

INTERVIEW WITH: Tracey Harding

BREAKING THE COLOUR BARRIER: AN ORAL HISTORY OF THE CHATHAM COLOURED ALL-STARS
A collaboration between the University of Windsor and the Chatham Sports Hall of Fame

Interview Status: open to public

Name of interviewee: Tracey Harding (T.H)

Name of interviewer: Salma _Abumeeiz___ (S.A. _)

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Transcription:

S.A: Okay, so we're just going to get started here. It is August 15th and I am here on the line with Tracey Harding. Thank you for speaking with me today.

T.H: You're welcome.

S.A: So, what is the name of the person you knew from the Chatham Coloured All-Stars?

0:00:19.8

T.H: Andrew Harding.

S.A: When and where was he born?

0:00:23.8

T.H: Chatham in 1919.

S.A: Okay, and where did he grow up?

0:00:29.8

T.H: In Chatham.

S.A: Can you tell me anything about his family, who they were, or what they did for a living?

0:00:36.8

T.H: So, Andrew was Wilfred "Boomer" Harding's brother.

S.A: Okay.

T.H: The two brothers had many sisters.

S.A: Okay.

T.H: And my mother and my aunt were Handsors.

S.A: Okay.

T.H: Andrew had three children, all girls. His eldest is deceased.

S.A: I see.

T.H: The second one is Andrea, and then myself.

S.A: Okay.

T.H: His other sisters that were -- no you may have this information from Boomer because they're intertwined, right? His sisters were Wanda, Beulah... who am I missing?

S.A: Those names do sound familiar.

T.H: No, Wanda, Beulah, and the brothers were Wilfred, Len, Carl, I think that's it.

S.A: Okay.

T.H: There were seven altogether.

S.A: Okay. Do if you know if sports were important—

T.H: In his family.

S.A: Okay. Do you know if sports were important to him growing up, did he do any other sports besides baseball?

0:02:06.4

T.H: He did track and field and I believe, that, I know I have his track and field photos, I may have his baseball photos as well.

S.A: Okay.

T.H: So, you have access to them, and I—this is something that you may want to research—I was going to look into it, my father was a police officer in Chatham.

S.A: Okay.

T.H: And I believe he was the first, the first black police officer on a city force in Canada.

S.A: Okay.

T.H: I have a photograph of him, and I think it's from 1953, standing in uniform in front of his police car.

S.A: Okay. Did his other family members play any sports and which sports were they?

0:02:55.7

T.H: Well, you have Boomer's history, right?

S.A: Right.

T.H: And then Wanda, his sister, played on the girl's baseball team that played during the war.

S.A: Okay. So, in regards to the Chatham Coloured All-Stars specifically, do you know how and when approximately he started playing with the All-Stars?

0:03:21.6

T.H: I'm—I was trying to figure that out. He's younger than Boomer, and I think Boomer played around 1936, so he would have been, I'm going to guess, in late '30s, early '40s.

S.A: Okay.

T.H: I'll see if there's a date on the photograph, I don't think there is.

S.A: Okay, so do you know what positions he played?

0:03:52.6

T.H: I do not.

S.A: No problem. Do you recall any memorable events or stories about his playing?

0:04:00.6

T.H: You know unfortunately, I'm—he was 44 when I was born.

S.A: Okay.

T.H: So, I—my sister may be able to tell you stories about when he played, he—I mean I knew that he played, he talked about his love of the game—he was always an avid sports fan. Like he went to Detroit to play baseball games all the time. He loved hockey, just about anything he loved.

S.A: Okay, great. Can you tell me anything about the team itself if you know any information, or what they were known for?

0:04:42.2

T.H: You know what, no, I don't.

S.A: No problem.

T.H: I don't know any of that.

S.A: No problem. Did anything among your family about people's reactions to their playing, such as fans or spectators?

0:04:53.8

T.H: No. Sorry.

S.A: Yeah, no problem. Did he ever talk about any challenges or difficulties while playing on the baseball team?

0:05:09.2

T.H: His challenges came more from his employment. Like he felt, being the first black police officer in Chatham, it was very difficult. Racism was really high within the department and then within the community because it was never seen before. So being in an authoritative position, it was challenging.

S.A: Absolutely. Did he ever talk about travelling with the team to other locations and what the reactions from people were like there?

T.H: I'm sorry what was that?

S.A: Did he ever talking about travelling to other places to play and what the reactions from people were like there?

0:05:54.4

T.H: He didn't talk about his experiences very much with regards to the baseball team. I think he was having fun.

S.A: Okay, we're just going to get into a few questions about sports and life after the Chatham Coloured All-Stars.

T.H: Yup.

S.A: So, would you like to share anything about his life after he played for them, how he made a living, or anything about his family? I know we mentioned he was an officer already.

0:06:24.6

T.H: Yup. That wasn't right away, he did a lot of menial jobs before he became a police officer. He was, he operated an elevator at the William Pitt Hotel, he was a private butler for a doctor in the city—I can't remember the doctor's name.

S.A: Okay.

T.H: He was in the army.

S.A: Okay.

T.H: And he learned how to cook in the army, which was great. He was a fabulous cook. He ended up doing a lot of the cooking for the police crew for parties and events.

S.A: Okay.

T.H: In Chatham.

S.A: Great.

T.H: He was best friends with Fergie Jenkins Sr., so he spent a lot of time, you know, following Fergie's career.

S.A: Okay.

T.H: That was very important to him.

S.A: Okay, did he continue to play any sports of any kind throughout his life? I know you had mentioned he did track as well.

0:07:24.2

T.H: Yes.

S.A: Okay.

T.H: He was pretty good at track, and he always played sports but not anything as organized as track and field or baseball, again. I know my uncle continued with hockey and skating and ref'ing, but he didn't do that. His job was too demanding at first, since he became a policeman.

S.A: Right. Did he encourage others in his family to also get involved in sports as far as you know?

0:07:53.1

T.H: I'm laughing, because the three girls, all three of us, were all horrible.

S.A: Oh really?

T.H: Yes.

S.A: Oh okay, do you think sports affected his life?

0:08:08.2

T.H: Yes, I think that, first of all he loved to have fun, and I think that he felt that playing on teams was extremely fun. I think he learned a lot of discipline, from practice and working on teams. He was a very disciplined man, he had a lot of ethics, and I think that stemmed a great deal from being in sports. And having brothers that were all athletic so, the competition between them, I'm sure, was pretty high.

S.A: So, on to some questions about sports in the community in general, do you know if sports were important to the black community when he was alive? Can you say anything about it?

0:09:02.3

T.H: I think it made them feel very connected, they connected to each other and I think that the, the social exposure was—it was an amazing time. I think that it really changed how black people were actually accepted and perceived in society, once they, you know, put on exhibitions playing against white teams. I think that it had tremendous value.

S.A: Absolutely. Did he talk about barriers or difficulties in participating in sports—

T.H: I think that both of my parents really believed in integration, and, you know, more along the lines of Martin Luther King and Malcom X, they were very much into culturally mixing and being part of society.

S.A: Okay, right. Did he talk about barriers or difficulties with participating in sports within the wider community? You kind of just touched on that, but do you want to add anything to it?

0:10:09.1

T.H: I can't really say exactly how he felt about that. When he was active in sports most of it was segregated so I think that added a lot of value to his life when it first became integrated.

S.A: Right.

T.H: Yup.

S.A: So, on to some questions about the impact and overall significance of the Chatham Coloured All-Stars. We sort of touched on this already, but what do you think the team's legacy was?

0:10:43.7

T.H: I think that it helped with integration. And I think that the men that I know of, that were on the Coloured All-Stars, I think a common thread with all of them would be their integrity and their hard work, and that, I mean, doing team sports I think that brings a lot of that together.

S.A: Right. Have any members of your family been involved in public commemoration of the All-Stars?

T.H: I'm sorry?

S.A: Have any of the other members of your family been involved with public commemoration of the All-Stars, for example there was a 50th anniversary celebration in 1984.

0:11:32.4

T.H: I'm sure my uncle, Ken Milburn, so that would be my dad's sister's husband was also on the team, and I believe you're going to be interviewing his daughter. So, she may have more information on that.

S.A: Okay.

T.H: The only other relatives that I know of would have been involved outside Boomer, wouldn't have been alive at that time.

S.A: Okay. So is this a story that you think more people should know about?

T.H: Sorry, I didn't hear the first part of the question.

S.A: Is this a story that you think more people should know about and why?

0:12:16.1

T.H: Oh, absolutely. It's interesting because I grew up in Chatham as well and I studied local history and it would have been really nice to have this as part of the curriculum.

S.A: Yeah, you're not the first person to point that out actually.

T.H: Yeah, and enjoyed local history very much, but it was focused on a lot of Native events but not so much the black, and I think it is a unique community because of the percentage of black people in it, so it would have been nice to have more than the Underground Railroad as part of the history.

S.A: Right. Do you have anything else you would like to add about your uncle or?

0:13:00.1

T.H: No, I don't think so.

S.A: Okay.

T.H: I've said everything.

S.A: Okay. So, if you have nothing else to add that's pretty much going to wrap up my questions for today. Thank you so much for having a conversation with me.

0:13:15.5