



## BIOGRAPHY

The Undisputed Truth was a 1970s Motown recording act, assembled by record producer Norman Whitfield and Barrett Strong.

Joe "Pep" Harris served as main lead singer, with Billie Rae Calvin and Brenda Joyce Evans on additional leads and background vocals. Joe "Pep" Harris served as main lead singer, with Billie Rae Calvin and Brenda Joyce Evans on additional leads and background vocals.

Billie Calvin and Brenda Evans had been part of a group called The Delicates in the 1960s. They were introduced to Motown by singer Bobby Taylor, and, when The Delicates broke up in 1970, the two began providing background vocals for artists around Motown. They sung backing on the hits "Ain't No Mountain High Enough" for Diana Ross and "Still Water (Love)" for The Four Tops. Joe Harris had been part of a Detroit soul group called The Fabulous Peps. Formed in 1962, the group were renowned for their energetic stage performances, and they cut a handful of singles for various different labels before their dissolution in 1968. Harris also became a member of The Ohio Untouchables (later The Ohio Players). In 1970, Motown producer Norman Whitfield - partly as a response to criticism from Temptations fans that he was using their group as his personal plaything - put together Joe Harris, Billie Calvin and Brenda Evans to create his own group.

Joe Harris was born in 1944 in Detroit, Michigan, in an area called the Black Bottom, an area made famous by top Black musicians and entertainers. At the age of nine, his mother took him to the Castle, a theater on Hastings Street in Detroit to see the Little Willie John Show.

"It was my first R&B Show ever! I felt something from the energy in that room: the band blasting... the MC screaming and cheering from the audience... that moment in my life I'll never forget"!

In 1955, in the Brewster Projects and at Garfield Junior High School, Joe formed his first singing group, "The Moroccos." The group won a contest around the city of Detroit through a department of Parks and Recreation Programs sponsored by Radio Station WCHB. The three finalists for the contest were The Moroccos, The Spinners, and Willie Tyler and Lester. The winner was recorded on the Lupine and Bumble Bee record label, owned by Robert West. Their first recordings were "Bubblegum" and "Trouble in the Cady Shop", produced by Sonny Woods

of Hank Ballard and the Midnighters and Joe Hunter of the now infamous Funk Brothers. In 1956 his singing was over and school was the focus. "Those were Mom's words!"

In the summer of 1962, one month after graduating from Northeastern High School, Joe was taken by a well-known artist named Lee Rogers, to a club in Detroit called The Village. There he met with Thomas Hester (aka Tommy Stone), Richard Street, McKinley Jackson, and Ronnie Abner to form the Fabulous Peps. They were immediately signed to the Thelma Record Label in Detroit. Their first recording was a song track written and produced by Norman Whitfield on Tommy Stone. The song was originally titled "Alone". Don Davis and Lee Rogers rewrote the lyrics and called the song "This Love I Have for You". The A Side was a song called "I Love You Baby". The Peps became a very popular live act in and around the Detroit area from 1963 to 1968. Their biggest recording was titled "I've Been Trying", written by Curtis Mayfield and produced by Willie Mitchell. The Peps were managed by Radio Personality Martha Jean "The Queen", Ms. Hazel Coleman, and Peter Hall.

In 1966 and 1967 the Peps were performing jointly with the Ohio Untouchables in Dayton, Ohio. The latter part of 1967 Joe moved from Toronto, Canada to Dayton, Ohio and performed as a solo opening for the Ohio Untouchables. After several months, Robert Ward and the Ohio Untouchables split. Joe originally went with Robert Ward, performing as Joe Pep for six months until Satch, of the Ohio Players, approached him to front the Players in a two-man Sam and Dave type act along with another singer named Dutch Robinson. That relationship lasted a little over one year and the result of that relationship resulted in the Ohio Players first LP, "Observations in Time". Joe then went to Louisville, KY and joined the Nite Lighters and Harvey Fuqua. Joe and the Nite Lighters performed at the 20 Grand in Detroit for ten nights. On the last weekend of the 20 Grand date, Joe was approached by Clay McMurray with a message from Norman Whitfield to meet at the Motown Building. That meeting with Mr. Whitfield resulted in the formation of the Undisputed Truth. Ironically, the Nite Lighters Band became the band for the Spinners at Motown because of our relationship with Harvey Fuqua.

The Whitfield Years: "Norman Whitfield became my life. He didn't fake. In fact, my relationship with Norman forced me for the first time in my life to think about who I was and what I was trying to be. His work ethic and focus on winning became all that mattered. We worked day and night, went home and rushed to get back to work the next day. Norman was always teaching and saying "Trust me" and we did". At Motown, The Undisputed Truth received a Gold record for "Smiling Faces Sometimes" and a Grammy for the best "New Mixed" Group. At Whitfield Records, being a part of the production team, we received an Academy Award Nomination for the movie "Car Wash." We also received Gold; Platinum; and Double Platinum Albums on Rose Royce and Star Guard. The things we did at Whitfield Records as a team were the best things that I got out of the record business. My Motown years were the highlight of my professional career."

**Summary of Accomplishments:**

- 1955-1956: Little Joe and the Moroccos, winners of the WCHB Summer Talent Show. First place winners received a recording contract on Lupine Bumble Bee Records
- 1962-1969: Performed as an original member of the Fabulous Peps; opening act for Robert Ward and the Ohio Untouchables; Part-time vocalist with The Funk Brothers; original member of The Stone Soul Children; and original member of the Ohio Players
- 1969-2016 Front man for the Nite Lighters; formed the original Undisputed Truth; formed The Dream Machine; and joined the P-Funk All Stars
- 2015: The Undisputed Truth and the Fabulous Peps were inducted into the Rhythm and Blues Hall of Fame in Detroit, MI on August 4, 2015