

10-6-1989

## Interview with Shirley Ann Coffey Cartwright Davis (FA 94)

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WESTERN KENTUCKY UNIVERSITY FOLKLIFE ARCHIVES

INFORMANT/FIELDWORKER DATA FORM

I. INFORMANT

NAME: Shirley Ann Coffey Cartwright Davis  
(Include fullest possible name of first, middle and/or maiden, last)  
(For example: John James Smith; Mary Ann Franklin Smith (Mrs. John))

ADDRESS: 5218 Meadow Lake Rd Brentwood, TN 37027

PERSONAL DATA: Age 53 Date of Birth 4-18-36

Place of Birth Bedford County, Shelbyville, TN Sex female

RACE/NATIONALITY/ETHNIC BACKGROUND: Caucasian Irish-English

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION: (Include education, occupation, places of residence, religious affiliation, etc.)

Central High School pre-school teacher Brentwood  
Baptist Young Children School - Baptist  
Brentwood Baptist Church

II. COLLECTOR

NAME: AMANDA LEE DAVIS  
(Include fullest possible name as described above)

ADDRESS, LOCAL: 216 Potter Hall WKU B.G. KY 42101

ADDRESS, PERMANENT: 5218 Meadow Lake Rd Brentwood, TN 37027

PLEASE DESCRIBE YOUR RELATIONSHIP TO THE INFORMANT, SUCH AS COUSIN, FRIEND, EMPLOYER, ACQUAINTANCE, ETC.:  
MOTHER

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS:  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

TAPE INDEX

Tape # 1 of 1

Interviewer: Amanda Davis Address: 216 Potter Hall, WKU

Interviewee: Shirley Davis Address: 5218 Meadow Lake Rd., Brentwood, TN

Interviewee: \_\_\_\_\_ Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
(write additional names on back of sheet)

Place of Interview: SD's home Date: 10/6/89

Equipment Used: Soundesign #4375B

Tape Brand: \_\_\_\_\_ Speed: \_\_\_\_\_

Cassette Brand: BASF 60 or 90 minute? 90

Amount of tape used: Side A: all Side B: \_\_\_\_\_

Brief description of contents: My mother tells of her Christmases past and present and her family participation.

Comments:

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	<p>When did you begin celebrating Christmas?            At Thanksgiving. Christmas is a very special time to me, I enjoy it. I begin decorating at Thanksgiving; I was born into a large family, so we began to make our gifts around Thanksgiving. We decorated the house at that time and I've carried that over to my family after I married and went away from home.</p> <p>Tell me about your childhood preparations?            We would begin to make preparations at Thanksgiving and we made special gifts, mittens, pictures, baking things. Being from a large family, my mother would bake things and put them in large lard cans. Thanksgiving and Christmas were the only two big holidays, and Easter, when we would get cake. I never remembered getting a birthday cake until after I married when one of my children, she was sixteen, brought home a birthday cake and it was the first cake I remember, maybe I had one, but I didn't remember it. Because in the Thirties, I was born in Thirty-Six, and sugar and things, well, I don't really remember the Depression except that there were sugar rations, so we'd save it up, so three times a year we'd have baked goods with sugar and we'd make candy</p> <p>Who was involved in the baking?            The whole family when we made candy, it was a kind of taffy and we'd pull it and everyone would take turns with that. Everyone would take turns beating the fudge because it had to cook so long because we had a wood stove and it was a</p>

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really a happy time.

Any special family recipes?

My mother's jam cake. Since there were so many of us, my mother would try to bake things that we all liked and that was kind of a Christmas present too. She'd make a chocolate cake, jam cake, banana, whie cake with chocolate frosting. It sounds like a lot of cake, but with forteen people under the same roof and relatives that would come in at Christmas time like people today come over for coffee. They didn't come over for coffee, they would come over for dinner.

Do you do any special baking now?

Dressing, turkey, ham that we usually don't have, rolls, I freeze most of my things, I do it ahead of time. We usually have a big crowd and it's fun with all of the preparing, I suppose I like that better than gift buying, the hustle and bustle of all of it is a lot of fun. My favorite time of year is Christmas and it's not because of gifts but what the Christams season represents, it's just a joyous time and I love it, the decorating, the tree doings, and if I could, I'd leave my tree up all year round, I like it that much.

How elaborate were you celebrations growing up?

Not too, we thought they were at that time because we would start out to get together, which I lived on a farm so you didn't have too far to go and we would get a Christmas tree, a cedar was the traditional Christmas tree, and I didn't know pine tree even existed at Christmas time until I got married, but we would find a cedar tree and chop it down and soak it awhile in water and putit in a stand in water and it was just a wonderful experience with my brothers and sisters. The boys would make the stand and the girls would be making fudge and popped popcorn and I only remember one time, now my older brothers and sisters remember stringing popcorn to put on tree inside, but we put it on the trees outside or bread crumbs of all kinds. We decorated with cotton and gum balls from a sweet-gum tree and acorns and you started collecting these around Thanksgiving because living on a farm you had chores to do. I can remember having a big black pot outside and they would build a fire and they would cook ham even now, you buy hams that are already cured and cooked at the store and boil it or something like that, but this was a fresh ham, we'd kill a hog, but it was a fun time.

What about your ornaments?

Most everything was homemade. We had some tinsel and some lights, I was twelve when got eletric ones. We just made most of out things. We'd use berries and we'd make cards to slip under each of our doors. We hung up stockings. We all had a stocking.

Did someone make them?

They were made by my grandmothers and greatgrandmothers I suppose, but they weren't like stockings now with Santa or "Merry Christmas" on it, we just had a stocking and we'd

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hang up a stocking that we would wear to school. I guess today people would consider us poor, but I didn't know that because we shared everything, we grew our own food and we lived on a farm.

What did you get in your stockings?

An apple, orange, some nuts, English walnuts, a few pecans, some Brazil nuts, some chocolate candy with a white center in it, some peppermint. I think back now, I think my grandmother made the peppermint, but I'm not sure because I don't remember seeing it in the store, I guess I should have asked.

How elaborate are your Christmases now?

I can't get it too elaborate. We decorated everything when I was younger. We had plays and we would rehearse. We always sang Christmas carols I mean the whole family, we'd have the Christmas story, one of us would read Luke the second chapter and we'd take turns reading, but you almost had it memorized because you had said it and heard it so many times, then Christmas Eve, you'd go to bed. We'd have the "Night before Christmas" the story before we went to bed and we would be excited about Christmas. I remember we didn't get individual gifts, we had to share like a bike roller skates to share with ten children, a ball. Later on maybe when I was fourteen, I remember mother wanted us to have something and she'd make something and as far as we knew it could have come from Gucci's or Sak's but it was a flour sack and my mother could make any kind of pattern and she'd make a blouse or skirt. But our Christmases today are very elaborate. If we are all together, I still have tree and I decorate every room in the house even to the bathroom. I like to celebrate, really start the night before and do something and I still enjoy that.

Tell me about your Christmas songs and stories.

My mother played the piano by ear and sometimes a harmonica and she had a beautiful voice, my father did too, the whole family was musically inclined and with that many of us we could put on a wonderful program and have a wonderful production. We'd sing "White Christmas," "Silent Night," "Winter Wonderland," "Joy to the World," "O Little Town of Bethlehem," "Away in a Manger," just the traditional, no different that today and on Christmas Eve was the big time at our house. My grandmother would get up every Christmas Eve morning, sometimes I wondered if she ever went to bed, she would get us all "Christmas Eve gift" and say that to us all and we had these cards that we made and gave out you see if you were caught and someone said that to you, then you had to give them a gift, so we'd give her these cards and candy or whoever won "Christmas Eve gift" that year. My children do it, they try to get each other. Some peoplesay they have never heard of it, but my grandmother did it. Really I think that she did it for her son, she was living with my family and my father, so she did it for him because he'd always have something to give

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	<p>her and she'd always try to catch everyone off guard.          What else did you do on Christmas Eve?          We would hide and wrap things and we would all go to bed and Mom and Daddy, poor things, I didn't realize what they went through until I had children of my own and they'd play Santa Claus and that was a big chore at our house and they would have things that they had made and mother would have dolls made out of corn cobs and have them dressed and under the tree, but they couldn't put them out until we all went to bed and you know that someone was going to be awake so they had to stay up until the early morning hours and we'd go to bed with all of our clothes on and our shoes on because they said we couldn't go into the living room and open presents until everyone was dressed and Dad would try to come in and take them off because they knew it would give them a little time to stay in bed but we managed to get up and put them back on and as soon as someone woke up, they'd wake everybody up and I think once or twice we got Mother and Daddy and they hadn't even gotten to bed. It was a delightful time. I don't remember any fancy gifts or anything. We had an Uncle that lived in Washington state and he brought us apples at Christmas, but one time he brought them down personally and I can tell you my mother's recipe for fruit salad is the best in the world. I still make it myself with apples, oranges, bananas and nuts. It's very delicious but that's the only time we had fruit salad.          So you opened your presents on Christmas Day?          Yes, Christmas morning and we'd have to stand in line as they called it the least to the biggest and Daddy and Mother would open the doors and go sit down to watch us as we came in and my grandmother would be in too and it didn't matter what we got because we all loved it because we all shared so if one person picked it up first, it didn't matter. Oh, we got some fireworks at Christmas too. I never could figure out why we did that and we got some at the Fourth of July.          When did you set off the fireworks?          Christmas morning after we opened our gifts and had breakfast and then we'd go out and shoot off fireworks because we were celebrating Jesus' birthday and some people might think we were being sacreligious today, but that's just what we did.          What about your Christmas dinner?          Big. Mother even had turkey that we raised and it would be on the table and it even had little "boots" on it all laced up and little papers and I keep thinking that I'll put them on my turkey, but I never have I don't know why and I've often wondered where she got those white papers, I'll have to ask her that, but that was a special time, it might have been when my Uncle was down and they might have been trying to impress him and his family because they were wealthy and they had a boat and they would go on cruises to Europe and we didn't really know about Europe except for what they</p>
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told us.

And your Christmas dinners now?

Turkey dressing, fruit salad, sweet potatoes, homemade roll cranberry sauce a cuple a vegetables, green beans or green peas, mashed potatoes, potato salad, it's just a feast.

It's always too much and you sit and eat too much, but that is Christmas and the only time you get to eat like that.

How big a part did religion play?

A big part, We used to go to the First Christian church and Santa would always come up there to the Christmas tree and our neighbors would help out because there were so many of us and they felt like that since their children were married and away they took us to the Christmas party to see Santa Claus and we would get sack of oranges and apples and orange slice candy and a few things like that and we used to have enough to make fruit salad and we'd all take turns because every had a job to do and we'd get our beds made to go out and play with whatever Santa had brought us.

We always did the story of Jesus at the Christian church and we'ddress up in bathrobes and be wise men. I remember a couple of times my brothers got to be wise men and one brother got to be Joseph and I always wanted to be Mary but I never ddd get to.

How about religion and your celebrations now?

It's too commercial, religion is left out of most Christmas celebrations now. I guess in the last fifteen years. I always the Christmas story and we'd go to pagents but they don't have them like they used to. But I still, myself, read the Christmas story because I love it. Now they have it on television or they have it on Midnight Mass but I still like the music and we all go around and sing.

You grew up the First Christian church?

Yes, until I was forteen years old and then my mother was Baptist and my father was Methodist and my father let us go with Mom so we could go as a family and there was a neat church they called it "The Church in the Village" and they broadcast on the radio and my youngest sister would sing. They wuld stand her in a chair at the pulpit and she'd sing on the radio. Those are happy memories of Christmas and I still do some of them. I have a nativity scene under my tree to this day because I fell like that is what Christmas is all about, Jesus being born and everybody celebrates this. So, I have this under the tree and it helps me when I look at it to remember what it was all about and not the gift part. I like to get gifts, but that was a special gift and that's why I put it under the tree.

Did you do anything for the community then or now?

I take food to church and let them take it wherever, but when I was a Little girl we would go to the shut ins and sing Christmas carols and take them bags of food.

What is a shut in?

An elderly person that just didn't get out, some didn't havefamilies, some were less fortunate children and we'd

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take our toys can you imagine ten children having toys that would be presentable to someone else? But my parents made us do that. My father taught us to share and to think of others and I still do on a lot of things where maybe I should think more of myself, but it makes me happy to this day to do something for someone else.

Did you believe in Santa and when did you find out?

I still don't like for anyone to know that I don't believe in him because I still believe in him. I can remember I was so angry when I found out, I was about twelve years old and we didn't have television to tell us about Santa and stuff like they do today, but we would go to bed and pretend we were asleep and I wouldn't move and Dot my sister slept with me in fact on Christmas Eve night about six in the same bed, three at the bottom and three at the top, and there we were with hard shoes on but mother put us in the room to keep us away from the front part of the house and Mother came in with Dot and she put her hand in front of my face to see if I was asleep and I wondered what she was doing, so I heard her go out the door and tell mother that we were all asleep and I thought, "I wonder why she's doing this, mother must be giving her a present or something special," but then I heard her and she had to help mother bring all the gifts under to tree and to hear her do that and play Santa Claus broke my heart and I thought surely I didn't hear it right because I didn't want to believe that Santa wasn't real and like I said to this day I still want to believe that there is a Santa.

Did your parents tell you about Santa after that?

I finally asked my dad and he said, "Shirley as long as you believe that there is a Santa Claus there will be, but when you stop believing, there won't be one," so, I believe.

Any special childhood memories--a best or worst holiday?

I can't remember any bad ones except that we didn't have much, but we didn't know that. I guess I have two special times. One was last Christmas, we were all together, all of my children and the oldest ones live in Dallas, so we went to Dallas for Christmas. It was the first time I'd been away from home on Christmas and I had mixed feelings about that but it was fun for all to be together because we don't get together that often. Another time we celebrate Christmas at Thanksgiving. We were in Dallas and all together, so we celebrated then and that was a fun time. I don't know if we'll be together this Christmas. I hope one or two of them come home.

Any last words?

It's the most joyous time of year and I wish that everyone would think of Christmas as it really is and it would be joyous for them. People get mixed up because they don't have money, they have to buy a gift and they don't know what to buy. I think that the President should say on the radio that this Christmas nobody is going to buy gifts. If you gift a gift, it should be homemade, a card or a



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small gift and I think everyone would have a better Christmas, because it is sad when people just think of all the material things and it becomes a burden for everyone almost and it takes away from the true meaning of Christmas.

What is the true meaning of Christmas?

A time that someday I am going to have all I hope, my family together but Christmas to me means a new life, new birth, a chance to live, it means Jesus is there and he died for me and he was born for me and anyone that would believe in him. It's the greatest gift that anyone could receive.