ravenna*, an Ohio Magazine article by Sue Gorisek, 1986.

*Within a year of the farmers' leaving, the first bombs rolled off the assembly line at the Ravenna Army Ammunition Plant. The countryside had given way to an incredible war machine: an instant top-secret city of 1,200 buildings, 18,000 workers and 500 earth-covered bunkers where live ammunition was stored.*

In 1940 Windham Village had a population of 316 with no water system, no sewage system, no gas lines, no police department and definitely no extra housing. Then enter the government— building sewage and water systems and 2000 housing units. The population grew from 316 to 5000 in a year and was the fastest growing town in the United States.

The Maple Grove Housing Project, as it was called, encompassed 117 acres of land. The housing buildings that were built were of six types: A,B,C,D,E, and F. The buildings consisted of the following types of apartments ranging from three to six rooms. The buildings were built between 1942 and 1943. They rested on wooden posts which set on concrete piers that were below ground. The floors were of varnished oak flooring. There was no insulation in the walls, and the units were heated with coal furnaces. The plumbing fixtures consisted of a kitchen sink and the bathroom had a shower, lavatory and a toilet- no tub. The pipes were galvanized iron. The rent for a three bedroom unit was \$39.50 and for an additional \$6.00 a month a person could have it furnished. Some of the housing units still exist, but many have been torn down. The ones in existence are rented as low cost housing. The unit that rented for \$39.50 in 1943 now rents for \$340 unfurnished.

The Project also included a community building which had a theatre with a seating capacity of approximately 400, a library, doctor and dentist offices and various other rooms. A small shopping center consisting of three stores and a gas station was built along with an elementary school. The shopping center no longer exists, but the school is still being used today.

## Turning Point

The year 1944 was a turning point for the Chase family. Employment in Panola County, Sardis, Mississippi, was critical. Charles Chase's job for the Prisoner of War Camp, Como, Mississippi, was terminated.

The employment office in Sardis, Mississippi, had a list of employment available in Ravenna, Ohio- the Ravenna Arsenal, Inc. Charles and a couple of friends were sent by the employment office to work at the Ravenna Arsenal, Inc.

They lived in the dormitory on the arsenal site. Later the family moved to Windham, Ohio and rented an apartment known as the Windham Project. A three-bedroom apartment rent was \$48.00 a month. The apartment was heated with a coal furnace. The bathroom consisted of a shower and no bath tub.

Tragedy came on a Saturday morning. The apartment caught fire. The two youngest children were asleep upstairs.

Charles broke the rear door to the apartment, cutting his hand, but the children were rescued with minor burns.

When the Windham Estate Homes were accepting applications to build individual homes, they visited the model home and Charles saw the upstairs had no exit door. He never forgot the apartment fire that could have ended in tragedy without that exit.

Later they purchased land out of the Village and built a home. Chase made sure the house plan had a back door.

*Jessie Chase, Betty Clark, Anna Lowell*  
Maplewood Career Center

## My Life In the Oil Patch

I attended Portland Grade School from first grade through the eighth. I then went to Racine High School for one-and-one-half years, quitting when I was fifteen years old to go to work in the oil field. My father had always worked in the oil fields, and I had helped him. That is where I got some of my experience.

I also carried the mail across the Ohio River in a row boat. I rowed across and back three times a day for \$35.00 per month, and I was making \$35.00 per month in the oil field for a total of \$70.00 per month. In 1940 that was good money for a sixteen year old boy.

I bought a motorcycle and my first car. The motorcycle was a 1931 Harley Davidson and I gave \$150.00 for it. The car was a 1937 Ford. I bought it from my sister for \$250.00. Later I bought a 1934 Harley Davidson for another \$150.00; I had blown up the 1931 cycle.

After I was married at the age of eighteen, I went to Sistersville, West Virginia, to cook in the oil field. The war was going on, so I went to work at the Fifth Service Command Post in Newark, Ohio, repairing army vehicles. After the war, I went back to the oil field, working in Sistersville, and then to Alfred, Ohio.

In 1949 I moved to Somerset, Ohio, and went to work pumping wells for Mideast Oil Co. I have worked for a lot of different companies, most of which are not in operation anymore. I have worked in Ohio, Pennsylvania, West Virginia, Kentucky, and New York. I have spent better than fifty years in the oil patch. I have roustabouted, pumped, worked on service rigs, dressed tools on a spudder, and have been a field representative and production manager. It has been a great life and I sure have enjoyed it.

*-Earl Willford*

Perry County ABLE

## Almost Heaven

In 1925, in a little coal mining village in West Virginia, there was a baby boom. Five baby boys were born to five different families: Homer Casey, Roosevelt Anderson, Rush Moorner, Richard Cunningham, and yours truly, Claude Victor Berry. We all grew up together. We were wild, young, and free. We didn't have anything that the world would call wealth, but we were happy with what we had.

As young boys often do, we tried to mimic the men around us. This was during the Depression and jobs were scarce. Most of the men around there worked in the coal mines two days a week. We all thought it would be fun to work in a mine too. When the men would leave for the mines we would head for the hills to dig our own mines. We would leave early in the morning and be gone all day. After a while our parents began to wonder what we were doing all day long. We had to come clean and tell them. By this time we had tunneled twenty or thirty feet into the side of the mountain.

In the innocence of youth we had no idea of the risks we had been taking. Our parents were quick to explain to us how dangerous what we had been doing was. We never thought about the possibility of a cave-in or of its potentially fatal consequences. We had only thought of the adventure and excitement of being together.

Grounded from the "world of mining" we began to look for new things to do. We loved to build. We built a log cabin to play in. We built a beaver dam to swim in and a big swing. The swing was actually a sixty foot cable attached to a huge oak tree. You had to grab hold of the end of the cable with both hands and hang on tight while a couple of the other guys gave you a big push. Fortunately none of us ever fell. If we had, we would have fallen about one hundred feet down the mountainside.

We never worried about the many different kinds of snakes in the mountains around our homes. Neither did we worry about the swift rapids in the rivers nor the high rocky cliffs in the mountains. To us it was a paradise.

The mountains gave us life. There was one spot especially. It was about a quarter of a mile in size. It was like a Garden of Eden to us. It was beautiful, with apple trees in the midst of it, and a mountain stream brimming with nice mountain trout. There were all kinds of nuts and berries for us to eat as well. And, oh, yes, I cannot forget the bull frog pond at the foot of a huge beechnut tree whose branches always seemed to be reaching up to the heavens in praise to God.

You might be wondering what ever happened to all of us. Well, Homer became a track star in school, and then lost his life serving his country. Roosevelt also lost his life in the service. Rush was in the war, but he made it back. Richard never went into the service. I also was in the war and God smiled on me and I also made it back.

It has been many years since the five of us roamed the hills together. I will never forget the joy of growing up in the mountains of West Virginia. To me, it wasn't "almost heaven" — it was heaven.

*-Claude Berry*

Southwest Community Center



## Journey to the Edge of Survival

As a youngster growing up, I remember being very happy and looking forward to the many wonderful things life had to offer. It was my step-mother, Michi Bias, who gave me this outlook. She was truly a mother figure to me who gave me such strength and courage. She was a real inspiration to me and I wanted to be just like her.

One special thing she did for us ( my brother, Dewayne, and I ) was to take us on a camping trip every summer. It gave us something to look forward to every year.

In the summer of 1978, it was very hot and humid when we got out of school for summer break. There were about ten of us going camping that year - three adults and seven children. We were all very excited and more than a little anxious to get to the camp site. But little did I know that we were about to embark on a **journey that would take us to the edge of survival.**

Upon arriving at the camp site, I remember looking around and thinking about how beautiful and peaceful it was. There were tall green trees everywhere. The trails were a jogger's paradise and there were numerous campers of all sizes and shapes around us. The river's water was so peaceful, it was so pleasant to just gaze upon it. A feeling of excitement overtook us all. We immediately set up our sleeping tents, our miniature stove, and other miscellaneous items for the trip.

The next day, while the adults sat chatting, all the kids decided to explore the park. However, we were not aware of all the dangers that lay ahead of us. We came upon a beautiful waterfall. As we got nearer to the waterfall, we noticed a rocky path across the top of it. It looked like it would be fun to try to walk across the top of the waterfall.

The older kids crossed first then my younger brother and I followed. What happened next was just all too unreal. One minute my brother and I were walking on the rocks when suddenly I slipped on some green moss and almost immediately found myself flying over the waterfall. The only thought I had going through my mind was "I can't die by myself". That was when I grabbed my brother and took him flying over the waterfall with me. What a frightening moment !! I began to scream for help.

At the bottom of the waterfall was a raging river that seemed very angry. I knew that if something didn't happen before hitting the bottom of the waterfall, we would never survive the river below. About a quarter of the way down the waterfall my foot somehow slipped into a crevice in the rock behind the waterfall. I held onto my brother tightly and we both screamed at the top of our lungs for help. The roar of the water was so loud that it took all our strength to yell loud enough for the others to hear us. But they did. The older kids came running back to where we had fallen. First they grabbed my brother and pulled him to safety. Then they were able to reach me and pull me up to my brother's side.

Once back on solid ground I remember feeling very frightened, but relieved that we were safe. As I looked back over the waterfall all I could see were the boisterous waves below me. I knew that if they had not been able to pull us to safety we would have drowned that day. I also knew there had to have been a Higher Power looking after us that day. What could have been a tragedy turned into a triumph.

Since that day, I have learned that on the journey of life there are many snares, disappointments, and dangers lying in wait for us. However, with courage, strength, and other's help we can conquer anything in life – that through every tragedy there is also victory awaiting us on solid ground.

However, since that day, I have made it a point to not try to cross any more waterfalls!

*-Treva Jackson*

Southwest Community Center



# A Farmer's Life

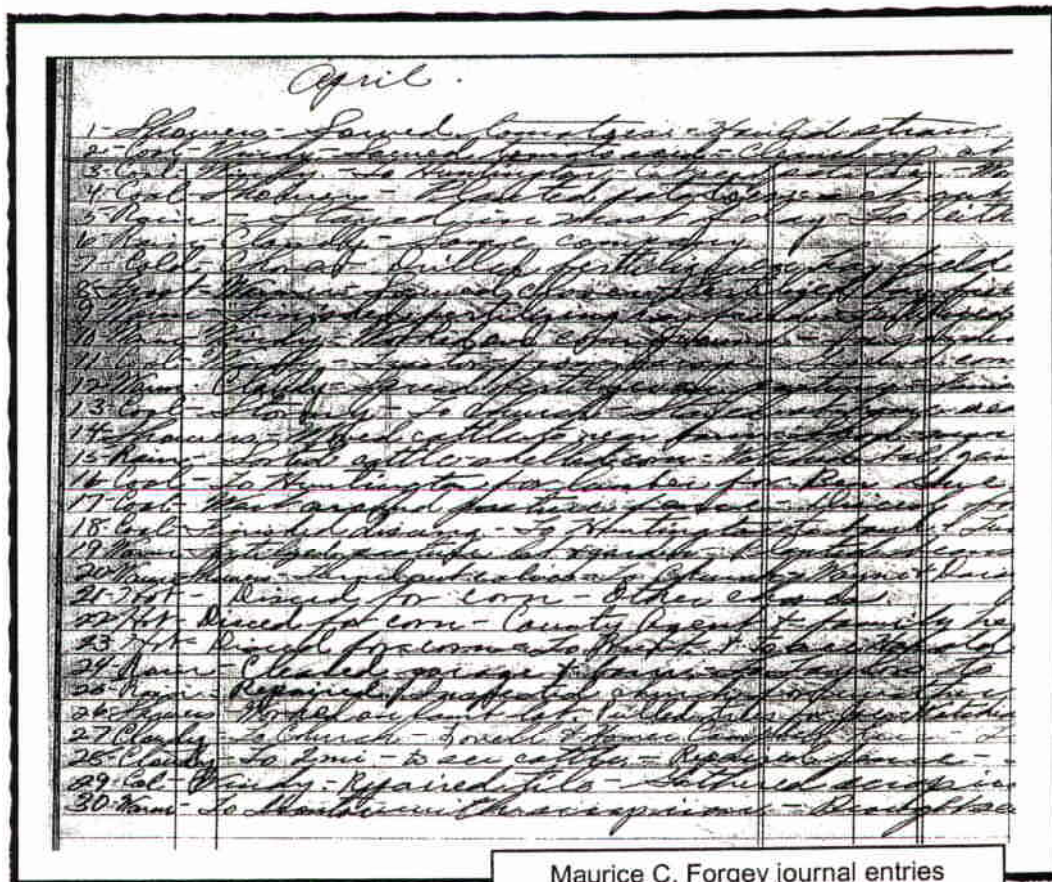
My father-in-law was a truck farmer. This means he raised tomatoes, cabbage, peppers, turnips, kale, and tobacco to sell at the market in Huntington, West Virginia. He not only was a truck farmer, but he raised beef cattle. Hay and corn were raised on the farm for the livestock. Horses and dogs were also part of this farm. Maurice C. Forgey did custom baling for other farmers from Gallipolis, Ohio, to South Point, Ohio, since there were few balers in 1952.

Even though Maurice was a busy farmer, he always took time out of his busy day to write in his daily journal.

We found his journals in an old box in a closet after his death. These journals became a treasure to his son, my husband Maurice E. Forgey.

In his journal he always mentioned the weather for each day and gave a short summary of the day.

This April in 1952 showed Maurice C. Forgey a busy man as we can tell from his own handwriting.



Maurice C. Forgey journal entries from April 1952

## History In My Family

My historical event lives within my family. I guess it happened about 7 years ago with my oldest brother. His name is James Harris. He served in the U.S. Army for 23 years. Germany, Korea, Vietnam and Fort Knox, Kentucky, were just a few places that he was stationed.

After leaving the army and settling in Columbus where Mom, Dad and my 2 sisters and baby brother all lived, he became very ill. His heart and kidneys started to shut down. This made him unable to really enjoy life after serving time for himself and his country. I guess he wondered at times out of anger and emotional strain, "Is this my reward for all the good things that I've done? Why does this have to happen to me? Why not the bad and useless people in the world that's no good use to themselves or the world?"

I would imagine that my brother and his wife really got tired of all the pain and emotional strain. After being put on the donor list, hopes and plans continued to give us something to believe in. Then it happened. A call came to notify them that a heart and kidney that matched were waiting. Some loving, caring person was giving him a chance at a functional life again.

My brother had his heart and kidney transplanted and it was successful. He was the second person that Ohio State University Hospital had ever done a double transplant of the heart and kidney. My sister-in-law told me that he was the first Afro-American in the United States that had the operation.

He is not in the greatest physical condition as he would like to be, but he's sure better than he used to be. He's living life again. I think it's pretty good for a 58 year old guy. High tech knowledge and medical science is what really makes it possible for some of these miracles to happen. What is it all about? Living to learn and learning to live.

*-Walter Robinson*

North Education Center - ABLE



Tom Dodge/Dispatch

Stephanie Harris with her husband, James, who received a new heart and kidney

# Patient's wife would give almost anything

## Heart-kidney operation OSU's second

By Alice Thomas  
Dispatch Staff Reporter

When her husband was sick, Stephanie Harris offered to give him a kidney.

When his condition worsened, doctors told James Harris that he also would need a new heart.

"I looked at him and said, 'I can't give you *that*, too,'" Mrs. Harris said, reflecting on the East Side couple's three-year wait for an organ donor.

What Mrs. Harris could not provide, doctors at Ohio State University Medical Center did March 20, when Mr. Harris, 51, became the hospital's second patient to receive a heart-kidney transplant.

Doctors say the operation was a success. Mr. Harris was in fair condition yesterday at the hospital.

"We've taken a fellow that was bed-bound and on dialysis to a functioning guy with a beating, healthy heart just like the rest of us," said Dr. David A. Brown, assistant professor of thoracic and cardiovascular surgery at OSU, who performed the heart transplant.

The double operation is rare, with "only a handful" performed annually in the United States, Brown estimated.

The first heart-kidney transplant at OSU Medical Center — performed last year on Roger Wilson of Butler, Ohio — also was a success, Brown said. Wilson is doing well, Brown said.

Mr. Harris' odyssey began seven years ago when he suffered kidney failure.

Doctors determined that his wife's kidney could be transplanted into his body, but Mr. Harris then

was stricken with cardiomyopathy, or a weakened heart muscle.

He was put on a list for a heart and kidney transplant, where his name remained for three years.

In February, Mr. Harris was hospitalized when his condition worsened. While still there last week, he received word that a 23-year-old Columbus man who died had compatible organs.

"His heart was working very poorly," Brown said of Mr. Harris' before the surgery.

The heart was transplanted first, he said, because it cannot be sustained outside the body as long as a kidney.

After an eight-hour wait to check on the heart's functions, doctors transplanted the kidney.

The organs in a heart-kidney transplant come from one donor, Brown said, to reduce the chance of rejection.

"It's almost like transplanting one organ," he said.

Heading the kidney transplant was Dr. Ginny L. Baumgardner, assistant professor of surgery with OSU's transplantation division.

"It really went well," Baumgardner said. "We had no problems."

Mr. Harris credits the staff, medical technology and his family — who "stuck right by me" — with giving him the strength to endure the procedure.

Mr. Harris is an Army veteran who served in Korea and Vietnam. He and his wife have nine biological and foster children.

He looks forward to the future, he said.

"I'm so glad to have a new life through the love of someone else. It's been a remarkable experience."

Columbus Dispatch article