Overview:
1. He inherited his father’s farm.
2. Work on the farm.
3. His father peddled fruit and worked at Bingham Copper Mines.
4. What you learn on a farm.
5. What they did for fun.
6. Eight children, they did work on the farm. None are farmers.
7. Worked at Geneva Steel for 37 years.
8. He hasn’t sold off any of his inherited land, but his siblings did.
9. Growing an orchard is hard work and doesn’t provide a steady income.
10. Changes in Orem, life used to be simpler and slower. You knew your neighbors.
11. Stories about Miles falling out of a tree and the humming bird nest in the apple.
12. Neighborhood sharing.
RA: Did you grow up on an orchard?

MH: All my life. I’ll be 80 years old on September 8, 2001.

RA: Your father had a farm as well?

MH: No, this is it.

RA: This is the same property?

MH: Yes.

RA: What was your father’s name?

MH: Leonard More Harris.

RA: How big was the farm back then?

MH: We had three different plots. A total of about 25 acres would cover all the acreage my father had. There is a little homestead that my great-grandfather Harris homesteaded when they came west, probably in the neighborhood of 100 acres. It bordered up to the back of the Albertson’s store to over here, the second street over, was all his at one time. He divided up the farm to the family members in six-acre plots. My Dad had some other ground over where the old home was in Lindon hills. We traveled around doing jobs in various places. Taking water turns and so forth. You should have been here last night. I ran the water from three o’clock this morning till just a couple of hours ago.

RA: You’re still working just as hard as ever?

MH: No, I don’t think so. It just takes a little longer to do things.

RA: Was it a lot of hard work to run an orchard?

MH: Yes, you had to spray the trees and take care of them, thinning and so forth in the spring. Pruning the trees to start with and then spraying. In fall is harvest time and then we’re picking the peaches and apples. That’s what we have.

RA: How did you distribute your fruit? Did you have a stand here?

MH: My Dad peddled a lot of it. He took a little pickup down to Provo, Salem, Heber, and all around the country area, peddling door to door. We didn’t have that much really, but that was ready cash coming in. This was during the Depression days in the late 1920’s, early 1930’s.

RA: As long as you can remember, he peddled fruit? Was it always just your own or did he take other people’s fruit?
MH: No, mostly just his own. He worked part-time at Utah Copper in Bingham, and he was traveling back and forth there a lot. He also stayed up there, and left us kids to more or less run things at home, take care of the cows and the horses and do all that. It was a busy, but it was a good life. I wish my kids could have had some of the experiences that I did.

CS: What experiences would those be?

MH: Learning how to work and how to do things, taking care of things. Giving them a calf and let them raise it and they can sell it when it’s bigger or whatever.

CS: What did you enjoy most about growing up on a farm?

MH: As long as you did your assigned job, so your parents didn’t get to you, when you got done then you had free time to go jump in the canal and go for a swim or whatever. We used to call it skinny-dipping. The old Geneva resort house has been gone for years, and that was a big occasion to ride the merry-go-round once in awhile. We also went swimming in the ponds, and rode the toboggan.

RA: What else did they have there?

MH: They had a big dance hall. I guess it was probably next to (NU) in Salt Lake as far as size is concerned.

RA: How often would you go as a child?

MH: Three times a month maybe.

RA: After they built the SCERA and the swimming pool did you start to go there as well?

MH: When they built the SCERA that was probably about the time World War II started, I don’t remember exactly. I married in 1941. We had eight children.

RA: And you raised them all here, on the orchard?

MH: They’re not all here. Most of them live in Salt Lake Valley. There’s two of them out of state, one of in Portland, Oregon and one in NU, Louisiana—Terry is an English professor at LSU.

CS: Did any of your children show any interest in farming?

MH: No. They weren’t involved in it at all.

RA: Even when they lived here?
MH: No they were far away from that.

RA: What kind of labor did you do?

MH: I worked up at Utah Copper until I went into the service in World War II and then after the war I came back and worked out at the Geneva Steel company for 37 years.

CS: Did a lot of farmers go down to Geneva Steel when they built it?

MH: Yes, that was quite a crew, quite a bunch. They started to build the plant in 1940-41 or something when the war first started and it didn’t produce any steel until about 1944. They produce mostly just plate steel for ships. That was the big thing, and since then they’ve diversified and gone into structural steels and things like that. All the people went down there to work, without Geneva there would be nothing here in this valley. It was probably the biggest, well I’m sure it was the biggest payroll of everything else combined in the valley at that time.

RA: Did you enjoy your job at Geneva more or working on your farm?

MH: Geneva was a more steady income than working on the farm. On the farm you didn’t know if you were going to have any income unless you had a big farm like the Gillmans, or the Strattons, or maybe Dave Kirk. They could maybe make a living on them, pay their water assessments and the taxes and so forth. Most of them would have to have some sort of supplemental income, dairy farms, cows that went along with it. That was their secondary income, rather than depending completely on the apple or cherry orchard or whatever.

RA: You decided to keep some trees?

MH: The whole lot I have now is just what’s around my house, about a dozen trees or so.

CS: What do you do with the extra fruit?

MH: I give it away.

RA: When did you get rid of the other land?

MH: I didn’t get rid of it. It was divided up into six-acre plots, each individual got his share and after a couple generations that cut it down to nearly nothing. I’ve still got three acres and that’s about it. That’s about all anybody ended up with.

RA: You didn’t sell any off?

MH: No, I haven’t. My brother did. They had little parcels but they’ve sold theirs off and my sisters, they got money and property.
RA: None of them are still in farming?

MH: No one is in farming. All my brothers have died. I just have two sisters now.

RA: And they got the money?

MH: Yes.

RA: Do you work on your trees a lot? Are you out there everyday taking water?

MH: No, I’ve got too many other things to do around than work in the orchard, pulling weeds in the garden, getting the hay cut and the bales taken care of and so forth.

CS: You have horses?

MH: No. I used to, but we don’t anymore. My cousin from Lindon comes over and does my hay for me. I can’t handle it anymore. I don’t have the equipment.

RA: What was it like to grow up on an orchard?

MH: An orchard to me is a lot of work for a lot of nothing, because you’ve got nature against you—wind storms that take your crops sometimes, winds, hail, maybe the bees don’t pollenize and your spray costs you an arm and a leg. It doesn’t pay, at least, it wouldn’t for me anyway. Some of these big farmers like Strattons that’s a totally different situation.

RA: Is it worth it, not financially, but just for the joy of having it?

MH: That’s why I’ve gotten down to 12 trees, that’s all I want to mess with.

RA: You still find joy in taking care of them?

MH: Right.

RA: In talking with people, we’ve heard that there is a rural atmosphere, something you don’t get in a crowded city with all the traffic. You’re pretty far from the center of town here. How have you seen Orem change?

MH: At one time Highway 89 was the only route, other than Geneva Road in west Provo, for us to get to Provo. There was only one car each way, only one lane each way. There weren’t even sidewalks on either side of the road, so just think back to that and compare it to now, it’s a big change now. A big change.

H: It’s really different nowadays.

CS: Is the change for the better?
MH: I liked it when it was a little slower paced than what it is now. People are in too big
a hurry to do this or do that or go there or do this.

CS: What do you think Mrs. Harris?

H: Too much money nowadays. People don’t appreciate things as much. We picked
strawberries and raspberries for ten cents a crate with 12 cups in it. I went to work at
Brigham Young University when we sent our first missionary out and we were thrilled to
get under a dollar an hour. So the two of us are complaining now about what BYU pays.
Of course, prices were down.

MH: You could buy a whole loaf of bread for a dime back in those days. You could buy
gas for 17-18 cents a gallon. At least you could buy five-gallons for a buck, so twenty
cents.

H: We had a different, freer life. I had girlfriends out in Genola that I walked to Pleasant
Grove with just through the fields.

RA: What do you think Orem has lost in our busy lifestyle?

H: Oh there’s a lot of good things.

MH: Individuality. I don’t think people know each other now like they used to. I think we
used to know everybody from Pleasant Grove clear across Orem. Not any more, you
don’t even know your neighbor halfway down the street.

CS: I’ve noticed the closer people and their housing, the less we know your neighbors.

H: Yes, we’ve got neighbors just a short way down the road and we don’t know them. I
guess they belong in a different ward and they’re in a different stake even though they’re
just three houses down there.

MH: Thirty-two years ago when we built this house, there was only seven houses on this
whole street, 12th North to 16th North. We used to have neighborhood parties. Not
anymore.

H: We used to get together and play games. We just lost the closeness I think in getting
so big. When we first moved here you could hear the birds singing in the morning, and
the sky was beautiful. Now you go out and all you can hear are kids screaming and
hollering or carrying on. Parents hollering at them and so forth.

MH: We had Meadowlarks. You’d walk out in the yard pheasants, quails, skunks, the
whole bit.

RA: You don’t get that anymore?
MH: No.

H: We still get a pheasant every now and again. We had an old pheasant that lived here all winter. He lived under the pine tree. He’d come out in the snow.

RA: It’s not completely gone? Did you grow up here as well?

H: I grew up in Pleasant Grove. We’ve got three high schools here in Orem now: Timpanogos, Mountain View and Orem High. Our kids all went to Orem High.

RA: I liked the falling out of the tree story [referring to story told previously].

H: We all laughed about that because he was climbing high in the tree and I said, “Don’t you fall.” I turned to the kids and they were commenting about crawling up to the highest branch. I said, “Did you know that your Dad used to be a trapeze artist?” Just as I said it, he falls out of the tree.

RA: Did you learn your lesson?

MH: Oh, yes.

H: I don’t know about that. He still climbs these trees all the time. A month or so ago he reached for an apple and one of them had a worm hole and (NU) jumped back. There was a moth nest in this one. The moth lived on the tree limb and she (NU). There was a little hummingbird nest and it had a little tiny baby bird in it. We watched it for days and finally (NU) fell out of the tree and (NU) to fly away.

RA: A hummingbird nest in an apple?

H: It was right on the branch. So many people came to see it. They had never seen anything like that. A lot of people came and saw it when the bird was in it too. Those are the kinds of things you miss.

RA: You said that you just pretty much give your fruit away to your neighbors. Does that bring a sense of community? Do you have a lot of the same people who come back?

H: We just tell all the people we know in the ward. We pick beans, big plastic bags full and take them up along the road. There are people in our ward we know.

RA: So there’s still a small sense of community like you were talking about when it was smaller?

MH: Yes, that’s just being good neighbors. In return our one neighbor likes to go fishing a lot, and every now and again he brings us fish back so it’s a trade. That’s what families and community, a close community is. We don’t have much of it in Orem as a whole anymore.
H: Victor came over and helped us get set up our computer. Oh we keep up with the times a little bit, don’t we? But sometimes people get so involved and busy that they don’t enjoy life.