

CONSULTANT: Mary Garren  
AGE: 71  
RESIDENCE: Chapel Hill, NC  
OCCUPATION: Retired UNC administrator  
INTERVIEW DATE: August 6, 2016, approx. 10:00 am  
LOCATION: Carrboro Farmers Market, Carrboro, NC

---

Hi, my name is Mary Garren, that's G-A-R-R-E-N. I'm 71 years old, proud of it. I live in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. I'm currently retired, but at the turn of the century, I was an administrator in the financial aid office at UNC.

**And you've already said that you remember where you were, so take a minute, picture it in your mind, and then take us back to that day, that night, and tell us what you remember.**

Okay, so [laughs]. So I have to give you a kind of prequel to that night.

**Please do.**

Okay, so this was the Y2K hysteria. And everybody was concerned about what would happen when the clock changed; whether everything was gonna go haywire. I was in a relationship with a guy who wanted to go on a cruise during that period of time. And I had never been on a cruise, wasn't too crazy about the idea of a cruise in the first place. But I was really fearful of being out in the middle of the ocean on a big 'ole boat, and Y2K, haywire, and I could just imagine the catastrophe that could happen. And I didn't want to be part of that. So I said no, and I, you know, was accused of being silly, that nothing was gonna happen, and I said, "Probably it won't, but I don't want to take a chance." I don't want to take a chance. So I didn't go on that cruise. And of course, everything turned out all right. Y2K happened seamlessly as far as I can tell. So that night, of the New Year's Eve, I think I -- along with a whole lot of other people -- were waiting and watching to see what was going to happen to the world when the clock changed. I honestly don't remember where I was that night. It was kind of an anniversary in our relationship; it's when we met, on a New Year's Eve, so that was probably something going on related to that. But I honestly don't remember anything except not wanting to go on that cruise that was gonna be taking place over the New Year's Eve over that period of time.

**You didn't want to be stranded in the middle of the Caribbean?**

No! I could visualize all kinds of things happening, you know? To systems on a ship that's that big, I could just visualize total, total chaos and disaster. And I didn't want to be part of that [laughs].

**Interesting. Some might say that that's a *good* place to be in that situation. You're sequestered, sort of, away from the chaos. But I'm with you. I think that would be not an ideal situation.**

No. So I also remember, I think, getting some money out of the bank. I don't remember how much it was. It wasn't a huge amount of money; it was probably less than \$500. But I remember getting money out of the bank because I was afraid that systems wouldn't permit withdrawing money somehow. So that seemed to be important, to have cash available, if I had to purchase things, if cash registers didn't work, you know? If I had to buy anything, anything I had to buy, I figured cash was going to be necessary if these things didn't work. I figured they would work eventually, but they might not work for a week, or for some period of time. So I do remember taking cash [laughs] out of the bank to have on hand.

**Aside from the Y2K bug, did the moment seem important to you, and why or why not?**

Um...well, it was important from several standpoints, because anytime you kind of change centuries, that seems to have some significance, although today is really no different from January the 1st, when you think about it. It's just another day. And there's nothing magical really that happens, it's all a construct, this whole calendar construct. So it's kind of silly to think about that, practically speaking, but just the turn of the century seems significant, number one. And for me, you think of milestones in your life, and to be living when the turn of the century seems to be a big deal, because that milepost, that point in time, seems to be a reference to many things, many issues, many events, many things are use the turn of the century kind of thing, you know. We mark millennials; we mark all kinds of things related to the turn of the century.

**Interesting. And do you feel like your daily life has changed much since 1999?**

No, no, not really. I can't say that it has. At 71 years old, I keep remarking about fast things are changing, especially technology-wise. When you think...I joke that when I went to work at UNC, in 1973, we had mimeograph machines. Now, you're too young to –

**Oh, no, I *vaguely* remember. The carbon sheets, right?**

Sort of. There was a kind of purple ink thing, and there was a cylinder that you put this template on, that you would type on it. And then you would manually crank things out, and if you made one little mistake on that template, it was very difficult to correct it, and for it not to look like a correction and look like a mess. So I remember that. And I remember photocopy machines when it was kind of a thermafax paper, a special paper.

**Now that's what I was thinking about.**

No, the mimeograph precedes that. And when I was in high school, and elementary school teachers, when they wanted to duplicate things, it was this cranking this template on a cylinder, you know? Cranking them out. And usually the print was a kind of purplish color. I don't know why all that was, but that's where I came from. So when you talk about cell phones, my first cell phone was something called a bag phone. The battery was probably, I don't know, half the size of this poster you have here. You know, it was a bag phone.

**A lot of people have recalled that, when they were talking about this, those bag phones.**

You know, calculators. I remember when battery operated calculators were huge, and they were very expensive. So you think about, you know, I don't feel 71, but a *lot* has developed over the course of that time, and it's so fast. So now, we have this almost instant obsolescence. When we get a cell phone now, we're waiting for the next one, which is gonna come out in five minutes, you know? There's no longer, we're no longer repairing things. We're throwing them away and getting new things.

**That's well said.**

This is so different, because my parents were older when they had me to start with, but they went through the Depression. So there was this ethic of saving and conserving, because people who went through the Depression, this was a huge, huge impact on people's lives. So to this day, I save aluminum foil; I reuse aluminum foil. I reuse plastic bags. This is not in line with where our society is in general.

**When was the last time you saw an electronics repairman, you know, or –**

Actually, he came to my house.

**Oh, so you found one, wow.**

There's actually a guy. I had a CD changer that needed to be repaired, okay. I shopped around, and I couldn't find anything comparable for a reasonable price. There's a guy in Pittsboro that has a mobile repair service. He came and picked up the CD changer, repaired it, and brought it back.

**Wow. It still exists.**

Now, when he ceases to do business, I'll be taking that CD changer to the dump, and trying to buy another one, which won't last five minutes. So I've seen *huge*,

huge transitions in technology, in attitudes, in values over the course of these 71 years.

**Do you think the attitudes and values have changed just in the time since 1999?**

Um...I don't want to put a political spin on this...

**Feel free.**

But I think what is so distressing to me is that through our instant media -- you know, you instantly know everything that's happening, and people being able to put spins on everything -- that we are being unduly influenced by this current way of communicating, because people are taking advantage of this and influencing people in ways, that we used to be influenced, by our community and our churches and our schools. Now, we're being influenced by anybody who wants to do it, in any way they want to do it and we're not, we're not...I don't know, that's changing to me and I don't like it.

**So perhaps the way that we communicate has changed, and that's affected how we...*what* we're saying, perhaps.**

Yes, yes. And what we're believing, and what we're valuing.

**Interesting. What do you think people will be talking about in 2100?**

In 2100? [pause] Probably going to Mars.

**I like that.**

Colonizing Mars, something like that. I hope that's what they're talking about. I hope they're not talking about the destruction of our planet as we know it.

**And they're not talking about it in the *past* tense.**

Right. Right, that's what I hope.

**We need to be talking about it now, in the present.**

Yes, exactly. Exactly.

*I thank Mary for her time and end the interview.*