



A Marine to His Country, A “Pops” to Me

By: Grace Johnston
Longwood University



INTRODUCTION

This research was conducted with the intention to learn more about the life of Mr. Ralph Harris (my “Pops”). With further inquiry, we discussed his past as well as the events that shaped him into the man he is today. I was able to conduct the interview and retrieve recurring themes as well as connect those themes to the literature for the SOCL 331 course.

METHOD

I prepared my questions in class when we had a workday. The day of the interview was the first day of spring break. After getting written and verbal consent, I conducted this interview in the living room of his home in Farmville, Virginia so that he would feel more comfortable to answer questions openly and honestly. The interview lasted around 32 minutes, and the questions were answered and detailed. I had no specific organization for the questions, I intended to find out more about him and his past. I then transcribed and coded the interview.

MAJOR THEMES

Family:

- “It-it was great. And that happened two more times in our lives, having babies”.
- (response to having grandbabies)- “Now we were delighted. It’s-you can’t really explain it in words. We couldn’t wait to see whether it’s a boy or girl. It was just wonderful. Knowing that you were having grandkids, that there was a love between families. It was wonderful”.

Childhood Dream (Marine Corps):

- “Most kids played cowboys and Indians. When I came along, I played cowboy- I mean, Indians and Marines”.
- “... I started runnin’ with heavy boots on to get in physical shape for the Marine Corps. And when I graduated, I went to Parris Island and became a Marine. That was my lifetime dream...”

New Perspective on Life:

- “One of my lasting memories from my childhood...” “...rode down through the country to the river where he held a shotgun at my temple and threatened to kill us both” “... the thought of *you could’ve been killed* that night, at age fifteen”

Transitions:

- Biggest transition= teenager → Military
- Military → Married life + Family

REFERENCES

Quadagno, J. S. (2018). *Aging and the life course: An introduction to social gerontology* (7th Edition ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill Education.



CONNECTION TO THE LITERATURE

According to our textbook (Levinson’s study), the era of early adulthood “lasts from ages 17 to 45” and begins with the “early adult transition” which is when the time when childhood draws to a close (Quadagno, pg. 159, 2018). A time to move out, becoming “financially independent”, and taking on new roles. Ralph Harris began his independence at the age of 19 and went straight into the Marines and married life with no in between.

The continuity theory can be applied to Ralph’s life as well. His personality shapes his attitude towards aging. His dedication to the Marine Corps extended in how he raised a family with the same values and morals he had learned.

CONCLUSION

I went in to this interview to learn more about what has shaped my Pops into the man he is today and how that has affected his attitude towards life and aging. It is amazing how one event that occurred in his life shifted his perspective on how he lived his life. Family, the Marine Corps, Perspective, and Transitions are four major themes that have shaped him into who he is. He holds fast to the family, patriotism, and working hard to achieve your dreams.