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## Frank A. Harris

Frank A. Harris

Institute of Child Nutrition

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## Frank A. Harris Oral History

Frank A. Harris fled Germany as an adolescent shortly before World War II, arriving in England. The family later made their way to the United States. Coming of age during the war, Harris joined the US Army and became a cook, serving in North Africa and Europe. After the war Harris built a career working in many different aspects of food service. He eventually became a school food service director and president of the Connecticut School Food Service Association.

JB: I'm Jeffrey Boyce and it's June 8, 2011. I'm here with Mr. Frank Harris in Somers, New York. Frank is going to share his story of child nutrition and some other things about his life with us. Welcome Frank and thanks for taking the time to talk with me today.

FH: Thank you very much and thank you for coming a long distance, and we much appreciate it.

JB: Happy to do it. We've been working on this about two years now haven't we?

FH: That's right. That's just about what it is.

JB: Could we begin today by you telling me a little bit about yourself, where you were born and where you grew up?

FH: All right. I was born in Fürth, Bavaria, Germany. Fürth is a city next to Nürnberg. It's like Minneapolis and St. Paul, kind of a twin city. I was born on December 7, 1922, the second child born in 1922, which was very unusual. My sister was born on January 3<sup>rd</sup>. When my mother became pregnant again she was hesitant to tell my father, but in the long run she couldn't hide it. He became so

upset muttering “People think I have nothing better to do.” But when I did come I was totally accepted and my mother was delighted because she raised us almost like twins.

JB: So you were born in the same year?

FH: Same year, 1922, which was very unusual, so I could really say I was an accident, but a happy accident.

JB: Tell me a little bit about your childhood. You started school in Germany?

FH: Yes, I started school in Germany. I started at an elementary school in 1929. As you know, Hitler came to power in 1933. In the beginning nothing much happened. After I graduated from elementary school we went to high school, where the atmosphere became quite uncomfortable for us. We had four Jewish students in our class. Classes are not twenty-four like here in the United States. We had about 35-40 students. Our classroom teacher was Professor Berthold, who was marvelous. He wrote all the French textbooks in Germany. He himself was not a Nazi, but we had two gym teachers, Mr. Vilsmaier & Mr. Steinhardt. We the four Jewish kids were superior in all athletic activities. The students couldn't accept us because the teachers pictured all Jews as clumsy and smelly, and would order the gentile students, “Ok. It's time to beat up the Jews.” So our classroom teacher, Dr. Berthold, urged my father to take Franz out - my name was not yet Frank - and enroll him in the Jewish school.” Myself and the other Jewish boys were taken out of the public high school and were enrolled in the Jewish high school in the Blumenstrasse in Fürth. This is where I met all the youngsters who have remained my friends for a lifetime. Our teachers were excellent scholars. We were taught many subjects, not only Hebrew. The director, Dr. Prager, was superior, and the chemistry and math teachers were excellent. We had a wonderful class, of about 30-35. As of today there are still 12-15 alive. Some have died in the Shoah, (in the Holocaust.) Many of them have immigrated to the U.S., Canada, the U.K., Australia, etc. We have maintained a wonderful relationship with all the survivors.

JB: I understand one of those men is quite well-known to most people who would be reading this – Mr. Kissinger.

FH: That's right. Henry Kissinger was one of my classmates. He sat right behind me. I should tell you – I'm not claiming that I was a great student – I really wasn't. I was great in imitating most of the teachers. That was my greatest contribution. Henry was not the greatest student either. He was a good student. He was interested in history. We had an outstanding class of really outstanding students, but Henry was not an outstanding student. He was a good student. And I can truly say that we have remained friends to this very day.

JB: Were there any sort of nutrition programs in the schools you attended in Germany?

FH: No, we did not have any nutrition programs in the schools. As a matter of fact, school days were divided. We attended school in the morning and at noontime we went home for lunch. And it was not really lunch. We, like most families, had our big dinner at noontime. My father, who was the owner of a toy factory, came home for our big meal at noontime, and then took a nap, while my sister and I went back to school in the afternoon. We did not have a nutrition program. We had all our meals at home. In order to get my dad home on time for our noon-time meal our dog Bobby, who was a mean little creature, but very smart, left the house, ran down to my dad's business, waited until my dad came out, and then raced back to alert us that Dad was on his way. He never walked with him, but when Bobby arrived home my mother could get the soup and the meat and everything ready, because Dad was on his way home.

JB: Sounds like a smart dog.

FH: Yes.

JB: You spoke earlier about why you changed schools. Things were getting bad in Germany. Then you ended up leaving Germany. Tell us about that.

FH: Yes, ok. That came a bit later. You have no doubt heard of the Kristallnacht, November 9, 1938, when the Germans used as an excuse that a secretary at the French Embassy in Paris was killed by a Jew, to round up all the Jews in Germany and burn all the synagogues. We were awoke at three o'clock in the morning. The doorbell rang and some SA men, the home forces of the secret police, came to our house to arrest us. Interestingly enough one of them was one of my father's World War I comrades. My Dad fought in the First World War and felt nothing ever could happen to him because he was born and lived in Germany all his life. No matter whatever the Nazis did, whatever the Nazis said, nothing will ever happen to us. But that night his Army comrade arrested him and all of us. The other SA man that picked us up was the owner of the delicatessen store whose business flourished because of his Jewish clientele. And we had very little time just to get dressed. They took us to a place called Plaerrer, where all the Jews were assembled. We marched through town. Next to me was a little girl. She was six years my junior. I only had one pair of gloves that I shared with little Eva because it was November and bitter cold already. It was supposed to be an action that nobody knew about, but the entire population was out. They screamed and they hollered and they spat at us. And we marched to this place called the Plaerrer, where some of us were beaten up. Our little rabbi was asked to step on the Holy Bible, the Holy Torah, and when he refused to do this, he too was beaten up. In the background we could see all of our synagogues were aflame. We had one courtyard with one Haupt (Main) and four other smaller synagogues. The Nazis burned them all down that day. Later on we were marched to a huge auditorium. This auditorium was called the Berolzheimianum, that was donated by a Jew many, many years ago. We were lectured on the history of the Nazis, and why the Nazis are superior to everyone else, the superior Aryan race. First they discharged the women and the girls. Afterwards they released boys under sixteen. I was one month shy of sixteen, born on December 7<sup>th</sup>, and this was only November 9<sup>th</sup>. Therefore I was released while all the men were taken to the Justizpalast in Nürnberg, the very building where, after the war, all the Nazi criminals were put on trial. All the adult men were kept overnight. My friend Eva, the one I shared the gloves with, went with me to the Gestapo. We had the

courage to go, pleading to learn where they had taken our Papas. They told us that they were taken to the Justizpalast. We went home to get some chicken soup, and returned to the Justizpalast to give the chicken soup to the guard, asking him to deliver it to our fathers. Much, much later after their release, we found out that they never got the chicken soup. The guard must have eaten the chicken soup prepared by Jews. Along with all other men, my father was taken to a concentration camp, called Dachau. In order to gain his release my mother and I were summoned to the Gestapo, the secret German police, to sign over my father's business - the co-owner of a toy manufacturing company - and his Mercedes car to the tune of twenty marks, which is equal to about \$10-15. They indicated any reluctance on our part to sign could become a death sentence for my dad. Therefore, we shall never ever see him again. And this is when I learned the real priorities very early in my life. Not what was important the day before – my father's business and the car, the jewelry or the Kristall that we owned – no, what was important was to get my father out of the K.Z. to allow us to function as a family once again, and get out of Germany. While my father was in Dachau we went to the American Consulate in Stuttgart, to receive a number to allow us to immigrate to the United States. There was a quota system. We got our number – somewhere in the 14,000s – I will get back to this part of my life a little later. My father was released five weeks after his arrest. He was a totally broken man. His first concern after his release was to get me out, since by that time I'd turned sixteen. I quickly attended a cooks and bakers school to take a speed course in cooking and baking. On March 7th or 9th, my dad - not my mother who was too upset - took me in the middle of the night to the railroad station to take a train with lots of other children called the Kindertransport, destination Holland.

JB: This was 1938?

FH: 1939. March of 1939. And Jeff, I will never forget the feeling when the train pulled into the station and I climbed aboard. We had all these kids, some as young as three or four years old, and the train pulling out seeing your – in my case my father – while others seeing their parents at the railroad station, really not knowing if they'll ever see them again. I was fortunate. I saw my parents again, but many, many of the other children never saw their parents again. They didn't understand why they were sent out of Germany. They begged their parents to let

them stay with them. It was the greatest sacrifice that these parents had to make, to send their children out, to gain their freedom, even if in the long run they themselves couldn't get out. So we crossed the border and arrived in Holland, where we stayed first at a camp in Rotterdam close to the harbor. Later on we were taken to a monastery, to be taken care of by nuns, who absolutely mistreated us. This was very unusual because the Dutch people in general were very helpful. I stayed there for a few weeks. A cousin of mine, Stefan, who was about twelve years my senior, had earlier immigrated to Holland and had started his own business. He came to visit with me regularly. I begged him to get me out of there, and he did. I lived with Stefan until my parents and my sister got out of Germany, arriving via France in England. Upon their arrival they called Stefan, who took me to Hoek van Holland to cross the English Channel to Dover. When officials looked at my papers they claimed that my entry visa into England had expired, and if they don't allow me to enter England they're going to send me back to Germany. My cousin Stefan bribed the captain of this little boat and said, "That kid will never go back to Germany. He has permission to be in England; just his entry visa has expired because his parents got out so late." I could not speak English at the time, since I was taught French in school by my famous Professor Berthold. I looked extremely young, even though I was sixteen, but I looked like twelve. After throwing up on the entire trip from Hoek van Holland to Dover the captain took me by the hand, put a little navy cap on me, and with my little suitcase, the Captain put me on a train, destination London, where my dad picked me up. It was a happy reunion. Together we moved from London to West Bromwich, Staffordshire, where my dad had a business friend who assisted us in starting a small toy business. This lasted barely one year, when the war broke out, and my Dad and I were interned, but not my mother nor my sister. We were arrested and taken for a couple of nights to a local jail. I shall never forget this either. The arresting official, Police Commissioner Clark, apologized a thousand times for our arrest. Those were orders by the Home Office to arrest us and to be classified as Enemy Aliens. Not until many, many months or years later that our classification was changed from Enemy to Friendly Aliens.

After a couple of nights at the local jail we were transferred to an internment camp, first to Lingfield, a racetrack in London. We slept on the steps of the racetrack. Later on we were taken to Huyton internment camp near Liverpool. When we arrived at Huyton, one of my childhood friends, Lutz, tipped me off that a transport was leaving that night, either for Australia or for Canada, with all the male youngsters. During the night I escaped from where I was stationed to join

my dad, which saved me from going to Australia. We stayed in the internment camp until we were called up to the American Consulate under police guard, where we also met my sister and mother again and where we got our visas. We had to go back to the internment camp while my mother and my sister went back to West Bromwich, to pack up whatever belongings we had, and join us in Liverpool. We were released one night before our boat was to leave and stayed at a hotel that was bombed during the night by the Nazis. The bombs hit the front of the building and we were in the rear of the hotel. We were extremely fortunate. We left on a boat called the S.S. Samaria that had 500 British evacuees, kids that were going to Canada. We traveled in a convoy. The boat was hit by a mine, but fortunately didn't sink, because it was equipped with a device called a Churchill Device that neutralized the mine and saved our boat. It was a very traumatic crossing. Everybody was seasick. My dad advised me not to undress at night, to stay prepared and ready for any emergency. It so happened when the mine hit the boat I was dressed and he had undressed to clean and shave. All of us had to go up on deck until they were sure that the boat was safe to continue our journey. We were part of a convoy with destroyers racing around, since they were not sure if it was a mine or a torpedo. To make a long story short, we arrived safely in the United States on October 2, 1940. It was the Jewish New Year, Rosh Hashanah, and my first trip was to go to synagogue to thank the Good Lord that I made it. At the entrance somebody stopped and asked me, "Where's your ticket?" I said, "What do you mean ticket? I don't need to get a ticket to go to synagogue to pray and thank God for my survival." "Oh, you need a ticket." But it was the synagogue of our congregation, Nürnberg, Fürth, and Munich, and I responded by asking the guard to get my friend Eric Heilbronn, the rabbi's son. He came out running. He was so excited that he ran right back into the synagogue up on the pulpit to tell the Rabbi (his Dad), "Papa, Papa, Franz ist da – Frank is here." "Let him come in," was Rabbi Heilbronn's response. I could go in and see all my old friends - Walter Oppenheim, Hans Sachs, and Henry Kissinger, and so many others who were happy to see me again. Rosh Hashanah 1940 we were reunited again.

JB: Wow, what an amazing story. And then from there?

FH: Next step was for me to find a job. My first trip was to visit an outfit called "The Blue Card", who assisted German refugees who immigrated to the United States. The Executive Director was a Dr. Richard Jung, who recognized me. He was a friend of my uncle, Dr. Arnold Frankenau. Since he was in no position to help me in finding a job he smiled and said, "Franz, here are ten dollars, and you don't ever have to pay them back." I have never forgotten this good deed. Years later I became very active with The Blue Card. At present I am still Vice-President of this wonderful organization, who honored me at a special dedication at the Heritage Museum in New York in 2005. I will talk about the wonderful work of The Blue Card a bit later on.

I had to find a job in 1940. I walked along Fifth Avenue, and was told that Fifth Avenue is the dividing line between east and west. There was a jewelry store called Richter's. I went in and asked if they could use somebody. They said, "OK." They gave me a job, ten dollars a week. Ok. I got the job, and had to take many jewelry items to the repair shops that were located in the 30s and in the 40s streets, to be repaired and then bring them back. At night Mr. Richter gave me deliveries to make on my way home. I walked up Fifth Avenue through Central Park, which was quite safe at the time. Since most of the deliveries were on the West Side I walked through Central Park to save the 0.5 subway fare. The first week was over; it was Friday. I went out during my lunch period to buy little gifts for my family. At night when I got my pay, I got my ten dollars, and Mr. Richter said, "Listen, I've got to let you go because you didn't produce enough." I worked my everything off and tried to please the Richter Jewelry Store and I was fired after one week. At least I had the good sense to say, "Mr. Richter, at least give me a recommendation. Say that I have worked here for six months. It will help me to find another job because I have only been in the country for two weeks." So he gave me the recommendation that is still in my possession. The recommendation reads that I worked for six months for Richter's and I was very satisfactory. So I arrived home with a recommendation but without a job.

The next job I took was for a carpet outfit in Brooklyn. I took the subway to Brooklyn, which for me was quite difficult. I was never very tall. I was never very strong. I had to schlep these carpets, and yes after one week I quit. I also got paid ten dollars. So basically, ten dollars was my life. I should have mentioned, when we arrived in the United States, we were allowed to bring in ten dollars per person, so it was ten dollars each for my father, for my mother, for my sister, and

for me. When I went to The Blue Card I got ten dollars to tide me over. When I was fired from Richter's I got ten dollars. When I quit the carpet store I got paid ten dollars. So again I was out of a job. And I looked for some other jobs, and held all kinds of really crazy jobs. I wanted to get into hotel work since I had taken a course in cooking and baking. I went to the Waldorf-Astoria and I asked Monsieur Lugot, who was a Frenchman, if he could give me a job. He looked at me, and since his eyesight was rather poor out of one eye, and out of the other one I believe he could see nothing. He looked me over and said in his strong French accent, "Brrr. Monsieur Harris, at your age I was potato peeler. Don't tell me you can cook. Get out of here. Come see me in a few years."

I did come back and worked at the Waldorf after my army service. I'm going to talk about it later on during this interview.

JB: So after New York, you said a couple of years later you joined the army?

FH: Yes. I had a few other jobs. My dad unfortunately died in 1942, two years after we came to the States. I got a deferment from the army for one year. In 1943 I was drafted for the army. When they looked at me, since I looked so young, the sergeant said, "Come on, stop kidding. Send your brother." I said, "No, I'm the one." My name at that time still was Franz Siegmund Hess. I was accepted and really enjoyed the army. I was sent to Fort Dix, New Jersey, and from Fort Dix I was sent to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, to cooks and bakers school. The military training was rather tough. It was one day basic training and one day working in the kitchen. At least I was able to get my foot in the kitchen, which was an advantage. This is what I wanted. As part of basic training we had a marathon race. From every company they had to send a couple of fellows to run the marathon. I certainly didn't volunteer, but the sergeant said, "Hess, you're the one that goes on the marathon." I had not trained for such a race, nor was I in any shape for it. To make a long story short, I was ordered to run this marathon, even though I protested, since I had to work that night in the officers' mess. The response from the sergeant was, "I don't want any excuses. You're going on the marathon." But it wasn't an excuse – the real marathon is usually 26 miles – this marathon was 14 miles, but it was incredible. When I finished all I wanted to do is lay down but they didn't let me. They marched me because you're not supposed

to lie down. So I finished the marathon, swore to myself that I will never, ever volunteer, or will fight anyone that's going to volunteer for me. I still worked that night in the officers' mess.

At another time I was once more tricked into a boxing tournament. I was a featherweight - and was opposed by a fellow from the South, who hated me because I was a Yankee. I tried to impress upon him that I'm not really a Yankee, I'm a refugee. But he was so strong he beat the hell out of me. And in between rounds my trainer said, "Go back and get him." I said, "No, you go get him." He didn't and I took a heck of a beating, but I finished at least. There were only three or four rounds, whatever it was. But those were my special experiences at basic training. Upon completing basic training we were transferred to Camp Meade, Maryland.

On a beautiful Fall day I was taken to Baltimore, Maryland, where I became an American citizen, a proud American citizen. When I was asked, "Do you want to change your name?" I said, "Yes, absolutely." As I mentioned earlier, my name was Franz Siegmund Hess. So I requested a change from Franz to Frank. And Hess, I didn't want anyone to ever question me if I'm related to Rudolph Hess, the Deputy Fuehrer. I asked to change it from Hess to Harris, but leave my middle initial S. Somehow when the papers came back the army messed this up and made Frank A. Harris out of it, so that's when Franz Siegmund Hess became Frank A. Harris.

From Camp Meade, Maryland, we went to Camp Patrick Henry in Virginia, and later on sailed on a troop transport to Casablanca. I was terribly seasick. They put me on a gun crew to look for submarines. I was completely useless for this assignment, because all I did was throw up for the entire period of my duty. This was a ship - the Empress of Scotland - that was used in peace time as a luxury liner to transport cruise passengers to the United States from England. During the war this luxury liner was used as a transport ship for soldiers. In place of 500 cruising passengers, we had 5000 seasick soldiers.

It was a horrible trip. You couldn't stand in line for food because the lines went all around the boat for any of the meals. I became quite seasick and was taken on sick call. The medic advised me, "You need to eat." My response, "I agree. Please get me something to eat." He responded, "I can't do that. You have to stand in line." There was no way. I made a deal with one of the sailors from the Empress of

Scotland. He sold me a dozen oranges for ten dollars - again here come the ten dollars – that saved me on the whole trip to Casablanca.

Being on the watch for submarines, we had one tall fellow on the ship by the name of Walt Dropo. Walt Dropo was the tallest of the company and I was the shortest. One night on my submarine watch I felt that I had the urge again to throw up. Since I was on my way up on top deck I raced out to the bridge to make sure that nothing happened to any of the boys on the lower deck. All I could hear out of the dark, "I'm going to catch this son of a – that puked on my head and I'm going to throw him overboard." And as much as I wanted to die when we got back to our sleep quarters, I did not tell him who the son of a gun was. At least not until we got to North Africa, when I confessed and he responded, "Frank you're so smart that you didn't tell me then - no telling what would have done to you." And I tried to explain that I went out of my way to avoid this mess. We remained good friends. Walt Dropo, after his discharge, as some of you might remember, was the first choice of the Chicago Bears, a top choice of a basketball team. His preference was baseball, and he became the famous first baseman for the Boston Red Sox. Later on he also played for the Detroit Tigers. After we were discharged I told my friends, "Oh, Walt Dropo's a friend of mine." 'Oh, tell me another one' was my friend's' response. So we attended a Yankee game, when they played the Detroit Tigers. I went down in between innings to the top of the dugout asking the guard, "Tell Walt Dropo to come over here." He greeted me with a big grin, "Frankie Boy! So good to see you again." So my friends were truly convinced that he was my army buddy.

JB: So from Casablanca you went where?

FH: From Casablanca we were transported to Oran with the 40 and 8, boxcars. They were called 40 and 8 because at one time they were used for transporting horses. We stayed in Oran for a few weeks, where we were taken frequently on long marches. I never forgot that we arrived in Oran during the rainy season in Africa. We were stationed on a hill where we had to pitch our tents. It was horrible because the rain ran right through our tents. But we survived this ordeal as well. By boat we were transported to Naples, staying in a replacement depot until I was assigned to the 2759<sup>th</sup> Combat Engineers. On our way north we

bypassed Cassino and Anzio arriving in Leghorn (Livorno), where our outfit built bridges. On one of my days off I was able to visit Cassino. My childhood friend Eric Heilbronn – the one who got me into the synagogue without a ticket on my arrival in the States - was sent overseas about one month before me. Permit me to back up a little bit. Eric was in the military intelligence when his father the rabbi died. Eric attended his father's funeral in New York, and on the way back to South Carolina he passed through Fayetteville, North Carolina. From Ft. Bragg I traveled to the railroad station to see and shake hands with Eric for the last time. He was taken out of the military intelligence, put in the infantry, and sent overseas. He only became a U.S. citizen overseas and was immediately sent into combat and killed the first day in combat. When I traveled to Cassino I looked at some of the graves, when somebody told me that there was a cemetery about ten kilometers further back. I hitchhiked there and saw literally thousands of graves. Cassino was a total disaster. The very first grave that I looked at was the grave of my friend Eric. I had to inform his mother, who at this time was only notified that he was missing in action, while he was already killed. I took pictures of his grave to send to his mom, who in many ways kind of adopted me, as the closest friend to her son. Our company left Leghorn, Italy on our way to France.

One other little story - I had adopted a little dog, or rather he adopted me when he arrived out of nowhere at our company. He was the cutest little thing. When we stood in formation the company commander screamed, "Harris, get rid of the dog." I said, "Yes, sir!" Malutschus I called him. "Malutschus go!" He would run around the entire company and come around sitting by my side again. It was ever so sad - when we left Italy I was not allowed to take my little dog along. I left him with a family but really missed him for a long time. We arrived in the city of Arles, in southern France, during the very coldest time of the year, Christmas 1944. We were not expected in Arles until some days or weeks later. I was at that time not as yet mess-sergeant, but one of the cooks, assigned to bring our soldiers C-rations, since there was no food to prepare. Can you picture the reaction of soldiers getting C-rations in place of a home-cooked meal on Christmas Day? Again, I'm happy to be alive, because those soldiers were so mad at me, not wanting to hear the reason for the C-rations. They wanted no excuses, but I could at least tell them that the Red Cross had opened up a center a few kilometers away. They could at least get some hot coffee and doughnuts from the center.

I survived Arles, and when we shipped out from there we went through southern France. I will never forget, we stayed in one little town in a hut and it was bitter

cold. I told myself, "I'm going to get myself a warm bed." Since I spoke a bit of French I went to a farmer's home - it was a farm town - and asked if they had a room. They said they had one room, but it was rented out to an American second lieutenant. I said, "Tell him to go", because I spoke French a little. And they were very happy to give me the room. They told the second lieutenant that the room was no longer available. I will never forget that first night, when the previous night I had slept with all my boys in this cold, cold hut, the second night I came to the home of Monsieur/Madame Lacroix. They treated me to a feather bed with a hot water bottle in it. I couldn't believe it! There I was in a war zone - to get this! And it was just absolutely incredible. They were so wonderful. In the morning - I hated hot milk - but they gave me hot milk and homemade bread, and I was able to give them some food. They were just a wonderful family that I stayed in touch with for many years. Their own son was fighting in the French army, and since he was not home they were so happy that they had again found somewhat of a surrogate son. We stayed there for a few weeks. We left and went to a town called Créhange Cité that was in Alsace Lorraine.

I had a very loyal army buddy, Billy Panetta. Wherever we went we always found families, and we found this very nice family in Créhange Cité with three daughters. Billy's girlfriend was Jeanette and my girlfriend was Yvonne. When the war was over and we went back to southern France they came down to stay with us. So truly this was a wonderful family. Our company was close to the cities of Metz and Nancy. During the Jewish Holidays I visited and stayed with a Jewish family there and celebrated with them. It was wonderful. And then from Créhange Cité we went into Germany. This was very dramatic for me to get back into Germany. I should really say I was so full of hate. I really wanted to get back. I wanted to get even with them, what they had done to many of my friends and my family. And if anyone ever hears that the Holocaust didn't happen, make sure that you heard from somebody, yes, it did happen. In my company I was called the Gestapo because when I found German Nazis I didn't kill them, but I did to them what they did to us on November the ninth. We came to one particular town and a grandmother and her granddaughter came, and the grandmother was released from a concentration camp, and said she was born in the town of Nürnberg. This was my town, and I questioned her. I wanted to be sure. I said, "Who was your rabbi there?" She said, "Rabbi Heilbronn." So I knew that she was genuine. She said in this town, even though the Nazis were supposedly gone, the Nazis are still in town in charge - the Bürgermeister, the Lord Mayor, and the town council still

treat them like their enemy, the Jews. They don't give them anything to eat. I responded, "Your worries are over."

I asked the town council president – it was a small town – to call out the entire town. And there was one fellow who was an SS – Standstattenfuhrer - in the camp where my father was imprisoned in Dachau, and I questioned him before. I gave him a good lesson. He said, "No, I didn't do anything. I was a guard outside." I said, "If you were a guard outside what did you do?" What they did is they hit the people before they got into the camp. And then we went through this rehearsal, what they did in the camp. They shaved everybody; just absolutely incredible. I said, "You are the one that will tell the people what happened in the concentration camp." The town was called out. I made my initial speech and I said, "This ex-SS Fuhrer will tell you that he was stationed where my father was a prisoner and he will tell you exactly what happened. I do not wish to hear from any one of you that you didn't know what was going on, and that you had nothing to do with it. All of you were responsible. I was born in this country. I went through it. There were very few good people, very few. Let's go look what has happened." I told them about all of them who were imprisoned in the camp. Not only Jews – Gypsies, homosexuals, people of other religious groups – Catholics, priests, Protestants, anyone that believed in God. And you people were the ones that killed them, so don't anyone ever say that you didn't know what was going on. You heard it first class. The present Burgher Meister made the decision in regard to a young Jewish girl with her grandmother. "You don't feed them." I gave the order that from now on they're the ones that will get the first rations in this town. "And if anything is left over you're going to get it. Ok." And this is how this meeting went. I was really very, very proud. And Alfreda Wolfel and her grandmother came to see me to thank me a thousand times.

The Germans were to turn over all their weapons, all the guns that they had. I gave them until the next morning – six o'clock. If the guns were not turned in – we will find them – they're going to get what they have done to us, they're going to be shot. Do you know, the whole basement was flooded with pistols and guns and everything else! And the Burger Meister said he threw his gun into the river - there was the Mainz River. I said, "Who threw it in?" He said, "This kid." He was a Hitler Jugend – they trained them. "Get him!" I said, "Did you throw it in?" "Yea." "Get in there and get it." He found it because the Burger Meister had said he had turned it in. He didn't. He lied. So, it was very, very rewarding to do something.

I came to a town that was close to the town where I was born, and my company commander, Captain Mahoney, said, "Frank, I'm going to give you my jeep. I'm going to give you my driver. I know I couldn't hold you back. I heard that Fürth-Nürnberg had been taken. Don't do anything that you would regret for the rest of your life." Well, I took the jeep, took the driver, and we went into Fürth. And we got close to, almost into the outskirts, and there was an American lieutenant running around. I said, "Hasn't this town been taken?" He said, "No. You can go three more blocks and you meet Assault Company A. And I went three more blocks plus one block. The company commander's driver said, "Listen, let's get the hell out of here. You might have a reason to get in. I don't. We're going to get killed here." So we did go back. We went to headquarters and I said, "You know, I was born in this town. Perhaps I could do something for this town to be turned over to us." They said, "No. Everything is well in hand. We don't need you." So I had to go back to my company. I couldn't get in to the town of Fürth at that time, but I was able to come back a few weeks later. We were no longer stationed in this town, which was Markheimfeld, but the town of Augsburg.

President Roosevelt had died and the war was over, and I was able to go back to Fürth, which was really very dramatic. I went to see my dad's secretary, who was extremely loyal to him, and she told me where his former partner was living. I went to arrest him. I took him down to the military government because my father was paid something like twenty marks from the government to gain his freedom from Dachau. At the military government my father's partner made the statement that all of my father's part of the business was sent over to England, to their business acquaintance Mr. Peacock. But my father was never able to get an accounting from him. And I said, "I want to have this in writing, because I'm going to go to England afterwards." And I did get it in writing. I did look for this Mr. Villsmaier and Mr. Steinhardt, my gym teachers. It was a good thing I didn't find them - they were the people responsible for us getting beaten up as kids - because I don't know if I would have taken my company commander's advice.

I did go back to the attorney's home when he told me that a fellow, Helmut Reissner, came out of the concentration camp as the only survivor of his family. I said, "Don't say anything. I will come up to the house." When I did, Helmut turned around, and it was one of the most emotional moments for both of us. One week before he was liberated, he was in a hospital with typhoid fever. As he looked out of the window, he saw his brother and father, and he told them to run, to get going. He witnessed them being shot. That was one week before

liberation. He fled the hospital and was hiding in the woods until he was rescued – I don't remember – either by the Russians or by the British. He had no place to go so he came back to Fürth and he stayed one year. He had an aunt living in the United States. I was able to assist him with his emigration to the States, where he became a very successful businessman. He married, had two sons and five grandchildren. We remained friends for all these years. Unfortunately, he died of pancreatic cancer just two years ago.

JB: Another amazing story. And so after the war, tell us about your career. You came back to the States.

FH: I came back to the States and that's when I really took off. I wanted to get back into cooking and baking so I applied for a job at a hotel in New York called the Midson House. It's on 38<sup>th</sup> and Madison Avenue. I was hired for the coffee shop, and worked first as the sandwich maker and later on was moved over to the grill station. I learned a great deal in terms of speed. I had a fellow who trained me and showed me how to be productive during lunchtime in New York at a coffee shop. They employed waitresses who hollered their orders. To remember each order, you'd take the end pieces of your bread and throw them on the requested order, like an egg or tuna salad, ham, cheese, etc. This way you remember. So I learned it very quickly. I did well and I moved over to the grill station for all short orders, like hamburgers, hot dogs, all kinds of eggs and omelets.

After my grill experience I was moved to the main kitchen, first as vegetable cook. Later on I was assigned to the roast station and Garde Manger. I became the second chef to Monsieur Barnaby. Monsieur Barnaby at one time worked at the Waldorf-Astoria. One day he suggested, "Frank, before you take my job here I'm going to take you over to the Waldorf-Astoria." I told him that I had once applied for a job at the Waldorf before the war. "They won't remember," was his response. Monsieur Lugot was the head chef, but Monsieur Ernest, the sous chef, interviewed me and I got the job to start on New Year's Day. I think it was in 1946. I had a date for New Year's Eve, and since I didn't want to disappoint my date I went out on New Year's Eve, swearing to myself that I'm not going to go to sleep at all. Make a long story short, I went home and I fell asleep. I was to report to

work at 8 o'clock in the morning and I woke up, it was already a quarter after 8. I took the subway down to Sixth Avenue and 47<sup>th</sup> and 50<sup>th</sup> Street, ran all the way to Park Avenue, to the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, came up to the second floor, where the main kitchen was located, and I was to report to a sous-chef by the name of Eric. He happened to have been German and said, "Where were you?!" and I replied, "I'm terribly sorry. It will never, ever happen again." And just then Monsieur Lugot walked in to wish everybody a Happy New Year. "Monsieur Harris, Happy New Year." I was so glad - if I had come five minutes later I would have been out the door again. And this was the first and last time that I was late.

I came on time every day, and I must say I learned a great deal at the Waldorf-Astoria. We had in the cold meat department a chef who was from South America. He was brilliant and very knowledgeable – not just in decorations. Everything passes through cold meat department in any main kitchen. All the little ingredients are passed to every station. This fellow always covered his work with his arms to prevent anyone from observing what he was doing. One day I went over to him and said, "Chef, somebody sometime in your life must have taught you. Nobody is ever going to take your place because you're so good. Please, please give me a break. Show me what you are doing." And from all the young lads working, I was the one he adopted and showed me his professional work. I learned a great deal from him because I had the courage to speak up. The Waldorf was a heck of an experience. I should mention that after the Waldorf-Astoria I got married and started my own little business at 1662 First Avenue, a little coffee shop.

Before I bought the business I observed it and it seemed successful. I had stayed with the owner, Jeff Jarvis, for a couple of weeks and everything seemed well, but the business did not work out well. The little waitress that I took over with the business said, "Mr. Harris, the reason the business doesn't work out well is that Mr. Jarvis tricked you, filling the coffee shop with his friends while you were there, to prove to you how much business he was doing." The business never got any better. But I kept the business and I said, "Ok, if the business doesn't come to me, I'll go to find a new business." There was a brewery on Second Avenue between 88<sup>th</sup> & 89<sup>th</sup> streets. My business was between 86<sup>th</sup> and 87<sup>th</sup> on First Avenue. Since I did not have enough money to buy a car, I carried and delivered breakfast items, taking orders for lunch and returning at noon to deliver the lunch orders. It was rough, but we kind of made it, not enough really to plan a profitable future. We got an offer for a job in Maine at the Summit Spring Hotel.

I closed my little luncheonette down to prepare for my job as a cook and Ruth as a waitress in Maine to start before July 4<sup>th</sup>.

On July 4<sup>th</sup>, while getting a haircut, Willie, the fellow who was hired as the chef, came in and said, "Frank, we're all fired." I said, "What do you mean we're fired? The season hasn't even started." "We're fired. Mr. Kaufmann, the owner of the hotel, sold the hotel and the new owner is bringing his own crew in." I said, "I closed my business down to earn enough money to pay off some of my debt that I had accumulated." So I went to see Mr. Bob Kaufman and told him, "You cannot do this to us, absolutely not. We have a contract with you. I don't have any money, because otherwise I would sue you for all the money you're worth." "Ok, Frank. I know you and your Ruth, who was my waitress for the last few days – I'm going to get you and Ruth another job." I asked about my other crew. "Well, I can't do any more," was his response".

So we got a job at the Poland Spring Hotel in Poland Spring, Maine. I was the cook and Ruth was one of the waitresses. We made enough money. The other cooks hired at the Summit Springs went back. Since I was the only one that was married, I was given priority. Mr. Kaufmann arranged after the season was ended for Ruth and me to work for his brother Joel and family. Bobby and Joel Kaufman's father was Mr. E. I. Kaufman, who was the chairman of the United Jewish Appeal. Joel and wife Bonnie employed quite a few domestics, one maid alone for their two young boys. They had a butler. They employed a gardener. I cooked for the family and all the help and I also cooked for all their special parties. Ruth was the special maid to Mrs. Kaufmann. I will never forget one day there came a call from the White House – the President of the United States would like to speak to Mr. E. I. Kaufmann – and I ran in, "Mr. Kaufmann, the President wants to talk to you." When the call was finished he came directly to the kitchen to tell me, "Frank, you're the first one that should know. The President told me that the United States will recognize the State of Israel, and he wants to know if this is totally acceptable to Israel." I was very proud that Mr. Kauffman shared this historic event with me.

We remained employed at the Kaufman's until I once lifted a heavy object and I broke a cord to one testicle that required an operation. After the operation, we got our own home and Ruth became pregnant, and our son Bobby was born on April 13, 1950. My sister Bella, in Milwaukee, was pregnant at the same time. My mother came first to us, since Bobby was born two days before Elaine. I started a new position, opening Herrman's Delicatessen and Restaurant on Pennsylvania

Avenue. I was in charge and made sure it was really going well. The day of Bobby's Bris I informed them that I will have to take the day off for my son's Bris. They responded, "If you take the day off you're not going to get paid." I said, "What?!" "I opened this business for you and I made it what it is, highly successful." I announced that, "I'm quitting." "Oh Frank," - I never forgot their response, "You cannot quit now because you not only have a wife to support, but you also have a son to support." My response was quick and strong, "If I have to eat out of a garbage can **NEVER** are you or anyone else ever going to do this to me." I took off from work for this special occasion in our lives, but did not announce to anyone that I had quit my job. After the Bris was over I told Ruth and quickly found another job working at the Army and Navy Club on 17<sup>th</sup> Street NW. in Washington, D.C., where I met a fellow cook, Gene Russo, who remained a good friend for many years until his death.

We moved from Perry Place in Washington to Wheaton, Maryland, where we bought a house. I changed jobs and became the chef at the Navy Officers Club in the Bethesda Naval Hospital. I was initially second chef. It was a rewarding position meeting and catering for a great many famous people like Mamie Eisenhower, Shirley Temple-Black, also for the Secretary of the Army, Thomas Finletter. I was very content, well recognized, and respected. My wife Ruth became mentally ill. She was also a concentration camp survivor, who lost her own mother in the camp. I was convinced when I married her that a regular family life would restore her to good health, but unfortunately things didn't work out this way. She wound up being treated in a mental institution in Washington. After her discharge from the hospital we were hoping that moving back to New York would settle her down, but it didn't.

I had to send my son Bobby to Milwaukee to live with my sister Bella and his cousin Elaine while Ruth was admitted and treated at Hillside Hospital, a wonderful Jewish institution that had a one-to-one relation patient to staff. For each patient they had one employee. I was hoping that perhaps this special care would help her.

After Ruth's hospital discharge and a waiting period we took Bobby back. It didn't work out. Ruth could not care for Bobby and I had to send my son away again. Ruth became so desperately ill that she wound up at Poughkeepsie State Hospital and I myself needed psychological support. There was nothing that could be done for Ruth anymore. The only thing I had to do is try to save Bobby, which I did. Ruth could not come back. We divorced and she met somebody in the mental

institution and got married later on. I was able to take Bobby back. It was the right move.

To get back to my work, I accepted a job in White Plains, New York, running the lunchroom for an electronic outfit, University Loudspeakers, with lots of free time. This allowed me to cater many of the parties for the outfit and also volunteer at the Beth Abraham Home in the Bronx, taking care of a young fellow, Eddie Markowitz, who suffered from multiple sclerosis, and also regularly visit an elderly gentleman, Mr. Levine, who suffered from Parkinson's disease. This experience was truly rewarding.

For business reasons, University Loudspeakers decided to move from White Plains to Oklahoma. The president of the company, a gentleman by the name of Haskell Blair, offered to pay for all our expenses to come down to Oklahoma to run the company's lunch facilities. I gratefully declined this generous offer, since I could not risk such a move because of Ruth's illness." It all happened before Ruth and I divorced.

I accepted the chef's position for Mary Knolls Seminary, cooking for all the priests and seminarians. They loved me as their Jewish chef, with my wonderful helper, Garfield, who, when I left Mary Knolls, wanted to join me when I took a position as Cafeteria Manager in Long Island, working for the Sperry Gyroscope Company. Unfortunately, I could not take him along.

After three long years, the commute from White Plains to New Hyde Park, Long Island, New York became too much. One day after attending a meeting in New Haven, on the way back I stopped in Norwalk Ct. In *The Hour*, the local paper, an ad was posted by the Board of Education for a food service director. I figured 'OK, no harm in trying' and I applied for the job and was given an interview with Dr. Becker, who grilled me, not exaggerated, for four hours. I have never sweated that profusely in all my life. When the interview was over Dr. Becker called his secretary with the following message. "Ms. Smith, please hold all my calls. Mr. Harris has been wiping the floor with me." It was the other way around. He's been wiping the floor with me. He asked about my experiences in dealing with unions. I was involved in union negotiations at the Sperry Gyroscope Company. He grilled me with hypothetical union problems and was content with my answers.

The food service department had an assistant to Mrs. Warren, the director, by the name of Beri Glennon, and a secretary by the name of Eleanore Mays. The names

are important because Beri Glennon, the assistant, looked out as I was being interviewed and told Eleanore, the secretary: ***“That refugee is never going to make it.”*** Make a long story short, the refugee got the job, and the refugee married the assistant six years later. Beri and I are married now thirty-eight years plus and are not only very happy, but most grateful that we were able to work and stay together for so many years until retirement.

JB: Wow, that’s a great story.

FH: Should we start talking about Norwalk?

JB: Sure. Tell me about your career then in Norwalk.

FH: OK. I got the job and I found out that Norwalk had two high schools, four middle schools, and eighteen elementary schools. Out of the eighteen elementary schools only six had a lunch program. When I became a bit more acquainted I questioned why only six schools have a lunch program, while the other twelve don’t? I was told, “Well, there is no money. In some cases, principals didn’t want it, and in some cases the staff objected.” I replied, “That doesn’t make any sense. It should never be up to principals or the staff. It should be based on what is right for the student. If there is a need in one school, there is a need in all the schools. About the money – we’ll see what we can do about it.” I asked my business manager, Mr. Wagner, who later on became a good friend, about a December seminar in Vail, Colorado. If I could go to Vail I could find out a little bit more what other school lunch directors are doing, dealing with their problems. I got permission to attend this important conference, where I met the secretary, Sunny, who took the minutes for all meetings. She introduced me to everyone. It turned out that we shared the same birthday date, December 7<sup>th</sup>, and celebrated our birthday together. During this conference I met many, many of the big shots directing child nutrition programs nationwide. John Perryman, who was Executive Director of the American School Food Service Association, Mr. Robock, then the Secretary of Agriculture, as well as many leading lunch directors and equipment company representatives from Market Forge, Hobart, WearEver, etc.

Dean Rhodes, the President of Lincoln Manufacturing Company, part of WearEver, made an important presentation. We became good friends. We both almost bought condos in Vail. I wish now that I had bought it. Dean pointed to the fact that I live in New York and he lives in Wayne, Indiana. Why would we want to buy a condo in Vail?" I said, "Well, you know, maybe when we retire it will be a nice place to visit." If I had bought it, at a cost of about \$50-60,000, it would now be worth about a million or more, but we didn't buy it for better or worse.

In any case I attended many of the workshops, many of the panel discussions, and learned a great deal about what other school systems are doing. I learned a great deal more about the central kitchen concept – preparing all the meals in one location and transporting them to other locations. This really appealed to me. When I returned to Norwalk I asked for permission to visit some of these school systems using the central kitchen concept. I visited Livonia, Michigan, Corpus Christi, Texas, with Gertrude Applebaum, and on my return reported directly to Dr. Becker, who was and is a perfectionist. I asked for his permission to make a direct proposal to the board to build a central kitchen for Norwalk that will accommodate **ALL** 18 elementary schools – not the middle nor the high schools – only **ALL** the elementary schools." "Mr. Harris," – he talked very slow – "there is no money." I pleaded with him, "Dr. Becker, please, give me the chance to prove to you and the board that a central kitchen building and all the equipment for the central kitchen and all satellite schools with state and federal funds would not cost the city or the board any more than just to equip two more elementary schools and run them on their own." Well I made my proposal. I was able to work with the state and with the Feds. The state assured me that the central kitchen, like any other school building, would be reimbursed to the tune of 50% by the state, 50% with local funds - the total cost not exceeding \$500,000. Nancy Perry, the state child nutrition director, assured me of adequate Federal money for all the equipment. In the final analysis all the equipment for the central kitchen and all satellite schools was reimbursed by the Feds to the tune of seventy-five percent. The total cost to Norwalk was twenty-five percent for all equipment and fifty percent for the building - as pointed out before, no more than to totally equip two schools as self-serving entities.

At this point Dr. Becker assured me of his strong support, requesting me to present my complete proposal to the Board of Education. I followed his advise and presented it numerous times between 1968, '69, '70, '71, to 1972, not only to the Board of Education, but to the future building committee, City Hall, and all of

the mayor's committees, etc, etc. We also made presentations to the fire department, the health department, and to numerous other departments and agencies. We had hired an architect, Tom Hume, whose past experience in designing school cafeterias made him the natural choice as the architect for our project. Plans had to be changed numerous times when one agency requested for the doors to open toward the inside, while another agency requested exactly the opposite. The same occurred when we proposed showers for the employees and one agency again rejected this proposal. Changes had to be made constantly to satisfy one and all. Over this entire period, we had to make so many changes, so many times, until we met the approval of each department and every agency. Let me share the last hurdle before final approval.

Mayor Irwin proudly proclaimed that we have the votes. All Democrats, who were in the majority, were all for it, while all Republicans opposed it. However, two Democrats were absent that day. When I inquired, "Where are they?" the mayor responded, "One is on sick leave. The other is attending another meeting." I pleaded with him, "Please get him! Get him! We've got to have him because we can't go through this again." The one absent one arrived just on time and the committee voted the party lines - all Democrats for, all Republicans against. The central kitchen project was approved, and I finally could breathe more easily.

One of the Republicans was our potato chip sales rep, who came up to me after the final vote to apologize, asking for my understanding why he had to vote against it. Let me quote, "Mr. Harris, you know I couldn't vote for it because my party opposed the central kitchen project." I responded angrily, "If you think your business and what your party tells you is more important than feeding all the kids, there are other potato chip companies for me to deal with. Goodbye."

I became president of the Connecticut School Food Service Association in 1973. The Spring meeting was to be held in Norwalk. At previous Spring meetings we never exceeded two hundred attendees. I wagered a bet with my secretary that we're going to exceed seven hundred attendees at this Spring meeting in Norwalk. It turned out that we hosted eight hundred plus. It was a glorious day. Food service representatives came from around the state and so did Congressman Stu McKinney from D.C., Dr. Briggs, the new Superintendent, Donald Irving, the Mayor, as well as Nancy Perry, the state nutrition director, and Joe Becker from the building committee. We featured a panel discussion on Central Kitchen - Satellite Feeding. The one principal who opposed the central kitchen was asked, "Would you come and join the panel to share your

objections?" He responded, "Frank, you must think I'm some kind of an idiot to go to your convention and have 800 people boo me." As it turned out this principal, when the program got started, was more cooperative than many others. He was every single day in the cafeteria to see to it that his students got their food, that they 'thanked the lunch ladies', and that they did not go out to play until they finished their lunches. He became a greater supporter of nutrition programs than many of the others.

Beri and I got married on July 1, the ***hottest day of the year 1973***. The night before we got married, I hired a chef who was a graduate of the Culinary Institute in Hyde Park. He was also Lunch Director in Upstate Syracuse, New York. When he came and applied for the job I thought somebody had tipped him off what I was looking for. He was in the process of building a central kitchen in Syracuse to provide meals for almost the same number of students with the same number of elementary schools. The night before our wedding, Jeff came to my house. I hired him, drew up the contract that he signed. Dr. Briggs, the superintendent, who attended our wedding, signed and approved it.

Beri and I went on our honeymoon, first to Quebec, Canada, and then to the National ASFSA Convention in New Orleans. As State President I had to carry the flag. On our return we opened the central kitchen in September 1973. I should say I opened one school at a time, transferring from each existing elementary school one of the experienced employees, and placed them with a newly hired employee at the new satellite school. I would personally supervise each new satellite school opening. Interestingly enough, every school wanted to be the first or next, even those who initially opposed a lunch program. It took almost the entire year to get all of them into the fold. The central kitchen became a huge success.

Questions frequently asked at any meeting before any new school opening: "Well what about if the food is lousy? What are you going to do?" Easy Response: "We change menus or we get fired. But if the food is good in one school it will be good in all the schools, because it all comes from one CENTRAL FACILITY." Hiring a professional chef was the best move I ever made. Permit me to share with you some of our menus. Our system allowed us to do many exciting projects that other school systems were not able to do. We never sent chickens or turkeys that we received from USDA out for processing. We cooked them fresh. We prepared, for example, chicken tetrazzini with spaghetti. We featured international menus introducing students to foods from other countries. We invited individuals or

groups from the city, state, country, and from countries around the world. We also invited students, staff, and parents. We invited dignitaries from the United Nations, who felt perhaps a system like our central kitchen could become useful or applicable in some underdeveloped countries.

Representatives from Boston came to seek our advice about a central kitchen in the Boston area. I advised them **against** building one central facility in such a huge metropolitan area. "A central kitchen is good for a community like ours, a small community where you can more easily get around. Boston will run into huge traffic problems." Against my advice, they built a central kitchen anyway to the tune of \$5,000,000. They are not feeding many more students out of their central kitchen than we do, encountering many of the problems that we had predicted. Central kitchens are not for every school system, but they are certainly the answer for some school systems the size of Norwalk. Should we stop for lunch?

JB: Sure.

FH: Good.

*After a very nice lunch in Frank and Beri's home:*

JB: So how many years were you the director at Norwalk?

FH: Thirty-nine years. I started in 1967 and I finished in 2006.

JB: Wow!

FH: Thirty-nine years, right.

JB: What were some of the biggest challenges you faced over those years?

FH: The biggest challenge truly was to keep the program going as a self-supporting program without any local subsidies. Of course all child nutrition programs are subsidized by the Federal government and by the state. There have to be state matching funds that vary from state to state. In Connecticut state funds are rather limited. Therefore, I had to find ways to keep the program going without local subsidies. So I started new programs. Over a period of time I started breakfast programs. A social worker from Cranberry School sent me the following note, "Mr. Harris, children come to school hungry. They are not fed at home. They cannot learn. Please, can we have a breakfast program?" I presented this letter to the superintendent, who asked me to come to the next Board of Education meeting. On my way into the board room I met the chairman, Bob Genuario, the

brother of the social worker who sent me the note. Bob is a very conservative, smart attorney, and a very nice fellow. I tipped him off that I'm going to make a presentation tonight based on his sister's recommendation for a breakfast program at Cranberry School. "Now you do not want to go public and say you don't want it?" When it came to the open meeting both of us were very professional. He questioned me as to costs. "Mr. Harris, is it going to cost the Board of Education any money?" "No Mr. Genuario, no money for the Board of Education. We will handle it completely and totally. We will also supervise the kids." "Well what about if the kids are delayed getting to their classroom because of the breakfast program?" "Mr. Genuario, what about if the buses are late and the kids are delayed getting to their classroom without a breakfast program? Isn't it better sometimes to teach children on a full stomach for forty-five minutes rather than on an empty stomach for fifty minutes?" "Alright Mr. Harris, you have permission to have a breakfast program at Cranberry School." This was my initial success with our breakfast programs.

So for every additional breakfast program I had to go back to the board. When principals requested it for their schools I asked them to "First come with me to Cranberry School to see how it works out. And then send me a letter, requesting the program with a copy of the letter going to the board." Naramake School, followed by Kendall School, were the next approved schools. That's the way it went until we received approval for each elementary school. Let me share some of the reasons that our breakfast programs were so successful. There are criteria, certain mandated nutritional guidelines to be met for breakfast and for lunch, but what good is it to serve an elementary child a whole apple, a whole orange. They use it perhaps as baseballs or throw them out. What we did is we cut everything into small, bite-sized pieces. Students had a choice of apple, grape, banana, orange, cantaloupe, strawberry – whatever was in season – and the kids could go through the line requesting a little of this, and a little of that. We did the same with all other components, protein – meat - offering ham, bologna, salami, - cheeses - all in small, little pieces. From the bread group we offered bagels, whole-wheat bread, rye bread, all in small pieces, along with a choice of cereals. We also offered a choice of milks, but no chocolate milk in the morning. They could choose, eat, and enjoy the breakfasts. It worked like a charm. Their classroom performances likewise improved. We had great participation and most principals and teachers agreed.

One of my other proposals to principals was to reschedule their lunch periods that would allow kids to play first and eat afterwards. They would finish their meals before returning to their classrooms and perform ever so much better on a full stomach.

I also requested principals to consider the wave system – one class - rather than one whole grade at one time. The average lunch period is 24 minutes. When students stand too long in line, perhaps ten minutes out of the twenty four, they only have 14 minutes left to eat. And when they finish their lunch they can play. They will throw the food out, not because it's no good - they throw the food out because they want to go out and play. My proposal let them play first.

It will also contribute to fewer fights in the cafeteria since they get rid of some of their hostility or aggressiveness on the playground, rather than the lunchroom.

Some of the objections by principals - "Oh, then they don't wash their hands." I responded, "Who are you kidding? They don't wash their hands now when they come for lunch. And if a teacher is concerned about it, they will make sure they wash their hands and students will eat their lunch because now we compete with classroom rather than play time. As I mentioned before, they are hungrier after playtime and will finish their lunches, returning well-fed to their classroom.

In my proposal for Universal Feeding I have always recommended extended lunch periods by use of the wave system and playtime before, not after lunch. Likewise, more congenial cafeterias are conducive to better eating and behavior in the lunchroom. Nutrition Education must be taught in every classroom and daily exercise should become mandatory. It's not only nutritious food but all other components that are necessary and essential as part of UNIVERSAL to raise a healthier generation.

JB: I know you are a big proponent of universal feeding. Explain this concept for those who may not know.

FH: Ok. Universal feeding, I should really give the absolute credit to a couple of Senators, Senator George McGovern and Senator Hubert Humphrey, who had proposed universal feeding for the simple reason that you CAN NOT TEACH A HUNGRY CHILD. The American School Food Service Association, whose name was

changed to School Nutrition Association, has really taken up this fight. Tom O'Hearn, a food service director from Massachusetts, was a great proponent of universal feeding. Tom pointed out all the benefits of universal feeding. After Tom's death I have taken over his struggle for UNIVERSAL. My concept, just like Tom's, that children going to school should not be separated by need or any other way. Parents have to fill out applications for free, reduced, or paid meals. Kids have to go to school. Nobody pays or fills out any applications for transportation. You live a certain distance from the school, you get free transportation. Every student receives school books free. Why not food? Food is an important ingredient to the education of a child, and more importantly well-educated, well-fed students are the future of our country. Annually, when I meet with congressional leaders, Congressmen and Senators in Washington who tell me, "Frank, there's no money." I respond, "It's not a question of money. It's a question of *priority*. Washington doesn't have money. Hartford doesn't have money. Albany doesn't have money. No state capital has money except taxpayers' money. When you tell me you've got to protect taxpayers, no, we are all either taxpayers or we are crooks – if we don't pay our taxes. And as a taxpayer I say to you there is no greater priority than the education and the health of our students, who are this country's future."

If students are *all* well fed, not separated by paid, reduced, or free, all served the same nutritious foods, food service workers can do what they do best – that is to prepare the food, feed the kids, be surrogate mothers and fathers, rather than interpret these multiple rules and regulations from USDA every year. Lately USDA has issued some fifteen or eighteen new pages of regulations. And when they say there is no money, yes there is money. The dropout rates will decline when kids stay in school, there will be less crime, health costs will decrease now and in the future. In the long run these youngsters will become taxpaying citizens of the United States doing their part to make our country number one in the world again – something that we have lost. The economy is in tough shape, with a high rate of unemployment. There was a time when there was more money available. We are in the Department of Agriculture with all those different programs – the Breakfast Program, the Lunch Program, the Commodity Program, the Summer Feeding Program, the Nutrition Education Program – put it all together. Teach proper nutrition. Make exercise part of it. Have nicer, more congenial surroundings. Then lunchrooms will become more conducive to enjoying nutritious meals. And let us not forget to extend lunch periods by a few minutes.

I am retired. I have retired in 2006. But I still go to Washington to participate in the yearly LAC, the Legislative Action Conference, and I will do it as long as I live. When Christopher Shays, the Congressman from the 4<sup>th</sup> District in Connecticut proposed the elimination of the reduced price meals, this was a step closer, perhaps the first positive step toward universal feeding. I asked Chris, "When is universal feeding coming?" He responded positively, "Frank, you're going to see it in your lifetime." And to all of you who watch this or read this I should confide in you that next year, 2012, I'm going to be ninety. I'm confident to make it to one hundred, but honestly I don't want to wait until I'm one hundred years old to see Universal Feeding in every school in the United States.

JB: What are some of the biggest changes that you've seen in the profession over the years that you've been involved?

FH: Changes as far as our programs are concerned – it has really all become infinitely more difficult. I just talked a few minutes ago about universal feeding. I have mentioned that we are under the Department of Agriculture. The regulations that are issued from the Department of Agriculture - and I realize they've got to conform to Congressional requests – leave me wonder, "How did nutrition programs get into the Department of Agriculture?" It was because farmers had excess commodities. And at one time they didn't know what to do with those excess commodities so they gave them to us. Yes, we were very grateful because we were able to cut our costs. But many school systems use these commodities that they're receiving and have them processed into chicken wings or chicken fingers. It is counter to what we should be feeding our children. The Department of Agriculture should no longer be the department that is in charge of child nutrition programs. To my way of thinking it should either be the Department of Education, because we should be part of education, or we should belong to the Department of Defense, because educating and feeding our children should be our first line of defense. By transferring child nutrition programs to the Department of Education or the Department of Defense would eliminate or at least cut down on the incredible amount of paperwork that has increased year by year. School lunch workers are not qualified to interpret so many rules and regulations. They are trained and qualified to prepare nutritious meals and feed all their students.

By following these steps, we shall succeed in UNIVERSAL FEEDING FOR ALL to become reality, rather than a life long dream.

JB: Is there anything unique about Connecticut in regard to child nutrition programs?

FH: Connecticut has really been outstanding. First of all, we had outstanding senators in Connecticut, and governors too. We had Governor Ella Grasso, and we had Bill O'Neill, and we had John Rowland, and we had Senator Weicker, who was a great proponent of universal feeding when he was governor. He offered for Connecticut to become the state to pilot universal feeding. This was never accepted. Much earlier Senator Abe Ribicoff represented Connecticut and he too was a great supporter of child nutrition programs, as was Senator Chris Dodd, who recently retired. Senator Lieberman still proudly represents our state.

Our association has been outstanding. We have used billboards statewide for advertising school lunch programs. In Norwalk for example we have used our trucks delivering meals to all our schools with printed slogans suggested by students like 'You Can't Teach a Hungry Child' and 'A hot lunch a day keeps hunger away.' Students whose slogans were used were honored at a special award ceremony.

Connecticut has really been in the forefront to push for changes Jeff. I remember when I became CSNA president in 1973 we attended the National Convention held in Washington, DC. We requested a booth for Connecticut right at the entrance of the exhibit hall. We exhibited and presented coffee cups made with our slogans as well as printed school lunch aprons and other items printed with our slogan, 'Connecticut, a small state, is leading the way to Universal.' Connecticut became better known nationwide.

JB: Tell me some of the special programs that you mentioned earlier while you were at Norwalk, the Grandparents Day for example.

FH: Oh, the Grandparents Day – an incredible story. One principal, Walter Reck from Marvin Elementary School, came to me one day and said, “Frank, what would you think if we have a Grandparents Day?” Before he finished his sentence I said, “What a marvelous idea. We’re going to have it at your school.” And we had it at Marvin Elementary School and we had about sixty-five grandparents. Make a long story short again, before about four, five, six, seven years we had Grandparents Day in every one of our elementary schools. We were able to overcome all the objections that some principals have had. “Oh, we can’t have that. We’re too busy.” “Oh yes you can.” Grandparents Day in schools where we have had it, children are better behaved on Grandparents Day than any other day. “We have children that don’t have grandparents.” “Yes, I know that. We have children that don’t have parents, and yet we don’t cut out all activities for parents.” We allow any child to bring in an uncle, an aunt, any elderly, and we ourselves, the food service department, have gone to every senior center and we brought in seniors, who might not have had any grandchildren in any of our schools, and we made them surrogates. We used school buses or used the limousines from the elderly home to transport them to one of our schools. They would adopt children for that particular day. I went to every school, made a little speech, asking all grandparents when they visit a classroom and see any child without a grandparent to please adopt one or two or three for that particular day. Grandparents Day was a huge success, not only in our elementary schools, but statewide. Every governor issued a yearly G.P.D. Proclamation declaring the Friday before Mother’s Day Grandparents Day for all of Connecticut. We invited Marian McQuade, the founder of National Grandparents Day, as a special guest for a number of years. She was warmly received in all our schools. By the time we celebrated Grandparents Day at all our elementary schools we welcomed as many as 3000 grandparents and or surrogates.

Not only did they visit each Friday before Mother’s Day, we provided special meals for them to enjoy with their grandchildren. They were welcomed in classrooms or were entertained in the gym with special performances, plays, or concerts. Congressional leaders contributed by their attendance - Congressmen Stew McKinney, Christopher Shays, Toby Moffett, Governors Ella Grasso, John Rowland and Lowell Weicker. All of them came at one time. Senator Lieberman could not attend, but his mother Marcia came, and adopted some students at Kendall School. She was so delighted that one year advised me that on my next D.C visit to tell Joey that anything that I request for the children he must approve. When I went to Washington that year and finally met with the Senator I told him,

“Joey, I have a special message for you from your mother. Anything that I ask of you for the children of Norwalk, or Connecticut, you’ve got to give them.” He quickly responded, “Oh, my mother did it again.” And I came right back with: “As a nice Jewish boy you’ve got to listen to your mother.” He laughed, and he has remained a good friend and supporter.

JB: What would you say has been your most significant contribution so far to the field of child nutrition?

FH: Truly I feel that personally my greatest contribution is that I have stuck with universal feeding, and this should not come out as a self-serving kind of project, but truly as a convincing idea of what is right for this country. Jeff, I was blessed with a marvelous staff. In my office besides my assistant Beri, who turned out to be my wife, I only had one secretary at a time. In my thirty years I only had two super efficient secretaries - Eleanore and Barbara. The third secretary, Jill, came for the last ten years, so we were never more than three people in the office - that included me. Other lunch programs employed as many as five, six, eight, or ten people in the office. I was blessed with a wonderful staff of one hundred and twenty employees - one manager in each of our two high schools, one in each of our four middle schools, and three managers for the 12 elementary schools. Six elementary schools were closed over a period of 30 years.

Fifty percent of our staff were union employees, with many benefits like a pension plan, health benefits, uniform allowances, holidays, sick days, etc. All other employees under four hours still enjoyed benefits like holidays, sick days, uniform allowances, etc. I was instrumental in the negotiations along with representatives from the board and an attorney. The union president was Kay Tortorella, the manager of Norwalk High School, who was a very loyal employee and also became a very loyal friend, as she retired exactly one year to the day of my retirement. Permit me to also give credit to all my other wonderful employees, who contributed by their loyalty and professionalism to my numerous awards, like being named twice Director of the Year, not only for Connecticut, but for all the northeastern states. The greatest honor that I was accorded was when Representative Christopher Shays presenting me with the flag that was flown in my honor over the United States Capitol in 2002. I responded with my true belief

that, "This honor really must be shared with my entire staff, who contributed so much to my success."

What I had done every year Jeff, since becoming food service director in Norwalk, was at the end of a school year to cater an employees' party. At the end of my first year in Norwalk I had asked Beri and Eleanore, "What do you do at the end of the school year for the employees?" They responded, "Oh, we take the managers out for dinner." I said, "What about the other employees?" "We can't take them all out for dinner." I replied, "You're right, we can't. We're going to do it ourselves." And from there on at the end of each school year we prepared and served an exciting dinner for all present and former employees. Beri, Eleanore, myself, and my chef (Jeff first - followed by Bob and Jim) did all the cooking and serving while the employees came dressed up, delighted to see the bosses do all the work. Students from that particular school provided the entertainment.

The very first year – that's when I really gained the respect of my employees. When I first became their boss, and came into their kitchens, looking in the garbage cans, looking in the refrigerators, in the freezers, in the ovens and stoves, they figured, 'What does this pencil pusher know?' But at the end of my first year at the conclusion of our Employees party, they gained confidence in my abilities and would call on me if they needed advice or were stuck. I always told them, "Don't ever cover up anything because I'm going to find it anyway." The relationship that I have enjoyed with all my employees was one reason for my success and my accomplishments. To date we still visit maybe once a year one of our schools. They are all delighted to see us because they have not forgotten us any more than we have forgotten them.

JB: What advice would you give someone who was considering child nutrition as a profession today?

FH: There is no greater reward. You know, we had student classes from many schools visit the central kitchen. We hired clients from STAR, the Society to Advance the Retarded. We interviewed and assigned some STAR clients to some of our schools. After a training period they were paid the same wages and benefits as all other employees. Some students from the Briggs Center for Vocational Arts were trained by us. Even younger students from other schools,

who came to visit with us in the central kitchen, were told if ever they wanted to get into the area of food service to come and see me and I will help them all I can. There is no more rewarding work or profession than to work as a food service person, or as a food service professional in any school system providing nutritious meals for students.

JB: Anything else that you'd like to add today?

FH: We prepared special menus for special occasions or special weeks. Yearly we featured an All American Week, an Education Week, a Grandparents Week, a special Thanksgiving Week. We featured dishes from different countries during International Week, with an Italian Day, a French Day, a German Day, a Dutch Day, and an All-American Day. From year to year we switched the days around. One year we changed to an Oriental Day, when students dressed up accordingly. All schools got chopsticks and were taught how to eat with them. Some principals objected on the grounds that kids can poke their eyes out. They can do the same, I told them, with a pencil or with a fork or with – they didn't get knives – a spoon. And each student also got a fortune cookie, some exchanging their fortunes. Oriental Day was just one of many rewarding days and experiences.

We had some marvelous principals who endorsed many of our promotions for any of our special days, for example on Italian Day. We featured Italian dishes and students dressed up in Italian wear, or whatever particular country we had chosen. We featured their special dishes and students dressed up accordingly. We worked with many dedicated, caring teachers from Kendall School, Rowayton School, and other schools. To this day some teachers have stayed in touch with us. Frequently they brought their students to the central kitchen for a most welcome tour of our facility, with special treats for all. People have asked me, "How come you have worked until you were almost eighty-six?" And I responded, "Because I enjoyed what I did." I have enjoyed good health. Now we enjoy our retirement and hope to be around when universal feeding becomes a reality, not only in Norwalk, but throughout the country.

JB: Well, the State of Connecticut and the whole country was blessed to have you as a dedicated child nutrition professional.

FH: I don't know. It has worked two ways. I was blessed that I had chosen Connecticut and I have enjoyed marvelous relationships with all my friends from Connecticut. Particularly with Joann Fitzpatrick, the food service director in Fairfield, Connecticut. We have worked together so well. When she adopted a little boy from Russia I helped out to share the responsibilities of the Food Service Department in Fairfield along with Norwalk. Joann also became my Legislative Co-chair for CSNA and has carried on beautifully after my retirement. She's still Legislative Chairperson – while Cindy Brooks, who will become the Chair of the PPL Committee this year, is likewise a wonderful, hardworking food service director from Cheshire. I am also blessed with many other dedicated food service directors, workers, and friends from Connecticut. I keep reminding all of them, *"Push for Universal!"*

JB: Thank you so much for your time.

FH: Ok, and I thank you for coming all the way from Mississippi to do this interview. I'm tremendously grateful and hope that I can yet contribute in some way to the betterment of the programs. Thank you.

JB: Thank you. It's been a pleasure.