

MARY HARTSOCK
Family Member - Carter Family Fold – Hiltons, VA

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Interviewer: Amy C. Evans, SFA Oral Historian
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[Begin Mary Hartsock Interview]

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Amy Evans: This is Amy Evans on Saturday, February 21, 2009, in Hiltons, Virginia, at the Carter Family Fold. I'm in the kitchen here, and I'm with some Carter Family members: sisters, Mary [Hartsock] and Nancy [Carter]. And Mary, who I'm sitting with right now, if you would introduce yourself for the record and explain your relationship to the family?

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Mary Hartsock: Okay. My name is Mary Hartsock, and my husband's name is Paul and his mother and Sara [Dougherty] Carter are sisters. And that's how I'm connected with the Carters.

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AE: And his mother's name was—?

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MH: Mae [Dougherty] Hartsock.

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AE: And you work here every Saturday morning at the Fold. Can you explain that?

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MH: I—I usually work here every Saturday morning at the Fold. I seldom come in the evenings. Once in a while I do but not very often, but I help Rita every Saturday morning, help

her get it all ready to go because it's a lot to it just to get it ready for evening. And as I was telling you, these people love beans and cornbread, and when you have beans and cornbread, that is the main dish of—of the evening because people love cornbread back here. They also—they also love sweetened tea; they drink lots and lots of tea, and through the winter nights they drink lots of apple cider. And anyway, that's—I just help on—on Saturday mornings mostly and get it squared away.

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AE: Can you explain a little bit what your different jobs are in the kitchen here?

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MH: Well we—we take turns doing things. I usually get the cheese and—ready for the nachos and we get the chili ready for the hot dogs and we—we do barbecue on Saturday night, and we do the beans and the cornbread. And I do egg salad. People love egg salad, so we have egg salad sandwiches on Saturday nights. A lot of times when we've had the—the—oh—I'm trying to think now what—when people come in they just want egg salad, and in August when we have the big shindig here [the Carter Family Memorial Music Festival], if you don't have egg salad the people have a fit. They love egg salad. **[Laughs]** Kind of strange, isn't it? But they love egg salad, beans and cornbread, chicken—.

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AE: Now is the egg salad your recipe or you just make it?

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MH: I make it. I think it's Rita's [Rita Forrester] recipe. Isn't it? *[Looks to Rita for confirmation]* Oh, it's Janette's—Janette's recipe [Rita's mother, Janette Carter], so—. What we have to do is we chop the eggs really, really fine, and we add pickled relish and celery and you have to be terribly careful when you're making egg salad because people don't particularly like onions in it, but we do it that way with mayonnaise, and they love it. We serve it on white bread or wheat bread. So it's pretty healthy.

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AE: Are you a big home cook?

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MH: Uh, I—I—yeah, I think I am.

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AE: What do you like to make at home?

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MH: Well I have—since I've been back here, I've shared my recipe of taco soup with Rita, and a lot of times we make taco soup here, and they really like that too. And we serve it with tortilla chips and they—they really like that.

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AE: Tell me what's in the taco soup.

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MH: Well first of all you have to cook your pinto beans just like you ordinarily would, and it's usually like a pound and a half—and about a pound and a half of hamburger. You brown that; after your beans are done, you put the hamburger in and onions and you—you mix the onions with the hamburger and brown it, too, as you go, and then you open a can of corn and you put a can of corn in it, and then you put two packages of taco seasoning and two packages of—I can't—yeah, yes, oh, ranch dressing, dry ranch—yes two packages of dry ranch dressing and you mix it, and then you put two cans of diced tomatoes, big cans of diced tomatoes in it and it—it's really tasty.

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AE: Sounds wonderful. So what year did you get married?

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MH: I got married in 1952. I've been married—in August it will be fifty-seven years.

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AE: Can you tell me a little bit about what this area was like at the time that you got married?

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MH: At the time I got married, there wasn't nothing here much [*Laughs*]—very few people and, of course, after that, I mean I—we lived in Bristol and Nancy lived here, and I used to come and visit quite often here. Janette lived in Bristol, and I was friends with Janette before I met Paul, and so—because we all worked at the same place and that was at the Bristol Weaving Mill.

So that—that was the big thing back here was the weaving mill. So then—then I left. After I got married, I left and came back after forty-five years, and it had really changed, you know. More people came in and it—it's very small even yet, you know. A good place, though, for gossip
[Laughs].

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AE: Rita just brought me some hot cocoa. So you say you moved away. So when you got married, where did you go?

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MH: I moved to Norfolk, Virginia, and then from there, my husband was in the military for twenty-two years, and so we've traveled all over the United States. I've lived—mostly we lived on the West Coast, like Oregon and Washington and California and Nevada. I came here from Las Vegas, so—. But he loves it back here in the country. He loves it.

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AE: So y'all moved here, like to retire you came back?

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MH: Yes, except I didn't retire. **[Laughs]**

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AE: Yeah, Rita has still got you working hard, huh? **[Laughs]**

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MH: We work all the time [*Laughs*] anyway so—but it’s a nice place to live, really, and my husband loves it. Of course he was—he was born in Charlottesville, Virginia, but they moved here when he was a young boy. His dad died when he was two, and they moved to Nicholasville and Sara and I called her Mom Hartsock, you know, and they lived there close together at that time, so—. And then when you come back after forty-five years, everything changes—or you hope it does, you know. But I don’t think it’s necessarily true here, you know, in Hiltons. So most of the people around here are related, and that—that was kind of shocking to me, you know.

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AE: And so many are related to the Carters.

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MH: Yes. [*Laughs*]

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AE: So what—can you tell me what it meant to you when you married into the Carter Family?

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MH: You know something, that never meant anything to me or it didn’t mean anything to my husband. You know, it was just—it was just part of life, you know. I mean June [Carter Cash] used to come—we lived in Altaville, California, and June and Johnny [Cash] used to come quite often there, you know. But you never think of it as anything big or—or particularly you know—

of all the—you know the people that want to—entertainers, you never think of it in that manner, you know.

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AE: It was just family?

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MH: It was just family, yeah.

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AE: So what about the music?

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MH: The music is great. My—my mother-in-law, she never played outside of the home, but she could play a—a banjo like you wouldn't believe, and she could sing. She—she had a beautiful, beautiful voice, but she never did get into the field of the music, you know, so—.

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AE: Well what about—can you describe or do you know anything about what your mother-in-law thought about Sara's [Carter's] success in—in music?

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MH: She thought it was wonderful, you know. I mean she loved—she loved her sister, and she loved Rita, Dale, and Don, and Janette, you know. They were always such a big part of her life.

But she was very common, a very common person and the rest of them was, too, really—that we knew because she had a—a lot of relatives that lived in California, like around Lodi, California, so you—you just don't think anything about that kind of thing. I don't—I know Rita don't. She's just—you know, it's just part of life.

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AE: Well what about the Fold today and how, you know, you were saying earlier, people come from all over the world to this tiny little place and—and what that means to you now, maybe?

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MH: Well it's—it's different, you know, but they enjoy it so much because it's small and—and it's kind of like down-home, you know. They really enjoy it, and I think it's wonderful that they come because it's changed so much here at the Carter Fold. And people just really enjoy it and it's—it's a nice clean place that you can bring the whole family. Children come and dance and, you know, they enjoy that and that's—that's such an important thing. I—you know you can't take children just anywhere. So it's—it's a good decent place, and Janette always made sure that it would stay that way. So I was proud of her for that; she stood up for what she really believed. She was quite the praying woman. She used to get up at her home and go to the window, and she told me many, many times that she would just, you know, look up to the sky and she would pray her prayer for the day. And she prayed for her family, and she always wanted a decent place, and that's what it became.

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AE: Well what do you think people who visit here—what do you think they take away from their experience in the music and the food?

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MH: I think they take away the decency of it, you know, and the enjoyment of all the different types of bluegrass and bands that come and—and usually people that come from all over, they want to come back, so that tells you something: that they really enjoy it. And Rita is such a wonderful host, you know. She makes everybody feel welcome, and it makes a difference when people come and you're friendly and kind, and you try to help them and to do, you know—find motels and hotels and ways of getting here and whatnot, and she's always kind and she—she takes them in, if they don't have a place to stay. She takes care of them, so it's—it's a good feeling to know that people do care and back here I—I think, basically, people are—do care. You know, if you have a problem, they—they'll help you with it.

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AE: Are you musical at all?

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MH: No. *[Laughs]* No, I'm not musical. My husband can sing, but he doesn't, you know, but he can sing. I think it runs in the family.

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AE: And you said earlier that y'all don't stick around for Saturday night but—.

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MH: Yeah.

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AE: But have you in the past, and are there some favorite moments that stick out in your—in your memory?

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MH: Yes, we have in the past because, you know, like—we come like when Tom T. Hall has been here and when—who is the last one—that Gospel singer? Yeah, the Primitive Quartet. They—they were just absolutely wonderful. If it's somebody like that, we—we come, you know, so—. And then they had that show, *Keep on the Sunny Side*; they brought it here so that was a big hit. So we really enjoyed that.

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AE: And how do you like working on Saturday mornings with your sister [Nancy]?

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MH: Oh, I love it. [*Laughs*] Sometimes I can boss her around for a change, you know. She used to boss me when I was young, so—. I can boss her a little bit now. That helps.

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AE: All right, Mary. Well is there anything else about food and the Carter Family and the Fold here that you'd like to share?

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MH: I don't—I don't think so.

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AE: Thank you very much. I've enjoyed visiting.

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MH: You're welcome. I enjoyed you, too.

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[End Mary Hartsock Interview]