

Patsy Burns

Henry River Mill Village



Photos by Jesse Barber

Interview

Born July 20, 1949 in Hickory, NC. She grew up in the Henry River Mill Village, where her parents Margaret and Leroy worked in the Mill. Patsy lived in a mill house of Henry River from when she was born till 1986, when she moved with her mother into the house she currently lives.

Patsy Burns Interview Transcript - June 20, 2019

Born: July 20, 1949. Hickory, NC

Patsy: I washed his (Ray) dishes for one penny.

Z: one penny?

P: He'd give me a penny and I'd wash his dishes. I mean I was younger. I didn't know better.

Z: That's not a good price he should be paying you more.

J: Did you save up for anything with those pennies?

P: Lord that's years ago. I'll be seventy next month.

P: I had two brothers, Mike and then Ray. Mike was my baby brother and Ray was my biggest brother and I didn't have no sisters.

J: So tell me about childhood in the mill village

P: I carried water. We carried water. I would go early in the morning and carrying my momma and daddy's water and then I would then carry my own water.

J: And your dad worked in the mill

P: My daddy worked in the mill and my mother worked in the mill. I believe my mother spinned and my daddy was something like a fixer or something.

J: Did you do any other work in the mill village as a kid, like did you do any work for you parents?

P: I had to go and wash my mother's hair and do it every morning, seven days a week, her arm was frozen. And I didn't mind. I took care of my mom and dad and I enjoyed every bit of it. And if I had to do it over, I'd do it again.

J: Was there a lot of events or what did the community do together?

P: Well we had a ball team, go up to the ball field and we played ball together and stuff like that.

J: Was church important in the Mill?

P: We used to walk to Henry River Church.

P: I have to say if you're a Baptist, they eat well. Seems like ever so often we're having a meal at church. They'd make up a reason.

J: Did the community celebrate holidays together?

P: We would have Christmas, this one year, I guess it's okay to tell this, my daddy had got me a huge teddy bear and I had to go all the way up to the top of the hill at a neighbor's house to get my teddy bear. It was black and white.

J: Why was it at the neighbor's house?

P: Because he was afraid I'd find it and get it before Christmas. And here I go walking across the street carrying a black and white teddy bear

J: Do you remember what school was like?

P: It was okay, I had a learning disability but what time I got to go, I struggled but it was okay.

13:47 J: Do you remember the store well?

P: Oh yea, they had a lot of stuff in that store, and Miles Alderholt he would, every Christmas he would give each one of us kids a new dollar bill and chocolate covered cherries. Every year for Christmas. But just about anything you needed they had it.

They had sodas, well I called them drinks, but back then they called them sodas.

J: What was your favorite?

P: Pepsi. Now my aunt Nancy, she called them dope. She would call me and she'd say, "come over here Patsy, I want you to go to the store and buy me a dope."

J: Tell me a little bit about your work

P: I worked in furniture, I worked for Century Chair, and I built the chars and I dearly loved it.

J: Tell me about the process of what you did at work

P: I'd put a chair on the table and I'd run around to another table and glue the blocks, put screws in the blocks for the next chairs, and here I'd go back to my table and build another chair.

J: How long did you work there

P: I worked there thirty-five years. I really enjoyed it. I was wanting to work when nobody else cared about working. It was something that I could do, I learned, so they let me work all I wanted to.

P: I've been married three times. And Ralph is the best. We don't have words or we get pee'd off we don't talk. Because when you're really mad you can say words that you can't take back. So we don't do that. And we never go to bed without telling each other we love each other. If he goes to the store he kisses me and tells me he loves me. Stuff like that means the world to me where it might not y'all, but since my son passed away, sometimes I call him just to check to see if he's okay. I even do my son like that, and Wayne told me, he said, "Momma, If you need to do that to get over this you go ahead."

P: My first husband, turned out to be an alcoholic, and he beat me all the time. I would go to church and when I come home I knew I was going to get a beating. And he'd beat me. And I thanked Ralph ever so often that he lets me go to church and don't say a word to me. And then my second husband turned out to, he was on Meth. He made meth and sold it in my garage. But he passed away. I come home from work one day and he was gone. And really it was for the best. If the law would've come, I'd lost everything. And he left me in debt, \$54,000. I was at the bottom, had to come work myself back up. But Ray stood by me, all the way. He sure did. And a lot of brothers wouldn't do that. I've had this house for twenty some years. The very first day of the month I make my house payment. I have never been late.

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