

Cheri & Tony Atkinson

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Interviewed by McKenna Johnston

Phone Call Interview

Transcribed by McKenna Johnston

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McKenna: Okay, so my name is McKenna Johnston. Today is April 18, 2021 and today I will be interviewing Tony and Cheri Atkinson over Zoom. So how are you guys today?

Cheri: We're good.

Tony: Good.

McKenna: That's good. So do you mind just introducing yourselves, each?

Tony: Go ahead Cheri.

Cheri: Oh. (laughs) Yeah, thanks. I'm Cheri Atkinson. I'm McKenna's maternal grandmother. I was born in 1947 and I'm 74 years old.

Tony: I'm Tony Atkinson. I'm McKenna's maternal grandfather. I was born in 1946 and I'm [1:00] 74 years old.

McKenna: Fun, okay, so today we are going to be talking about 1960's America. During the 1960's, there were a lot of things going on. Vietnam, the Civil Rights Movement, the

Cold War, the Beatles coming to America and also the Beatles breaking up, the assassination of several people, including JFK and Martin Luther King Jr. What moment do you think was the most influential in each of your lives?

Cheri: Mhm. Well I remember when JFK was shot. I had just moved back to San Diego from Bremerton, Washington. I was 16 and [2:00] my English teacher, I was a junior in high school, did I say that? My English teacher, I don't know how he heard or somebody called him, it was before cell phones, and he said, "JFK is dead." And I said, "Good."

McKenna: (laughs)

Cheri: Well I came from a military family and my mom and dad were both Republicans and I hadn't even begun to think of politics and he shot me a horrible glance and made some comment that didn't register for prosperity in my head. But I had been put in my place. [3:00] And it was all very sad but being 16, I didn't get politics. I was more concerned that the whole week of TV programming was preempted with the cortege with his body going to Washington and the whole week of TV had preempted and that was more concerning.

McKenna: (laughs) I imagine you feel differently now.

Cheri: Uh yeah. What hit me more was his brother being shot as he was running for president. His brother, Robert Kennedy, [4:00] being shot a couple years later.

Tony: Actually, he was shot in '68.

Cheri: In '68?

Tony: Yeah. JFK was in '63. I was a senior in high school. I was in drafting class and our instructor walked in the door and said "Kennedy's been killed." The rest of the day was sort of like in slow motion. The whole school gathered out by the flagpole, I can't

remember what we did by the flagpole but, we stood there, saluted, and probably gave a place of remembrance. But Kennedy's brother, Bobby, was running for president in '68 and I was living in-

Cheri: That was the year I had your mother.

Tony: Yeah. I was living in Costa Mesa, California with roommates. We were watching Bobby Kennedy on TV [4:00], he was at, I can't remember which hotel he was at.

Cheri: Yeah, he was speaking.

Tony: Yeah, he was speaking. Ray Roberts, one of my roommates who spent most of his time drinking wine and smoking marijuana, was sitting in front of the TV, very close to it with his jug of wine, and Kennedy was speaking and Ray looked around at everybody and said, "Just watch. Somebody's going to shoot him too."

McKenna: Oh.

Tony: And just an hour later as he was leaving the hotel, he was shot. Now I don't know how bad-

Cheri: Right after that speech.

Tony: How badly that screwed Ray Roberts up.

Cheri: Yeah!

McKenna: Oh yeah! How crazy is that?

Tony: (laughs) Yeah the 60's were interesting. [6:00] It started off pretty innocent but it ended up with Woodstock.

Cheri: I wanted to go to Woodstock real bad. But I had a teeny tiny baby at that time and didn't see how I could do it with no car, not being able to drive.

McKenna: Oh yeah. You didn't want to take her? (laughs)

Cheri: I didn't know how it was going to work out going all the way across country, I was living in Long Beach at that time.

McKenna: In California?

Cheri: Yeah and I just, I couldn't see- I remember, before all this, in '67 [7:00], going to San Francisco and getting off the plane and the atmosphere of the place hit me as soon as I stepped off the plane. It was just, it's hard to put into words but it was really different. I only spent a week there.

McKenna: Different in like, a good way?

Cheri: Yeah! It was- the atmosphere was electric. That was the Summer of Love and there were Flower Children passing out flowers to people and being a Republican at the time, I just ignored all that.

McKenna: (laughs)

Cheri: Said no thanks to the flowers. It wasn't until I met your grandfather [8:00] that I began to loosen up a little.

Tony: Yeah. I remember San Francisco too.

Cheri: Did you go?

Tony: Well I used to- when I worked for Transamerica, one of the reasons I didn't take you to Woodstock was I had just started to work for Transamerica Corporation.

Cheri: Well I- No. Woodstock happened-

Tony: In '69.

Cheri: Oh.

Tony: Same year I started working for Transamerica.

Cheri: But that was the summer. We didn't meet until October.

Tony: Well I- During the 60's, I know what the electric air felt like in San Francisco.

Cheri: Yeah, it was just different and as for the Beatles, I didn't like them.

McKenna: (laughs) Anti-Beatles? Okay.

Cheri: Well yeah I was- I didn't like their music. They were [9:00] too moon spoon croon joon, you know, everything was just too rhyme-y. I didn't like them until they discovered drugs and I liked their music a whole lot better.

McKenna: (laughs) I think a lot of people would agree with you on that one. (laughs)

Tony: I tried letting my hair grow out at one point to another.

Cheri: Yeah...

McKenna: Like the Beatles?

Tony: Yeah!

McKenna: (laughs)

Cheri: It never got very far.

Tony: I found boots like they wore...

Cheri: Did you?

Tony: Yeah!

Cheri: (laughs)

McKenna: (laughs)

Cheri: That was before I knew you.

Tony: Yeah. And the fella you met, Hank Blair, who has a trading post out in Luckachukai...

McKenna: Mhm

Tony: He was out going to the same college and-

Cheri: Long Beach City.

Tony: Yeah,[10:00] part of being branded a hippie was that you had fairly long hair or even full hair and the instant he was talking about it, we were arrested in Kingman.

McKenna: (laughs)

Tony: It was real simple, I had a brand new Mercury Comet. He and I and Klead Seamen who was a friend that was going to UCLA loaded up my Comet, headed back to New Mexico cause we were all Farmington High School graduates so we were coming home for Christmas holidays and we got to the border check and we actually drove through it! I wasn't driving, I think Klead was driving at the time and he said "Oh! I didn't see that, I should've stopped." So we turned around, came back to the border place and here we are, college kid [11:00] hippies.

Cheri: (laughs)

Tony: And they gave us a ration of-

McKenna: (laughs)

Cheri: Cacapoodle.

Tony: And I just shook my head and turned to Klead and said "Get used to it. We're now officially in Arizona." and that really pissed him off.

McKenna: (Laughs)

Cheri: (laughs)

Tony: So they finally let us go, we got into Kingman, driving down the street in Kingman, we get pulled over by a city cop, a county sheriff, and a state policeman, and they took turns giving us a rough time,

Cheri: How old were you?

Tony: I was 19. They gave us a rough time and were arguing about who should give us a ticket so everyone got money out of us. Oh! But we had to go right to the courthouse right there, they had a nighttime judge that fined us. I can't remember how much they fined us but [12:00] probably wiped us out almost.

McKenna: Probably. Why did you get pulled over by the city police?

Tony: It was the border people that gave us a rough time, called ahead and told them.

McKenna: (laughs)

Cheri: Prepare for them! A bunch of hippie freaks.

Tony: Probably about 1966.

Cheri: Yeah cause you graduated in '64.

Tony: Yeah.

Cheri: I, however, am younger and graduated in '65.

McKenna: Oh wow. A whole year.

Cheri: Uh huh.

McKenna: (laughs)

Cheri: But we're the same age. Papa (Tony) entered school when he was 4 instead of 5.

Tony: Yeah I should've been in the class of '65.

Cheri: Yeah.

McKenna: I see.

Cheri: Ok kind of off subject there.

McKenna: Oh no, it's okay. [13:00]

Cheri: Ask another question. (laughs)

McKenna: Okay switching over to maybe a sadder subject. The Vietnam War. And while it definitely lasted way before and after the 60's, what was your opinion about the war from the beginning and did it change once it was over?

Cheri: I grew up in a military family and my dad was in the Vietnam War. He was in 3 wars, World War II, the Korean Conflict, and the Vietnam War. But he was in the Navy.

McKenna: Mhm.

Cheri: So they didn't have hand to hand combat or anything like that. Coming from a military family, I was pro-war. I was pro everything, [14:00] you know. But after I grew up a little, my first husband was a sailor too so he'd been at Vietnam on a boat and I had just always been in that mindset. But after my divorce (laughs) and I found Papa and I began to loosen my politics a little. The Vietnam War, I always felt guilty for not joining up. I feel, [15:00] coming from a military family, I should've joined but I didn't.

McKenna: What was it you would've done as a woman like nursing or-?

Cheri: Well, see I couldn't do anything. I was a baby, I didn't have any education. I didn't go to college until I was 35 and that was always a problem and then I got married and then I got pregnant and all of that went by the wayside. The Vietnam War, I became against it because it just didn't seem to make sense [16:00] and it went on for so long and the news reports every single day Walter Cronkite or whoever it was would come on and say, "Well, today we had a body count of 473." It was a different number every night and it just got to be overwhelming. You stop listening to it because it was just too much.

Tony: And the body counts were always, it was a thousand US troops then it would be ten thousand Viet Cong. It appeared we were really winning but somehow, we weren't.

Cheri: Yeah.

Tony: That was confusing. I had the same view it was during the Cold War. But we had been raised on World War II movies. [17:00]

Cheri: Yeah.

Tony: John Wayne always won, always. And when we were going to war in Vietnam, it was just another World War II story. We're going over and we're going to clean house and come back. There were songs like Green Berets and-

Cheri: Yeah.

Tony: I didn't sour on it necessarily but I got real concerned when a friend of mine, who I went to high school with, came back from Vietnam after serving tours that he won a Distinguished Service Cross, which is the highest medal you can get next to a Congressional Medal of Honor, and he came home and Farmington actually found out about it and for the Christmas parade, he was grand marshal at the Christmas parade. Now you don't hear about anyone celebrating Vietnam soldiers coming home but they did him [18:00] and I remember after the parade, everybody was in town for Christmas and went down and got together and drinking beer and he loosened up a little bit and the stories that he told of what the war was really like were just chilling. I just-

Cheri: Horrific.

Tony: Horrific and he actually felt bad about what he had done over there.

Cheri: Oh yeah the guilt.

Tony: Yeah. So I had mixed emotions about the war. I got called up for the draft. They hauled us down to Downtown LA for our physicals.

McKenna: So your number got pulled?

Tony: Yeah.

Cheri: You had to sign up.

Tony: I had to sign up and I didn't turn 18 until I got to California so I was registered in Long Beach.[19:00] So when my number came up, I was 1A, went in for my draft physical, the guy ahead of me was really funny because every station, knees, elbows, eyes, he had a problem. He had a bad leg there and this and that and they just kept passing him right on through. And I was wearing contacts at the time and got to the eye check and I told him, "I have contacts in." And he said, "Go over there and take them out and come back." So I went over and took my contacts out and laid them there and went back and the guy says, "Now tell me what direction the big E on the wall is pointing." and I said "Which wall?"

McKenna: (laughs)

Cheri: What wall? (laughs)

Tony: And he said- he started putting lenses on my face and snapping, clapping, pretty soon, I heard this 'stamp stamp stamp' [20:00] on my papers and he shoved them at me and said "Next" and I got to where I could see again and they stamped me "Reject" on all of my papers. So I had some concern, like your grandmother said, I kind of felt bad for not being sent to Vietnam.

McKenna: So you had the same kind of guilt for not going?

Tony: Yeah. Yep. It's all part of the nationalism that we were raised with.

Cheri: Yeah.

McKenna: Really?

Cheri: Not the nationalism that is going around now.

Tony: No but just the whole period after World War II were, like I said, just [21:00]
'America can't go wrong.'

McKenna: Right. World War II was a big win.

Tony: Yep. A big win.

Cheri: And after those guys came home, it was a period of economic boom.

Tony: Boom town.

Cheri: And everything was good and TV came along and we were just riding high. But the nationalism now is kind of reverse nationalism.

Tony: Yeah.

McKenna: How so?

Cheri: Well...

Tony: The nationalism now is Nazi nationalism.

Cheri: Yeah.

McKenna: Oh I see.

Tony: Yeah. [22:00]

Cheri: Yes you're speaking to a lifelong Democrat once my frontal lobe grew enough.

McKenna: (laughs)

Cheri: Your frontal lobe does not mature until you're around 25.

McKenna: Right. That is true.

Tony: Yep.

Cheri: I know.

McKenna: (laughs)

Cheri: I now have a college education.

McKenna: Oh yeah. Right right.

Tony: But yeah the Vietnam War was unsettling for everybody that lived during that time for various reasons.

McKenna: Right.

Cheri: And the people who protested at college campuses were met with military force [23:00] and I never understood that. There were kids killed because they held up a sign saying, "No More War."

Tony: 4 dead in Ohio.

Cheri: 4 dead in Ohio.

McKenna: Yeah. Kent State.

Cheri: Yeah. Uh huh, exactly. I think that was 1970.

McKenna: That's pretty- that's close.

Tony: Yeah 60's butted- There was a thing about, everybody thought that by the 70's that marijuana would be legal.

Cheri: Yeah (laughs)

McKenna: Oh (laughs)

Cheri: And that didn't happen.

Tony: And I'm not so sure how I feel about it now. But-

Cheri: Well I could tell you about how I feel but that's (laughs)

Tony: Jimmy Fallon did a joke. [24:00] New Mexico- You don't watch Jimmy Fallon but he did a joke saying that New Mexico legalized recreational marijuana and he said most dopeheads would say, "There's a New Mexico?"

McKenna: (laughs) I think a lot of sober people would say that too.

Cheri: Yeah. (laughs)

Tony: I actually think there was someone who wrote for a New Mexico magazine.

Cheri: "One of our states is missing."

Tony: "One of our states is missing."

McKenna: (laughs) I kind of have the same- so the same sort of question but instead of the Vietnam War, instead about the Civil Rights Movement.

Cheri: The Civil Rights Movement, I was always a backer but in my senior year in high school in [25:00] San Diego, I had debate. Why they stuck me in debate? I don't know.

McKenna: Oh you were in debate class?

Cheri: Yeah.

McKenna: Okay.

Cheri: And I was to take the opposite view, you know? The opposing view. And that didn't make sense to me. I think I flunked that because I was for civil rights and to this day. It's stupid that people are not treated the same as everybody else.

McKenna: Was there a lot of segregation in San Diego?

Cheri: No. I'll give you a flashback [26:00] to the 50's though.

McKenna: That's fine.

Cheri: When my dad was in the Navy, he did shore patrol in Texas and that was the first time I'd ever seen 'colored' water fountains.

Tony: Yeah.

Cheri: "Coloreds Only." and 'colored' restrooms. And I asked my mother when I was 6 or 7 years old, no, I guess I was 10, "Why is it like that?" and she said, "I don't know. It just is."

Tony: Have I ever told you about the busses in Little Rock?

McKenna: No.

Tony: Early, when I was about 8 or 9; 7, 8, 9; I lived in Conway, which is north of Little Rock. My granddad was in the hospital, [27:00] the military hospital there in Little Rock and my grandmother was raising me and my sisters. She didn't drive so we would take a bus from Conway to Little Rock and then we would get on the city bus and go to the hospital. Do you hear about all of the stories of the people riding buses and segregating busses?

McKenna: Mhm. Yeah.

Tony: The basic rule was all whites were in the front and all the Blacks were in the back. Unless there were too many whites and then they had to sit in the back and then the Blacks or "Coloreds" would have to stand and if there was no room for them to stand then they would have to get off of the bus and the whites took over the whole bus and I remember that happened on several occasions. One of the interesting things about-
Cheri: So archaic.

Tony: [28:00] I know. But there was another thing, if you were a Black person in accompaniment of a white person, you could sit with them or stand with them or stay on the bus when they couldn't or when others couldn't. So when we would get on the bus, my grandmother would sit down and if she saw an elderly Black woman standing, she'd say, "Tony, stand up and put that lady in your chair." and I would stand there, the lady would sit down, and when the bus driver would come around taking tickets, my grandmother would say, "She's with me."

Cheri: Oh!

McKenna: That's sweet.

Cheri: Was that Granny?

Tony: Yep. That's Granny.

Cheri: You never knew Granny.

Tony: No. Granny was- I did that quite a few times. I would just plan on standing if we were riding the bus to Little Rock cause my grandmother would make me stand for [29:00] for some elderly Black lady to have my seat. That's how barbaric it was in the 50's.

Cheri: Yeah.

Tony: That's kind of digging back to the 50's but that leads to the 60's. By the 60's, I had moved out of Arkansas and in New Mexico there is no- I think I went to high school with maybe 2 Black kids for the whole 4 years I was at school. So the matter of segregation or integration, I don't recall. One of them was a football player and everyone thought he was great. So.

Cheri: A Black football player?

Tony: A Black football player, yeah. In high school. He was the only Black kid on campus at the time.

McKenna: So there wasn't any sort of 'Whites Only' sort of things in Farmington?

Tony: No, no. [30:00]

McKenna: Interesting.

Cheri: And the kids I went to high school with were white, there were just a few Black kids because Black kids didn't live in the same neighborhoods that went to my high school.

McKenna: Mhm. Well were schools still segregated back then?

Cheri: No but the neighborhoods were- it wasn't segregation. It was-

McKenna: Perhaps low income, high income sort of situations?

Tony: Yeah.

Cheri: Well we were in the Navy and we were looked down upon by the rich kids. Yeah but the Black kids lived in a different neighborhood than the white [31:00] kids. That wasn't- you- well it was "You can't live here." They didn't have the housing act until the 80's where you couldn't discriminate-

McKenna: Mhm.

Cheri: Because of color. That didn't come for a long time.

Tony: In Conway, Arkansas, there was-

Cheri: De Facto segregation!

Tony: Okay.

McKenna: Gotcha.

Tony: But that's what you had in Long Beach right? Or in San Diego?

Cheri: In San Diego.

Tony: In Conway, Arkansas, there was actual segregation. If you lived on one side of the tracks, most Blacks could not cross over the tracks until morning and basically didn't want to be caught in-

Cheri: White neighborhoods?

Tony: Yeah.

McKenna: So it was a sundown town? [32:00]

Tony: Yeah!

Cheri: A sundown town? I've never heard that term.

McKenna: Yeah, a sundown town is a town where after dark, when the sun goes down, I don't even know how to explain it correctly, but it's when the sun goes down, essentially Black people cannot be in town.

Tony: Yeah. In certain parts of town.

Cheri: Yeah there are certain places. Yeah certain parts of town.

Tony: My grandmother in Conway had a Black lady that helped her with some chores around the house. I'm not going to say she was a maid but she helped Granny with house work.

Cheri: She was a day worker.

Tony: And she would not, she would leave so she could get back across the tracks before sundown.

Cheri: Yeah.

Tony: So that was an actual thing. But Farmington really didn't- Farmington was way off the shoulders. [33:00] Climate and social things because everyone seemed to get along pretty good as far as Hispanic, white-

Cheri: Navajo.

Tony: Navajo, yeah. I didn't go to school with that many Navajo kids but there were quite a few. Most were still in Shiprock. Kirtland hadn't expanded that much. So yeah, I was happy with- when I was in college, I took a class about cultural and racial minorities and it was one of the first classes, college classes, that openly discussed segregation, integration, and social-

Cheri: Racial issues.

Tony: What was kind of interesting about it was, [34:00] it was taught by a Black guy who was from Louisiana, I think, but he was a good friend of my uncle, who was from Arkansas and my uncle was the one who told me I should take his class and I said, "Why should I take his class?" He said, "It's an easy A!"

Cheri: (laughs)

McKenna: (laughs)

Tony: I said, "How do you know it's an easy A?" and he said, "Well I know-" I can't remember his name. Colton was the last name. He says, "All you do is go into his class acting like you're really redneck-"

Cheri: (laughs)

Tony: "- and then half way through the semester, start easing up and by the end of the year, he'll think he's converting you and then you get an A"

Cheri: (laughs)

McKenna: Oh my gosh.

Cheri: That's horrible.

McKenna: (laughs)

Cheri: Yeah, you never met that uncle.

Tony: Yeah. [35:00] But yeah as far as- it bothers me nowadays that race is still such an issue.

Cheri: Yeah. We were going to conquer the world. Don't you feel that way?

Tony: Oh yeah.

Cheri: The world was- we were going to solve all of the world's problems. Us guys from the 60's. And the fact that we still have racial issues today is just insane.

Tony: And this showman deal in Chicago is going to really- is it Chicago? No, Milwaukee.

Cheri: Milwaukee.

Tony: It's going to really- no matter what the verdict comes in.

Cheri: Yeah that's going to be bad. [36:00]

McKenna: Mhm.

Cheri: And the 13 year old Hispanic kid that got shot and there was another Black kid that got shot. For no reason!

Tony: That's pretty bad.

Cheri: Yeah.

McKenna: Yeah I think it's pretty insane that people always think that all of these issues like segregation was so long ago when really in terms of things, it wasn't.

Cheri: No. Things will get better and better. You just have to believe that.

McKenna: Mhm.

Cheri: More people are being educated today and education makes a real difference in how people think.

Tony: That's the key to everything.

Cheri: That's why [37:00] you're in school!

McKenna: (laughs) Yeah. Do you think something happened between the 60's and now it kind of- this sort of backwards- you thought you were going to conquer the world, there wasn't going to be any race issues anymore; what do you think happened that they're still a major problem today?

Cheri: Well there's the Mitch McConnells of the world. Some people don't want to.

McKenna: Don't want to, what?

Cheri: Don't want to understand that the world is a growing place. You can't have ideas that are so archaic. I don't know how to put it. [38:00]

McKenna: That's okay.

Tony: Yeah I think the problem is is the stuff like the 60's were actually, given all the turmoil, were actually pretty carefree.

Cheri: Yeah. You and I had a good time.

Tony: Yeah, we always have been. I tell people I started programming- playing with computers in college in 1966 and by '69, Transamerica Corporation started paying me to pay with their computers.

Cheri: (laughs)

Tony: And I have not been out of a job since.

McKenna: (laughs) Wow!

Tony: I mean that might mean one job on Friday and a new one on Monday but that only happened a couple of times.

Cheri: Yeah. Well when I first met you, you were unemployed.

Tony: Yeah. Well it worked. [39:00]

Cheri: I was needing to speak to you about going out and getting a job. (laughs)

McKenna: (laughs)

Tony: Okay! I did!

Cheri: Yeah! He did!

McKenna: That's good. (laughs)

Cheri: Yeah. (laughs)

Tony: Yeah so as far as conquering the world that way.

Cheri: Yeah. He did.

Tony: Well we both teamed up on it. You got your Master's summa-

Cheri: Summa cum laude.

Tony: Summa cum laude.

McKenna: What? (laughs)

Cheri: Summa cum laude. It's the highest you can graduate.

Tony: Your grandmother graduated summa cum laude.

McKenna: So top of the class?

Cheri: Well not top but in the top, I had a 3.83 GPA

McKenna: Wow! That's really- [40:00] That's impressive.

Cheri: Thank you. Thank you.

McKenna: (laughs) I don't think I can get mine that high.

Tony: That was from-

Cheri: Your mother was 13 years old when I started going to college. I figured me taking the time away from bringing her up, I figured that the only way I could justify that was to be a good student and bring home the A's otherwise, you know? I think she might have a differing view though.

McKenna: (laughs)

Cheri: I made her go to school.

Tony: That grade point average was Bachelor's and Master's.

Cheri: Yeah. I graduated with honors in my Master's program. [41:00]

McKenna: Wow! Very nice.

Cheri: I'm the brains of the two of us.

McKenna: Yeah I agree (laughs)

Cheri: (laughs)

Tony: (laughs) I didn't think so.

Cheri: Oh shut up!

McKenna: (laughs)

Tony: We're supposed to be talking about the 60's here now.

Cheri: Oh! Okay! I didn't like the Beatles. My girlfriend that I still communicate with, she went to see them in San Diego. She just thought they were great and I was- I didn't like them at all.

McKenna: You didn't buy into the British Fever? Whatever it was? The British Invasion!

The British Invasion!

Cheri: Yeah, British Invasion. Oh there were another couple bands I liked that were British. [42:00]

Tony: The Doors.

Cheri: The Doors weren't British and I didn't like The Doors.

Tony: Oh yeah not The Doors but the Rolling Stones.

McKenna: The Who?

Cheri: Rolling Stones. Herman's Hermits. Do your research! (laughs)

McKenna: (laughs)

Tony: Can I take a quick break and turn your recorder off?

McKenna: Yeah.

Tony: I'll be right back.

McKenna: Okay so one more kind of big topic before we wrap up with final thoughts, I wanted to cover was the Cold War, which again, goes-

Cheri: Oh.

McKenna: Before and way after.

Cheri: Yeah. I can remember doing duck and cover in my grad school in Long Beach.

[43:00] When I was- I lived there- I went to school from kindergarten to second grade.

No that's a lie. To third grade. Yeah and I remember doing duck and cover where you had to get under your desk and cover up your neck and face because the air raid siren would go off at noon every day and that's what we did as soon as that went off. All the kids would get underneath their desks to protect us from The Bomb and the bomb was of course the- what went off in [44:00] Hiroshima and they would show it on TV and it used to scare the living bejesus out of me to see this big mushroom cloud. I was only 5 or 6 years old but I understood that it was not something that should ever happen and when we took you girls to Hiroshima, those pictures just haunt me, of the kids and the bodies.

McKenna: Mhm.

Tony: The Cold War actually started right immediately after World War II.

Cheri: Immediately after The Bomb. [45:00]

Tony: Yeah, immediately after the bomb, everybody including the Soviets said, "What the hell is that?"

Cheri: (laughs) Yeah.

McKenna: So essentially, it was your whole life up until the 90's which is a significant-

Tony: Yeah!

Cheri: Yes yeah and being from a military family, it- it's hard to explain.

McKenna: That's okay.

Cheri: I was always deathly afraid that that would happen. What would I do? What would anybody do?

Tony: I don't recall doing duck and cover. I remember seeing kids do it on the news but I don't think we did it in Farmington.

Cheri: Yeah.

Tony: Farmington's always been sort of in the middle of nowhere.

Cheri: (laughs) Yeah! It still is! [46:00]

Tony: And during-

McKenna: (laughs)

Tony: The Cuban Missile Crisis would've probably been the closest in time we came to actually bombing each other.

Cheri: Yeah!

Tony: And living here in Farmington and being in high school during that period, I was totally oblivious. If you saw it on the news, it was like some other world, some place of no concern of anyone in Farmington.

Cheri: Oh

Tony: So a part of my life, I didn't even comprehend the Cold War. Finding out some of the things we found out since it ended was kind of scary. But-

Cheri: Yeah!

Tony: Yeah.

McKenna: Yeah about how close it all was.

Tony: Yeah.

Cheri: Yeah, we, as kids, weren't aware of that.

Tony: I think because of it, [47:00] I'm with your grandmother in that. I was fascinated in the bomb.

Cheri: Oh not fascinated, I was scared shitless.

Tony: I was just glad we got it and no one else did. But-

Cheri: Yeah and then they, the Russians, had to have bigger bombs than us and then we have to have bigger bombs than that and it kept getting more and more and more and more until finally they said- but it wasn't until the 90's that they, not Khrushchev, Gorbachev and Regan finally said- after each side could kill the other 10, 15, 25 times [48:00] over, they finally said, "Listen, this is stupid."

McKenna: (laughs)

Cheri: But now with Trump, everything ramped up again.

Tony: Yeah. What they called it was, "Mutually assured destruction."

McKenna: Yeah.

Tony: Which meant that M.A.D. so- But yeah, Hiroshima was kind of, well it wasn't scary as much as it was sad. I've been to the Trinity site down at White Sands. There's a monument there for the first bomb that was set off in any place and Hiroshima happens to be the second bomb that was set off in any place. [49:00]

Cheri: Hiroshima and Nagasaki.

Tony: Yeah.

McKenna: Mhm

Tony: You've been to Hiroshima.

Cheri: Yeah.

McKenna: Yeah we did. We went.

Cheri: Do you remember? How old were you?

McKenna: I was 14 when we went. No. I was-

Cheri: Did it make any sort of impression on you?

McKenna: I was 13, almost 14 and yeah absolutely it made an impression. Did it ever dawn on you- Oh sorry. You were so scared of it but did it ever dawn upon you that the US did that? The military that you loved and adored did that.

Cheri: Not until I was older.

Tony: Yeah I don't think that [50:00] I think that atomic energy was going to happen no matter what. The bomb was originally design not for Japan but for Germany because-

Cheri: Yeah it really was- what was his name? The German guy?

Tony: von Braun?

Cheri: von Braun! Yeah.

Tony: Yeah so-

Cheri: We got a German guy. He was developing the idea for The Bomb for Hitler.

Tony: So we're just lucky that we got it before he did.

Cheri: Yeah!

McKenna: Hm. Crazy. (laughs) [51:00]

Tony: That's another reason New Mexico, to me anyway, New Mexico and Los Alamos and all the secret labs they have is kind of interesting.

McKenna: Oh yeah! Do you know if the rumors true that they have bombs hidden in the Sandias?

Tony: Well, Four Hills.

McKenna: Four Hills, where's that?

Tony: That's-

Cheri: There's a-

Tony: It's close to town. It's east of where you are right now.

McKenna: East of Albuquerque?

Cheri: Yeah

Tony: No, it's not up in the Foothills. It's Four Hills. If you go down Central, go past the fairgrounds, go past the- oh gosh, go almost to the interstate on Central.

Cheri: Juan Tabo.

Tony: And yeah, it's south of Juan Tabo, it's to your right as you're leaving town. There are actually four hills and there's supposedly [52:00] a huge nuclear arsenal there.

McKenna: Oh that's (laughs) that makes me uneasy.

Tony: Mhm.

Cheri: Well yeah!

Tony: And I make a point everytime I fly out of Albuquerque, I make a point of seeing whatever experiments they've got going. If you fly over the four hills, you'll notice there are two rows of fencing. Now I've heard there's all sorts of bombs and booby traps hidden in between the fences.

McKenna: Oh that's- (laughs) Well I hope those don't go off anytime soon.

Tony: I'm sure they won't.

McKenna: (laughs) Ok I have one final question and if you don't know how to answer it, it's okay. Do you think all of the events, a lot of things happened in the 1960's, do you think [53:00] it left the country for better or for worse?

Tony: I think-

Cheri: For the better.

Tony: Yeah absolutely. Well like I was telling you, the Civil Rights Movement in itself made the world a better place.

McKenna: Oh absolutely.

Tony: Yeah even if it was just temporary.

Cheri: And all of the wars and all of the bomb making, we eventually came to the correct decision about all that stuff. It wasn't the way to go, that sort of thinking. Well that didn't come out right, did it?

McKenna: (laughs) No, it's okay.

Cheri: What do I mean? [54:00]

Tony: You mean yes, the world is a better place after the 60's.

Cheri: Yes.

McKenna: Yeah.

Tony: Yeah.

McKenna: You kind of corrected- We corrected ourselves in a way.

Cheri: Yeah. The mistakes of the past were kind of, sort of, corrected and you would hope that the mistakes that are happening now, you hope that- well it's getting late and my brain has stopped.

McKenna: (laughs) That's okay, we're almost done.

Cheri: Yeah. People have to learn lessons and the 60's were lessons that got us through the 70's and we made progress in the 70's that lead us to the 80's and [55:00] it's just a progression. A progression of- I don't know, intelligence, levels of intelligence. You have to learn lessons.

McKenna: Right. Well thank you so much for doing this. I really appreciate it. Do you have any closing thoughts perhaps?

Tony: No. I would say actually it was a fun decade.

Cheri: Yeah

McKenna: (laughs) It was a fun decade despite it all.

Tony: Yeah! Yeah.

McKenna: Alright well thank you so much.

Cheri: You just put one foot in front of the other and you make it through your life and it was strange to me when I hit my 60s [56:00] thinking, "I've lived my life. That was it." Just moving on, putting one foot in front of the other and I didn't realize that it would pass by so quickly. Just strange.

McKenna: Yeah. I think a lot of people do that. Maybe they just, you know like you said, one foot in front of other and forget to live in it.

Cheri: Yeah, exactly. We were so busy trying to raise the kid and have fun ourselves and make money and all of the things that you do that get to your 60's and go, "Oh. Hm."

McKenna: (laughs)

Cheri: And my nose [57:00] is so stuffed up that I can't even go "Hm"

McKenna: (laughs) That's okay. Well, again, thank you so so so much.

Tony: Ok we love you.

Cheri: Sure, I hope you can make sense from all of this garbage that we spoke.

Tony: (laughs)

McKenna: Oh yeah it was all great. It was all good. (laughs)

Cheri: Okay. [57:24]