

Joann S. Harris, R.N., M.S. Collection (AC145)

Introduction:

The Joann S. Harris, R.N., M.S. Collection includes items that document the life of one of the first African American flight hostesses in the United States, who worked with Trans World Airlines (TWA). It also highlights her time at Saint Margaret's Hospital in Kansas City, Kansas. The collection features a newspaper article, a photocopy of her TWA Hostess Diploma from 1965, a letter from a TWA executive dated 2013, seven photographs, her online obituary, and an unreadable flash drive.

Descriptive Summary:

Creator: Joann S. Harris

Title: Joann S. Harris, R.N., M.S. Collection

Date Range: 1965-1969

Size: 1

Linear Feet (1 Box)

Collection Number: AC145

Donor Information:

Dr. Jasper W. Harris, Jr. 2014.

Citation Note:

Joann S. Harris, R.N., M.S. Harris Collection (AC145), Black Archives of Mid-America, Kansas City, Missouri

Related Collections:

AC50: GENERAL HOSPITAL #2 COLLECTION

AC107: DR. COLLINS ANDERSON COLLECTION

AC113: DR. ARTHUR ODELL THURMON COLLECTION

Subjects:

Trans World Airlines (TWA)

Nursing

Administrative Information:

Reproduction Restrictions: Unrestricted.

Access Restrictions: Unrestricted.

Biographical Sketch:

Joann Sadie Harper was born in 1937, one of four children of Stella Maryann Kemp and Rantie Hubert Harper. After graduating from Sumner High School in 1954, Joann attended St. Margaret's School of Nursing, where she earned her registered nursing degree in 1959. She worked as a staff nurse at St. Margaret's Hospital for three years and then served as a clinical instructor in the Pediatric Department for an additional three years. With six years of nursing experience, she completed the Trans World Airlines (TWA) flight attendant training program in Kansas City and was one of the first African American flight attendants in the United States.

Joann had a diverse career path, beginning with TWA. She worked as a TWA hostess from 1965 to 1969; TWA and Harris were ahead of their time. Most African American hostesses were not hired by major airlines until the 1970s. However, one strict rule was that hostesses had to be unmarried, so she ended her career with TWA to marry Dr. Jasper W. Harris in 1969.

She earned a Bachelor of Science degree from St. Mary College. She then became a school nurse with the Kansas City, Missouri, School District and devoted fifteen years to raising her only child, Dr. Jasper W. Harris, Jr. After returning to the workforce, Joann received a fellowship from the University of Kansas, where she completed a Master of Science degree in Education. She went on to teach middle school students with learning disabilities in the Kansas City, Missouri, School District until her retirement.

Joann passed away on October 7, 2012. She is survived by her husband of forty-three years, Dr. Jasper W. Harris; her son, Dr. Jasper W. Harris, Jr.; and two sisters, Marion Deloris McGriggler of San Antonio, Texas, and Doris Jean Blakley of Houston, Texas.

Family History

Dr. Jasper W. Harris, husband

Dr. Jasper W. Harris, Jr., son

Rantie Hubert Harper, father

Estella Maryann *Kemp* Harper, mother

Marion Deloris *Harper* McGriggler, sister of San Antonio, Texas

Doris Jean *Harper* Blakley, sister of Houston, Texas

Historical Sketch:

Saint Margaret's Hospital, Kansas City, Kansas-

Built in 1886, St. Margaret's Hospital in Kansas City, Kansas, has long been an important part of the community. However, after the hospital closed over 30 years ago in the 1980s, the property fell into decline. It changed hands multiple times and served as a nursing home, residential treatment center, and daycare before becoming vacant. As of 2025, the former hospital has been reborn as the City View at St. Margaret's, a high-end building with 111 senior and market-rate units. Kansas City-based developer Foutch Brothers restored the building and transformed it into residential housing, aiming to revitalize the neighborhood.

Trans World Airlines, Headquarters, Kansas City, Missouri-

Trans World Airlines (TWA) was founded in July 1930 as Transcontinental and Western Air, following the merger of Western Air Express and Transcontinental Air Transport. In 1939, Howard Hughes took control, leading to the airline's expansion into international markets after World War II, solidifying its role in global aviation. Despite facing financial challenges and declaring bankruptcy in 2001, after which it was purchased by United Airlines, TWA is remembered as a pioneering force in American air travel and a key player in the evolution of commercial aviation.

Scope and Content Note:**Series 1: Biographical & Educational Materials**

This series contains summaries of Harris's life, career, and education. It also includes a copy of the 2012 Harris obituary from the Dignity Memorial website.

Series 2: Correspondence

This series contains a 2013 letter from TWA Executive Committee Member Mary Ellen Miller to Jasper Harris and the Harris Family. Miller's letter thanks the entire Harris family for the donations that belonged to Joann S. (Harper) Harris. Miller also recognized Harris's role as historically significant.

Series 3: Newspaper Clipping

This series includes a single undated newspaper clipping. The article, written by Harris and titled "Former Kansas Nurse Tells of Training for Airline Hostess Past," discusses her interest in flying, her pursuit of her dream job, and details on how she achieved her goals. The clipping comes from an unknown source.

Series 4: Photographs

This series includes four photographs capturing Harris's nursing training at Saint Margaret's Hospital in Kansas City from 1956 to 1957, as well as her graduation in 1959. It also features two photos from her time at TWA. Additionally, there is a single, undated photo of an older Joann, though the source of this image is unknown.

Series 5: Diploma

This series includes a diploma Joann earned as a TWA Hostess in 1965.

Series 6: Flash Drive

This series contains an unreadable flash drive.

Collection Inventory:

Series 1: Biographical & Educational Materials

f. 1 Biographical & Educational Information

Series 2: Correspondence

f. 2 Correspondence, 2013

Series 3: Newspaper Clipping

f. 3 Newspaper Clipping, no date

Series 4: Photographs

f. 4 Photocopy Prints #1-7

Series 5: Diploma

f. 5 Diploma, 1965

Series 6: Flash Drive

f. 6 Flash Drive, unreadable

Processed by: Kat Miller, Assistant Archivist, June 2025

Sources:

“Joann S. Harris.” 2018. Dignity Memorial. 2018.

<https://www.dignitymemorial.com/obituaries/kansas-city-mo/joann-harris-5266626>.

“Joann S. Harper Harris (1937-2012) - Find a Grave...” 2024. Findagrave.com. 2024.

https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/98652487/joann_s-harris.

Kansas City Star, and Kevin Collison. 2013. “Former St. Margaret’s Hospital in KCK Is Now an Apartment Building.” Kansas City Star. December 25, 2013.

<https://www.kansascity.com/news/business/development/article334704.html>.

Road, The TWA Museum at 10 Richards. n.d. “The TWA Museum at 10 Richards Road.” The TWA Museum at 10 Richards Road. <https://twamuseum.org/history>.

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