

Southwest Virginia LGBTQ+ History Project  
Oral History Initiative  
The QTPOC Project: Representation Matters

Interview with Carolyn Sue Wilson  
February 25, 2018

Interviewer: Kitty Bridgewater  
Interviewee: Carolyn Sue Wilson  
Date: February 25, 2018  
Location: Home of Carolyn Sue Wilson in Roanoke, Virginia

Transcribed by: Kitty Bridgewater

Total: 1:22:48

0:00 – childhood in Gary, West Virginia (1950s-1960s); moved to Roanoke at age 21 (1972)  
2:34 – gender fluidity; pronouns  
3:44 – coming to Roanoke in 1972; staying at the YMCA; making gay friends  
4:17 – discovering The Trade Winds; Horoscope; Murphy's; Miss Gay Roanoke drag pageant (1970s)  
5:29 – School experiences in West Virginia; school desegregation (1960s)  
7:09 – first experiences in Roanoke (1972); the YMCA  
9:00 – discussing The Trade Winds (1970s)  
10:22 – Elmwood Park and surrounding (gay scene) in 1970s  
11:15 – cross-dressing in West Virginia (1960s); performing drag for first time at The Trade Winds (1972)  
14:25 – The Horoscope; The Park (late 1970s); hosting and performing in drag shows and pageants  
17:54 – HIV/ the AIDS crisis (1980s)  
19:48 – The Park nightclub (1978- )  
21:15 – Experiences as a Black person in Roanoke's drag scene; white queens versus Black queens; Black people's experiences at Horoscope and Trade Winds  
26:21 – The dating scene; hanging around the City Market building (1970s)  
28:45 – Employment experiences  
29:52 – Performing drag in other cities: D.C.; Norfolk; North Carolina; West Virginia  
32:09 – types of drag pageantry; the expense of purchasing materials; the types of titles to be won  
35:31 – body modifications in drag (body/facial hair; breasts; surgeries); views on body modification within the drag community  
38:38 – early experiences cross-dressing; high school experience in West Virginia (1960s); relationships with siblings  
42:50 – running away from home at age 15 (c. 1965); relationship with her father  
49:35 – relationship with her mother; wearing mom's clothes (1950s-1960s)

51:55 – views on transgender identity; hormone replacement therapy; trans youth  
 54:49 – views on the Trump administration; current protest movements  
 57:16 – current involvement in the community; fear of going out; reflections on working at The Park for 34 years  
 1:00:30 – transgender issues in the workplace; bathroom access; relationship with neighbors  
 1:05:24 – reflections on the past, present, future  
 1:07:19 – working as a street queen / trans sex worker in Roanoke (1970s)  
 1:11:15 – mentorship and drag families  
 1:13:36 – current divisions within Roanoke’s drag community (2010s); conflict over drag at Pride in the Park, and at The Park night club  
 1:19:35 – performing with The Bowties (a drag group) at The Park, and in D.C. (1980s)  
 1:20:59 – Concluding thoughts

KB:	00:00:00	Good. All right, my name is Kitty Bridgewater and I'm here with Miss Carolyn Sue Wilson and I'm conducting an interview on behalf of the Southwest Virginia LGBTQ+ Oral history project. Today is [February 25, 2018] and we are in Miss Carolyn's home. So, uh, you grew up here in the Roanoke area?
CW:	00:00:21	Hmm mm. Yes I do.
KB:	00:00:22	All right. So why don't we just start about, uh, how about you tell me a little bit about your childhood growing up.
CW:	00:00:26	OK, well I'm from West Virginia, a little town called Gary, West Virginia. I was born and raised there. I left at the age of 21 and I came here in Roanoke in [19]72, April 15th of '72. And this is where I reside at the time being.
KB:	00:00:45	So, uh, how about your childhood, moving here? What age did you guys...
CW:	00:00:45	I came here when I was 21.
KB:	00:00:45	Oh, ok.
CW:	00:00:59	I always been Miss Carolyn from five all the way up to 67 [years old], but I always been, I always know the way I was. You know. And I never had any major problem about it, you know, people never, I was a little bit picked on, but nothing serious. Never have had any problem with that. People begin to accept me as I am, I guess.

KB: 00:01:21 OK, so you are from West Virginia, So, how was your childhood, in West Virginia?

CW: 00:01:26 It was good. I mean... good. I started having problems there. I graduated, went to school, graduated, and then when I finished school I went to work for the city of Gary and worked there for a year and then from there on I moved out of town, I moved from there.

KB: 00:01:51 So, how about your family?

CW: 00:01:53 My family they accept me very well and I have no problems with them, and I have one brother and three sisters and they don't... accept me as I am, my mother accepted me as I was. She's passed and my father, he gave me a hard time but um, he's passed too, so I think at the end he accepted me as me and that's the best that... they accept me as I am and I'm proud. My sister told me that as long you respect me, I'll respect you. So I say that's a deal. And that's what she gets.

KB: 00:02:34 OK. So how do you personally identify?

CW: 00:02:43 Myself? I'm just me. I don't try... I don't try to be a woman and I don't try to be a man, I'm just trying to be a human being, you know, just me. And most people call me "she" and I accept that, and at work they call me "he," you know, naturally, but that's how I present myself, either one it doesn't matter to me. You can call me either one, it doesn't matter. *[laughs]*

KB: 00:03:10 So when did you realize that you were maybe a little different or...

CW: 00:03:15 Oh God, when I was five years old. I always knew, well I never knew the word "gay" until I really came here to Roanoke, really, basically. In West Virginia they would, they would prefer a "sissy" or "punk" or something like that. I never heard the word "gay," "queer," none of that stuff until I came here in Roanoke. So that's that.

KB: 00:03:44 And how was that transition, like coming to Roanoke and...?

CW: 00:03:53 Golly, It was amazing. Uh, well I would walk down the street and I see a child smoking and it was just... *[gasp]*. "My God, that little boy is smoking!" But when I first came, I came to the Y [YMCA]. I stayed at the Y for about six months and I made beautiful friends. They took care of me, the gay people, you

know, they took care of me and everything and then I started going to the bars and stuff like that.

00:04:17 And then I wind up, um, my first year I started going I went to Trade Winds, a bar called Trade Winds. I don't know if ya'll... ya'll are too young to remember Trade Winds, but it was on Franklin Road. There was, I think that was the only gay bar here, so I went there and, ran the pageant, became the second runner up to Miss Gay Roanoke, which was exciting. And then, then they closed and it went to another bar called Murphy's, which I never went there. And then Horoscope, y'all ever heard of Horoscope? I started going there and there I won Miss Gay Roanoke. I was the first black Miss Gay Roanoke, the second and first black, and it was amazing. And then from there I just, my life just bloomed. I became the... I won a lot of awards, you know, they say I was the first person to go to Norfolk and win fresh out of town entertainment. I won an award in Norfolk, been around a few blocks.

KB: 00:05:29 OK. So just for the sake of establishing a timeline, let's go back to West Virginia. So, your school days, um, how was school? I know like, you're born in 1950? so that's right around time of like integration, and things like that. So how was that?

CW: 00:05:50 That was interesting. The school I did go to was Gary district and that was the black school I went to, and then they integrated in [19]60-something, [19]67, something like that. So we went to the, well, all-white school. I was one of the black people that went to that school, but it was predominantly white people and I had no problem with it. No, I had no problem with it and I don't think anybody there, any of the black students, had any problems. I was just shocked to come here and hear about riots and stuff. I was like "What?" We didn't have that in West Virginia, and people talked about me. They called me "sissy" and stuff like that. It wasn't major to me, you know, it wasn't a major thing to me. I had a sister that was very mean and she would take up for me. You did not mess with me because she would get you.

KB: 00:06:48 So it was a pretty smooth transition?

CW: 00:06:51 To me it was. I had no problem with it.

KB: 00:06:55 OK, what about high school? How was...?

CW: 00:06:58 High school was about the same. Yeah, high school was about the same. Graduated, left, got out. Yay.

KB: 00:07:09 OK. So when you came to Roanoke, uh, how was the, I guess, the gay scene? How was your introduction, like when you first got here, what was it like?

CW: 00:07:20 Oh God. When I first got here, I got off the bus with one suitcase. Got to the [a place] downtown, and I asked somebody where was the Y [YMCA]. And he said "about two blocks up," and I looked down at the ground, said "want to, I'm not going to be at the Y." So I was sort of... I was green. I mean I was real green. I didn't know what The Block [cruising area] was. I didn't know none of this stuff. So uh, I asked somebody else. They said "just straight up the street. Go straight up the street and you'll see." And I walked straight up the street, there it was. But, the gay scene.... like I said, I stayed at the Y, I made friends at the Y, so they start introducing me to Trade Winds, the bar. So that started me into my basically gay, gay life. That was amazing.

KB: 00:08:14 So you said you moved here when you were 21? So that's around like [19]70, [19]71? So that's around the time of like the Stonewall Riots and the gay liberation movement. So how was that in Roanoke? Like? Was it really present or like were you guys just like hearing about it?

CW: 00:08:35 I think it was just like, I hear about it. I didn't participate in stuff like that. So, to me, nowadays, I don't know back then cause I never participated, nowadays is too one sided for me, you know, that stuff they have in the park down there, too one sided. I don't participate in it. I feel like it's one sided.

KB: 00:09:00 So you said Trade Winds? Was that a place that you frequented?

CW: 00:09:05 It was a bar. A gay bar.

KB: 00:09:07 Yeah, I heard some about that. First gay bar here in Roanoke.

CW: 00:09:11 Yeah, sure enough was.

KB: 00:09:12 So, what was that like? Was there a diverse like... was there mostly gay or was there straights?

CW: 00:09:19 Uh, some straights came down there, but I think it was mostly gay. Mostly gay people.

KB: 00:09:25 Was it gay ownership or...?

CW: 00:09:28 Um-hmm. All the guys that owned it... you say don't say names... they're all dead anyway. So they owned it. It was... three men that owned it, and they were gay themselves. So there was no problem with that. And there were three parts of it, you had the basement, the middle, and the upstairs. Upstairs is where they get shows at.

KB: 00:09:52 OK, how was that?

CW: 00:09:54 It was a small place, sort of small place. But it was pretty good. When we had shows it was pretty packed. People wanting to come out and see the girls [*laughs*] dressed up.

KB: 00:10:10 So you said you made some good friends?

CW: 00:10:13 On yeah. Very good friends. Very good friends. They took very good care of me.

KB: 00:10:18 Were you meeting them at the YMCA?

CW: 00:10:21 Yes, at the Y. Made them at the Y. They introduced me to everything, the lifestyle, which was interesting. But most of them are gone.

KB: 00:10:33 OK. So, what about any other [places], like Trade Winds... I know like Elmwood Park was a pretty big...

CW: 00:10:40 Yeah, Elmwood Park was booming back then. You had a diner called Elmwood Diner. It was a little old diner in between, you know, where Anthem is now? That used to be the Moose Lodge and then um, Elmwood Diner was there. And then the Downtowner Motel was on the other side of it. It was a motel there. Where Social Security is. And we all frequented all of that, you know, we went to all this stuff and um, but the park was real festive back then. The park was good.

KB: 00:11:15 So I know that you won Miss Gay Roanoke for the second time, and you were first black Miss Gay Roanoke. So how did you, how was your introduction to that scene? Kind of the drag scene? Is that how you would refer to it? OK, so, let's set this up. Like when did you first become interested in [drag]? Like how did you...?

CW: 00:11:38 Start dressing? Well I start dressing in West Virginia. I had a real good friend, um, that we, we dressed and we'd get out on the roads and walk down the roads sexily(?) and have fun like that. But uh, that's where I first started dressing at. Not the make up,

just dress, you know, just put a dress on and run outside and play at nighttime. And then um, when I really started doing it was here in Roanoke in the 1970s, in the '70s when I start at The Trade Winds. That's when it really popped off to me.

- KB: 00:12:12 So do you remember your first performance?
- CW: 00:12:18 Yeah, it was in [19]70-something, probably [19]72. And my first song was "Tell Mama." That was my first drag song I did, was "Tell Mama." But dang ... I could do it for you now. But that was my first song and I remember, uh, I had on... What did I have on? A white dress? I think it was a white dress. I think it was gold up in here or something like that. It was way back. But, uh, I enjoyed. Made good tips, back then. And really, my life started out real good with... my gay life started real good; people respected me and calling on me and friends and they liked me real well.
- KB: 00:13:10 So how did you feel about it? Were you nervous? Were you excited?
- CW: 00:13:14 No I don't really get nervous. Don't get nervous. Just say, well, if I do good, I do good. If I do bad, I do bad. So most of the time I'd do good. Pretty good. Not Bragging, but that usually I do pretty good.
- KB: 00:13:28 So I'm assuming there was a pretty good reception.
- CW: 00:13:32 Oh yeah. Yeah. Pretty much so.
- KB: 00:13:38 So I saw online that you're pretty like famous or known for like, you're like impressions of Aretha Franklin, Janet Jackson, Patti Labelle. OK, let's talk about that.
- CW: 00:13:52 Oh God. Ah, let's see, my favorite person... When I first started doing this, I was a Diana Ross freak. I saw Diana Ross five times in person and I was a freak of hers. So that was my first one. Then I started doing Janet and Patti and you know, different ones like, you know, whatever style come out famous, you know, you usually try to do that song. So I pretty well on that. I got some pictures of her. I'll give you one of them in my crown. So you can have a picture of me.
- KB: 00:14:25 OK. So [19]71 you came to Roanoke. What was happening late seventies?

CW: 00:14:31 Late seventies? Let's see, what was going on? Ah, like Trade Winds had been closed and then I think it's a bar named Murphy's. I'm not really for sure. I never did go there to that one. It was downtown right down from the um, Appalachian Power. I never frequented that one. I'd never go to that one, and then another one called Horoscope opened, and that's the one I started going to. I had the key to it. The guy really liked me, you know, as a person, he liked me. I would go in to organize shows and pageants and everything. So that was the hippest bar in [19]75? Yeah. Seventy-five.

00:15:16 '74, '75, I think and then when it closed I think The Park opened in '78, '77 or something like that. And then I went to work there. I worked at a Horoscope. Then I worked at The Park, too.

KB: 00:15:34 So you said you were organizing pageants? So was it more of like behind the scenes or were you in them also?

CW: 00:15:37 Well, the first one we had I won Miss Roanoke at The Horoscope. Then, from then on, he gave me the thing to just go on ahead and start organizing pageants and stuff like that. So I started doing that for him. And it was a hip thing back then. It's straight and gay came there. Straight and gay. It was just really, really hip back in the days.

KB: 00:15:59 So what led you to enter the Miss Gay Roanoke pageant?

CW: 00:16:04 For fun. Just for fun. I just said, well I'll just dress up and go do it and if anything happens... and I did and came in second place at that... at the Trade Winds.

KB: 00:16:17 So what is involved in the pageant? Are there like, is it kinda like the Miss America? Like there are different events and like...?

CW: 00:16:25 Now, at Trade Winds, it was just dressing up, and who looked good. Not pretty or good, just dressed good. You know, you look like you just look good. Nowadays, at the pageants they have these days is you have interview, you have talent, and you have gown. And I think I see those three.

KB: 00:16:50 Have you been involved in some of those?

CW: 00:16:51 No, I sat on... I'm already Miss Roanoke. I can't run again.

KB: 00:16:55 OK. No I mean organizing and things like that.



CW: 00:16:56 Uh-uh [no]. I don't do any of that stuff. They have rights on this stuff, you know now, and you have to own it to do whatever you want to do it. I don't do this stuff. It's owned. You have to have a right to it.

KB: 00:17:14 So did you enjoy like, uh, organizing the pageants and being a part of that?

CW: 00:17:21 Um-hmm. It was fun. It was really, really fun to do that with the people. Crazy but fun. But when I organized it, it was just one thing. Miss 10th Street or Miss M or you was Miss whoever you wanted to be back then, and you just dressed up in a gown and I had swimming suit back then. And can you imagine that? But *[laughs]*, but that's the way I did it, and had a good turnout, and it was really, really nice. Real good.

KB: 00:17:54 So, uh, let's talk about kind of like the HIV [AIDS crisis], a kind of uprising of that. And how did that touch Roanoke or touch you personally?

CW: 00:18:09 Well, it touched me personally, but, I, you know, I like the things that people do for it. And I do shows for raising money for it and stuff like that. I do do that. I know quite a few people that's HIV [positive]. But, I'm concerned about it, I really am concerned about it. And if there's anything that I can... if they would ask me to, you know, I would do it, but you know, people these days they're so, uh, you know, like they got the ownership of everything. If you try to organize something for, they'll knock you down from it. So I just sit back and just wait on...

KB: 00:18:51 Yeah, What about like back when it first began. Was it big in Roanoke? like friends of yours?

CW: 00:19:02 I wouldn't say it was big, but it was known, and you know, you know people. But it wasn't... People really didn't pay any attention to. I mean they paid attention to it, but it's not like now. It's not worldwide. But people, they paid attention to it, but no, it wasn't as serious as it is now. I don't think, as far as I know.

KB: 00:19:30 OK. So, are you still, uh, at this time, are you in contact with your family? Do you visit?

CW: 00:19:39 Mm-hmm. My sister was down yesterday. And we still talk. I go see them, they come see me and spend the night, and so-so.

KB: 00:19:48 So, uh, when you got involved with The Park, uh, I think it opened in...

CW: 00:19:55 ...[19]78 or something like that. Thirty-four years ago.

KB: 00:20:00 Were you performing when it began? [CW affirms.] So was it just like the impersonations and things like that?

CW: 00:20:09 Mm-hmm. Sure was.

KB: 00:20:10 What about the other people who were like performing at the time? Can you tell me a bit about like what was it like or like, um, do you still know the people?

CW: 00:20:23 Do I still do any other people? Yeah, I'm not as active in it now than I was back then. Back then, you turn on the light, I was in front of it, you know, I was there big time in front of the spotlight. But now since the bars closed... not closed but took over by another. I don't really deal with it too much. I did a show at the Jefferson [Center] last month, and then Miss Gay Roanoke is coming up in June or July the thirtieth and I will participate in that, but really I don't really go to The Park. Like I used to. 34 years. I've worked there 34 years. Yup, good memories [laughs].

KB: 00:21:15 So just looking at like the gay scene and like areas that were gay areas back then, like the seventies, eighties, did you have any issues with like racial issues? Like gay spaces that weren't allowed for people of color or things like that? or just like discrimination...?

CW: 00:21:39 No. Never. Never. Even in West Virginia where I'm from, never. I never had anything racial. You know, People gonna call you names off and on, but never a big thing like that. No, never. I never experienced, you know, racial stuff. Never have.

KB: 00:22:00 So you were the first black Miss Gay Roanoke. Were there other people of color like performing and things? Like how was the ratio? Like where there just a few black people and like predominantly white or like...?

CW: 00:22:17 When I started with just, I think I was the only one back then. And then as it progressed, like the Horoscope, the Horoscope was the one that really had a lot of blacks in it. So a lot of blacks was in it then. It's still a lot of blacks in it now, but it's prominently more white girls. White girls, boys, girls... Um, I don't know why, but in the South, down in like North Carolina

and places like that, it's real, you know, blacks, you know, that's good down that a way. But we still have em here but they [laugh]... I don't know why. But I think it's the interview thing, the interview thing, I think they're [Black performers] not good at interview, which I'm not good at interview. When I did Miss Virginia, I was horrible. I don't know how to talk real good, you know. But I think that's why a lot of them don't. The interview thing. But when it comes to talent, oh yeah. You better be prepared. I've entertained with the Miss Gay Roanokes and Miss Americas. I've entertained with them and everything. So, I'm up there pretty good. But not now. Was up. Let me put it like that. Was up there.

- KB: 00:23:53 So you're one of the first... the first black Miss Gay Roanoke. Would you think of that as like a movement maybe? Like, did people really respect that or was that like, you know, "wow, OK, we're making it." Since there weren't many people of color in the field at the time?
- CW: 00:24:15 Well, let's see. Go back to Trade Winds again, not very many blacks came to Trade Winds back then. And you had a few, but not very many. And the ones that really did accepted me when I first came here was the white people, they, you know, they came to my side. The black people, the black girls, they used to shun, you know, they just wouldn't talk to me, wouldn't deal with me or no kind of way. I don't know why. I don't consider myself any other way but me. They wouldn't talk to me or anything. So I was predominantly... mostly the white girls took me and they helped me out a lot.
- KB: 00:24:57 Did that change after you won...?
- CW: 00:24:59 Oh, yeah, after I won and stuff like that. And then later like Horoscope days, we came together, they start talking to you, you know everybody start talking to me. And after I had won and stuff like that, they, you know, they showed me, you know, that I was welcome. I guess it was scared I was going to take the boyfriend or girlfriend, but they just wouldn't have anything to do with me. I don't know why. I went on with life.
- KB: 00:25:32 So now a few of the people that we've spoken to that kind of like talk about you as like, you know, Miss Carolyn, she's a legend [laughs]. What do you think about that? Do you get that a lot?
- CW: 00:25:44 Used to. Used to. But now that I'm not into the scene like I used to be. Um, I loved it, you know. And I treated everybody the same. I didn't see any difference in skin tone or what you was,

I'm just that. I'm just me, you know, I accept you as you are. Whatever you are, you are. That's how I look at that. I don't knock you for being a murderer. I don't knock you for being a rapist. I don't knock you for being gay. I don't knock you for being straight. I'm just. What does your life... deal with your life first. That's just what I am.

KB: 00:26:21 Okay. So walk me through the eighties. What's going on? More friends? The scene? Family? Relationships?

CW: 00:26:30 Well, I did a relationship. I was dating a guy and we were together for maybe like about a year and a half and then he went on about his business and I about mine. I'm happy. I'm content. I don't have any other relationship. I have, and I've been without one for about 17, 18 years now. I haven't had a relationship and I'm happy. Very happy. I wish I had one [laughs]. I get sometimes... "God, I wish I had a boyfriend," and I go "No, no, I'm too happy." Did never have bad, bad ones, but, you know, you have your ups and downs. I guess he went on about his business. I went on about mine.

KB: 00:27:29 Was the dating scene like good, like, in your youth?

CW: 00:27:32 Oh yeah, back in the times, very good. Uh, I had about five boyfriends at one time [laughs]. Trust me, I had about five boyfriends at one time. I don't know how I did it, but uh, I did it, you know, and it was fun. But, I wound up with one and that's the one I had. The dating scene was pretty good but down the... the City Market downtown, that's where we used to hang out somewhere down in that area in the City Market downtown, and then they ran us from down there. They said "get out," and I left [laughs].

KB: 00:28:16 So like did you mostly date people within the community or....?

CW: 00:28:21 Both. I had a guy, I dated a guy from North Carolina for about maybe a year, about a year. I think I dated him for about a year and I think that's the only one that I dated from out of town. And the rest were from around here in Lynchburg and stuff like that.

KB: 00:28:45 So were you working back then?

CW: 00:28:46 Mm-hmm. Yeah. I was working at Woolworth's. And then I worked at Lewis Gale. Then I worked at Camelot Nursing Home, but it's called something else now. Then I worked at The Park. Then I worked at Hollins. This assisted living [business in]

Hollins. Assisted living. Yeah. Hollins Manor. That's what the name is. Then North Roanoke Assisted Living. I deal with mental and physically handicapped people and stuff like that.

- KB: 00:29:28 So you're a nurse?
- CW: 00:29:29 No, I'm director of housekeeping, but I do have a DCA license where I can do nursing. It's just, it's a certificate. It's not a license. It's like a nursing assistant. But they call them direct care assistant, that's what they do there.
- KB: 00:29:52 So you mentioned before that you went down to Norfolk, Virginia and you won some titles. So what titles did you win there?
- CW: 00:30:00 I just... Best Out of Town Actor or Entertainer ... Best Out of Town Entertainer. And, it was a good experience. Those people down there, they do, they were hard to please, very hard to please, but I won it and I did a pageant down there and I didn't win that. Back in the days, but it was interesting though.
- KB: 00:30:27 Did you notice a big difference in the gay scene in Roanoke and then in Norfolk?
- CW: 00:30:32 Yes. In Norfolk they were more bonded, you know, that were more in a bit more bonded than here, more capable people. But it was more bonded to me, I think.
- KB: 00:30:46 In what way?
- CW: 00:30:47 They were together. They weren't one side this side, you know, this side over here and this side over there. They were, all the people just bonded together. Were friendly with each other, or you know, stuff like that. It was interesting.
- KB: 00:31:00 Did you travel a lot for... entertaining?
- CW: 00:31:03 I have. I did North Carolina, and we did one in D.C., a show in D.C., um, and I think that was it. D.C., North Carolina, and West Virginia. Did West Virginia, and that was it. I loved it. I love traveling, you know.
- KB: 00:31:26 So were these like, um, did they request you to come? Like they wanted you to come?
- CW: 00:31:30 They would invite me. They would invite me to come. They invited me to do Miss North Carolina pageant. I'm the judge.

That was hard. It was... when the gown, the talent, all this stuff you have to, you know, judge. And that was a hard pageant to do because those girls, they come to work. Very professional.

- KB: 00:32:01 You enjoyed it?
- CW: 00:32:02 Oh, yeah. I loved it. And they're a good community, too. Their gay community is real good.
- KB: 00:32:09 So what's your favorite of those pageants with the different things going on? What was your favorite, like maybe category or favorite aspects?
- CW: 00:32:17 I love gown. I love gown. I was never good at interview, horrible. But gown and talent. I was pretty good and I got real high scores for that.
- KB: 00:32:30 So there's gown, interview? Was there swimsuit at that time?
- CW: 00:32:33 No, no.. Back when I did it, it was, but nowadays, nuh-uh. Now they do have a swimsuit in like Miss Continental. Those are what girls that have the breasts and stuff like that. They do do swimsuit and stuff, but they are so beautiful. I mean one walking there you wouldn't even know it. That's how pretty they are. But these girls pay a lot of money, too, for the cheeks and the hair. And it's expensive. It really is. Dressing is very expensive. You would not believe how expensive it is. Back to [the] Miss America thing. Those girls, they pay 900 dollars for a pair of shoes, thousands of dollars for a gown. Get their hair done and all that. It's very expensive. If you want to win, if you want to win, but you got to, you got to have that.
- 00:33:34 And I don't have it to enter that pageant. I would never want to go. It's a week-long. No. They had it in North Carolina, in Charlotte. And, it goes on and on and on. One day you might have gown, next day you might have interview, next day you might have talent. I mean, you're constantly going. I mean, it, when you get back from it, you could say that you're wore out from it. I have a friend who went to North Carolina and when they came back they're like, boom [*exhausted*]. They were like drained. I mean it's something. You go, you have to go. It's all about the money, though, I think.
- KB: 00:34:21 Is it that the girl is very competitive with one another or are they more like, you know, competitively in the moment? And then like when they go back stage...?

CW: 00:34:30 I think, in the moment. I think they're competitive in the moment, you know. They all try to beat each other, and you know, when you're in competition, you're in competition. You got to do it. But a lot of them say, "well, you're not my friend. Right?" So you're just a competitive person like I am. And they just go on about it. Yeah, it's very competitive. Got to be on your tip toes.

KB: 00:34:54 So what do they win? What do you get like, other than like the title?

CW: 00:34:58 um, you get a... like if you're a doctor, if you win Miss America, you're not a doctor. There is no more doctor until that year is up. You can't do anything like if you're a dancer or whatever, whatever, when you become Miss America, you're Miss America. You are not a doctor, you're not a nurse, you're not a nothing. You completely, your life is Miss Gay America. That's how they run it. You have to put everything aside.

KB: 00:35:30 So they get like money...?

CW: 00:35:31 ...They get big money and you get booked, like if they have a pageant here, you have to be the branch of Miss America. Like if they have Miss Virginia America for here. Miss Gay America has to be here or somebody to represent her. Has to be at that pageant. When you travel, you go from place to place, you know. But I just can't do that. I can't have my face shaved every night *[laughs]*. Oh God, can you imagine that? The hair on your body, which I'm not hairy but the hair on your body and stuff. God. But yeah, just don't see it. And you live out of a suitcase. But it's a big thing. It's a big thing.

KB: 00:36:17 So you mentioned that, uh, some pageants have swimsuit, but those are the people who have like breasts and things like that. So was there like a big difference between like pageants for like people who have done surgeries and things and then those who didn't?

CW: 00:36:35 Oh, it's definitely a big, you know, big... well, it's the look of it. So, Miss America pageant. You can't have breasts. You can have things done above the neck, but anything below, like hips, you can't do. Miss Continental, or something like that, you can have anything you want. Miss America, they say "you're a man first" *[laughs]*... which I don't... Why are you dressing like a woman if you're wanting to be a mister? I don't get that. That's the way they judge you on. Man first; woman last. Yeah, it's a... I don't know *[laughs]*.

KB: 00:37:30 So have these like pageants and things like they were pretty, like you said that you were like the first, you know, steam rolling. So these must have gotten pretty big like over, like, over the years, how do you feel about that. Are they televised? Are they pretty well attended and like, save the date, you know?

CW: 00:37:55 Well, I don't think they're televised. They do film them and stuff like that, but you can buy... but from what I understand you can buy the movie, the pageants, you have to, you can buy them. But I don't think they're televised and sometimes they have like a Miss America on a show or something like that. Sometimes they do do that. But, the thing with Miss Roanoke pageant, I don't understand why they do interview. Cause you're not on TV, they don't offer anything like that. Why are you doing an interview? Do a gown and a talent and leave it alone [*laughs*].

KB: 00:38:38 So you said in West Virginia you were dressing, so did you have mentors or people who like kind of like showed you the ropes? Did you eventually start wearing makeup and things like that?

CW: 00:38:48 When I came here, when I came to Roanoke, I started doing the makeup thing. But my best friend in West Virginia, they started showing me things, you know, like that. My Dad he would always call him a "sissy." ... "that sissy! "Sissy boy," and stuff like that. And that was my best friend, and he would always get on me for that. But he showed me—my friend showed me—not the make up, just the putting on the dress and stuff like that, and wig and stuff, but we never did make up, was one thing we never did. Make up.

KB: 00:39:24 And people were like okay with you like wearing dresses and things?

CW: 00:39:30 Well they never said. We always did it at nighttime. Always did.

KB: 00:39:35 So it wasn't like going to school?

CW: 00:39:37 Oh God no. I'm alive right now. Back then they would have killed me. They would have probably stoned me [*laughs*]. No I never did do that. But they knew I was gay in school. I tried out for cheerleader. I made cheerleader, but we integrated that next year. So I didn't get to do cheer, and I was always in the band. I always did the band thing. But no... they paid me no attention really.

KB: 00:40:04 So was it like a "don't talk about it" and like "we know, but you don't talk about it" or like...?



CW: 00:40:11 I don't think they really paid any attention. Yeah, I really don't think, you know, they will see you and say "sissy" or something like that to you. And that would be it, you know, they never made a big deal out of it. They never bothered me at all or anything like that.

KB: 00:40:25 So no like bullying or anything like that?

CW: 00:40:26 No, oh God, no. Like I said, I had a mean sister. She was mean, and she would fight a bear. She was mean. But she didn't let nobody bother me. She next to me. I'm next to the youngest, so my brother didn't mean to her and she was really, really mean. It didn't bother me.

KB: 00:40:52 Are you and your brother like pretty close?

CW: 00:40:54 We're pretty close. My whole family is. We pretty much close. I have a family reunions here every year. They come here and have people, nieces, nephews, everybody accepts me. Nobody bothers me... At least that I know of. Nobody's saying things behind my back. Yeah, we get along real good. Yeah, they don't bother me, cause they know I'd cut them off.

00:41:21 I'm good at not speaking to you. Oh Lord, I can ignore you. I hate to be like it, but I'm like that, you know. I'll cut you off in a minute. This could be on fire. You stand there in the window. I'd rather go through the fire than speak to you, if I'm mad at you. That's how I am. I'm sort of hard to forgive, you know, but basically I consider myself a very, very nice person.

KB: 00:41:55 So you were very active in the community here in Roanoke. So were you pretty active like in high school? Were you in a lot of clubs? You say you tried out for cheerleading.

CW: 00:42:06 Band. Well, I did cheerleading, I went out and made it, but, no just band was the only thing that I was active in school. Never did drama or nothing like that, you know. I don't want to fool with that stuff.

KB: 00:42:22 Did you have many friends or just like a few friends?

CW: 00:42:24 I had friends, yeah. The girls liked me, you know, the girls we got alone with the boys so-so. But I had quite many friends in high school. Gay friends.

KB: 00:42:33 Did you date in high school?

CW: 00:42:35 No. No, no *[laughs]*. I'm still alive, remember? No, no, I didn't. No, um-mmm. I start dating when I came here.

KB: 00:42:50 So after you graduated high school, but before you moved here, were you working? Did you go to college or anything?

CW: 00:42:57 No, I didn't go to college. No, I worked. What was the question again? *[laughs]*

KB: 00:43:06 Where were you? Like what was going on between high school, graduating high school, before moving to Roanoke?

CW: 00:43:14 Oh, I worked. When I finished school, I went to work for the city. I was a water and sewage plant reader. I'm reading the meters, water meters, and then I worked at the sewage plant at nighttime, uh, taking care of the, you know, water. Testing the water and stuff like that at the water plant. So I did that for about a year, about a year, and then I moved to Roanoke. But when I was in school, I worked. I left home at 15. Me and my father didn't get along so I ran away from home. And um, this lady in the community took care of me, and put me through school and everything. And so I was working at Kroger at the time when I left home, Kroger's. I worked there three, three years. Put myself through high school and everything.

KB: 00:44:08 That's really nice. This lady in the community. Like, did you know her well before?

CW: 00:44:15 I knew her. She had six boys and she took me in. She took me in and treated me better than she treated her sons, but she treated me real well and I admire her for that. She passed, she passed away, but yeah, I left home. Got myself together.

00:44:36 I wouldn't speak to my father. Like I was on that speaking diet. He would be like, if he was, I had to catch the bus, he would be down in the roadway. I would go all the way up on the hill around the mountain... and I just, I wouldn't speak to [him]. I didn't speak to him for probably four, five years maybe. I would not speak to him period. Wouldn't even go past him and then when I went home from here, I went home, and I used to go around and see her back in the community. The lady, she said, you know what the Bible say, "honor your mother and your father." I said "yes mam." So I went in, and, you know, we start talking. Then when I would go home I would go see him. I start see him, take him little gifts and stuff like that, and dealing with the house fire. Got burned up.. But we finally buried the hatchet *[laughs]*.

KB: 00:45:37 So was it hard on the rest of the family? Like when you guys weren't talking?

CW: 00:45:42 I don't think they really.... Well my baby sister knew we weren't talking. But I don't think the rest of the family knew I didn't have anything to say to him. He pampered my brother more than he would... He would buy him a car and he never bought me anything. So I just said, "OK, I'm gone, bye."

KB: 00:46:07 How did they feel about you leaving the house? Like at such a young age.

CW: 00:46:12 The only one that was there was my younger brother. He was the only one there. He was the only one left in the home. All my sisters had left, and he was the only one there. Me and him was the only one there. And so when my father got into a big fuss, I left. I said, "you ain't gonna treat me no more like you treat..." No. I left immediately.

KB: 00:46:39 So, did they, your sister and your older brother, were they still in the state or did they go?

CW: 00:46:47 Younger [brother]. They were still here. Well, I was always was there until uh, my sister came here, my baby—the one that took up for me—she came here and my older sister, she followed her here and I still have a sister in West Virginia. She's married and that's the only one left out there.

KB: 00:47:07 So you guys seem pretty close. They come visit you and you go there? Have they been to any of your shows? Have you been to any of them?

CW: 00:47:18 No. *[laughs]* My sister has. My baby sister has, and my brother has.

KB: 00:47:24 Would did they think about it?

CW: 00:47:25 They don't pay it no mind. They call me Carolyn.

KB: 00:47:28 Did they enjoy the shows?

CW: 00:47:30 Oh yeah. Definitely yeah. They were proud of me. *[laughs]*

KB: 00:47:37 Were you happy to have them there? Or nervous about what they would think?

CW: 00:47:40 No, I'm not a nervous person. Nothing bothers me. My sister told me. She said, "you know what? Nothing bothers you." I say "no." Before you... runs up. People that approach gives you a heart attack, blah blah blah. Just say it's done and it's over with. I'm not a nervous type person. Never. Never. If it had... whatever day it happens, it happens, and that's... I accept it.

KB: 00:48:08 So you said your father was in a fire? Is that when he died?

CW: 00:48:12 Uh-huh. He passed away. What he died of. The community... the fire was going up over the ground. It went from another house. Three houses. Did their house and then it did the lady next to him houses and then it got hit to his house. And, and I guess, I guess it was gas and it blew his house up. And they say he was trying to get out and he couldn't get out of it and [it] killed him. Burned the whole house down. Left me nothing. *[laughs]*. I'm just kidding.

KB: 00:48:45 So you said you guys reconciled prior to his death?

CW: 00:48:50 Yeah, we got together and I started, you know, started going to see him and stuff like it. I think he finally found out that I am who I am and I'm not going to change and accepted it. I guess he accepted. I'm almost sure he did. Because I would go back and look like something from the city. Not nothing from the country. It was so fun to see the... Well, my whole appearance had changed. Um, so, uh, I guess he found out that I am going to be me no matter what. I'm glad I buried that hatchet with him. I really, really am.

KB: 00:49:35 So uh, your mom, she died after him or...?

CW: 00:49:41 No, she passed away in [19]67? I think. I was 15 when she passed.

KB: 00:49:48 So you were pretty young. So this is before you moved out.

CW: 00:49:50 Oh, yeah, this was before. She was still alive. And I think I left because she had passed away, you know. Cause she always took care for me. You know, I was a mama's boy. Thank God. And uh, I was her little prince. So I will put her dresses on and run around the house while my daddy was at work. She said, "boy, here comes your daddy, you better get out of that dress!" I will fly and take off the dress and don't want to hurt. So she always said. But I was, I guess, her little princess *[laughs]*. Yeah, she, she accepted me very well, but I was still young, too. But she accepted me very well. I'd love for her to be here to see what

I've accomplished in, you know, my lifestyle, you know. I would love to... well him, too, my daddy, too. But I was a mama's boy.

- KB: 00:50:44 Did he ever like find out about the dresses?
- CW: 00:50:50 No. Absolutely not. No. *[laughs]* I had that dress off. One, two, three and it was off. But of course it was big. No, you know how women would dress in those fairytale[?] dresses?
- KB: 00:51:09 So were they her dresses or your sister's dresses?
- CWL 00:51:12 They was her dresses.
- KB: 00:51:20 What do you think if she had seen you winning Miss Gay Roanoke?
- CW: 00:51:23 I think she would be proud. I think she would... I think she would say "I raised a very well mannered person," you know, "son," or whatever she would have called me. I think she would be very proud of me and I think that my daddy would, too. I think he would have been proud to... cause I planned to bring him to my house and everything before he passed. But I think he would have been proud, too. I think he really, really would.
- KB: 00:51:55 OK. So let's bring it more recent. So how do you feel about like, you know, the more recent transgender movement and things like that?
- CW: 00:52:09 I'm for it, you know. If a person wants to do that. You know, I'm with it. I'm, you know, for transgender and stuff like that. I have several friends that's going through the transgender thing and I'm for it all the way. I have no problem with it. Now, it's not for me. If I was 20 years or 40 years younger than what I am, I would be going through it, too. But right now it's not the thing for me. But I admire the people that do that. That's on them. I have been to some of the in-service they have over at the church, of the gay church [Metropolitan Community Church?]. I go to that. I try supporting the best way I can. But yeah, it's no problem to me. I'm happy for them. If there's anything I can do for them, let me know.
- KB: 00:53:09 What about like, uh, I know there's been a lot of controversy and push back about like transgender kids and them wanting to either be on testosterone or things like that. How do you feel about that?

CW: 00:53:23 I'm for it. I'm for that, too. I mean everybody has a way to live their life and if they want to leave it that way, I'm for it, you know. But I think it should be at a certain age, you know. I think once you hit maybe 10 or 12, I think you should know what you want to be. And that mess about "Oh, he'll grow out of it and she'll grow out of it." It ain't for me. I think either you're born gay or... not born gay... or I don't think you have to grow into it. I don't think that. I don't think anybody can convince me to be gay. Do you? What do you think about that? I'm questioning you now. *[laughs]* Bu yeah, I think it's already in you, really. I really do. I think it's already in you and I don't know if you can change from that. I really don't know. I don't know if you can change, you know, go back into the straight thing. I think a lot of people will try to and they always bounce back into it, you know, get married, have children and everything like that, and always people around the corner you see them going where they ain't supposed to. I'm I right or wrong? *[laughs]*

KB: 00:54:49 So, how have you been feeling with the recent change in administration? And I know like there's a lot of progress under the, you know, President Obama. How have you been feeling about this new [administration], the last few years?

CW: 00:55:10 I've accepted it. I've learned to accept it. I'm for it. I like the way he changed the movement and whatever, whatever, whatever. I'm for that.

KB: 00:55:20 What about the recent like regression under this new [president]?

CW: 00:55:26 Ahh *[sigh]*. Do we have a president now? Do we? I don't have a president now. No, I'm just kidding with that, but I'm not into a lot of that stuff like that, you know. I'm not really... What's going to happen is gonna happen, you know. If I say, if I go to Trump tell them "blah blah blah blah, blah blah." He gonna look at me, and say "okay." And gonna pat me on the shoulder and say "okay, I'll do what I can." That's what he's gonna do to me. But standing out with signs and marching and all this stuff, which I'm for some stuff, I think it's sort of useless in a way. I really do. I think it's sort of useless. Certain things we should protest, and certain things we shouldn't, you know. Rights? Yeah. We should protest for our rights. But are we gonna get our rights?

KB: 00:56:20 You always seem very like for things, but like, you know, you wouldn't like identify like as an activist or anything like that?

CW: 00:56:33 If they ask me. You have to invite me to things. That's the type of person I am Like getting back to what I said before, people

just don't like you stepping on their parade, you know, marching in the parade if they don't ask you. So you have to ask me to. "Will you do a show for me?" I would do it, but I don't like stepping on people's toes, you know, and that's the way it is now. You see people just want to be bragging about what they're gonna do, and you know, they're not going to say, "well, Miss Carolyn helped me do it." They don't want that. They just want to say "I did," and I just don't fool with that stuff. But if they ask me, yeah, I will. I'll help them out in the best way I can.

- KB: 00:57:16 So you're not really active in like the performing scene anymore? But you say you attend services at the gay church?
- CW: 00:57:28 Well, yeah, like... They had a thing for the transgender people and they wanted me to come down and give them, put my input in it. And so I did. But yeah, I'm for it. You just have to ask me. But if you don't ask me...
- KB: 00:57:43 So what are you up to these days?
- CW: 00:57:45 I work and come home. I stay away from the shooters. I don't like to go shop anymore [laughs]. I don't like to go to the movies no more. I don't like to do nothing no more. I'm just scared of everything. I've just scared of everything. I'm scared, well not scared, I wouldn't say scared, but I'm leery of stuff like that. And I think just because you're gay, somebody's gonna kill you, you know, just for going shopping, just... [laughs]. I'm just leery of a lot of stuff, you know, like school, you can't go to school and have a decent education but somebody killing you. So I just basically just stay at home and I guess if I get invited to something to do something, I'll do it. But I'm not out there like I used to be. I can, you know, like I said, I spent 34 years in that bar and that was enough. I've seen everything. I've met every thing, and so I'm just, "Yay. I've done it all!" and I'd just stay at home. I'll stay at home. That's what I do.
- KB: 00:58:50 Are you still in any contact with like friends from...?
- CW: 00:58:54 Oh yeah. I still have my friends and stuff like that. I still do that, but I'm not as active out there like I used to be like when I worked at the bar, I met God, so many different people. You name it, I met it. You know, I met freaks, fraus and fraus, froos and froos, frivs and frigs [laugh]. I mean, everything, you know, all types of people and I love that! I really, really loved that. I love people. I really do love working with people and not um, I miss being that way but I would never do it again. Not for 34 years. Nah, I quite that place at 34 years and I came outside and I stayed outside at nighttime. And I said, "God, is this what

happens at night?" I said, "God, it is a life out here! Yay."  
[laughs] But I liked working at the bar. I loved it. Like I said, I met different people, different styles, different races, different this, different that. I met it. Straight, gay, lesbians, whatever, whatever, whatever. I met it. And I loved it. I learned a lot from it, you know, from different people. I wouldn't want to do it again. No. Don't you ask me to come work at your bar. [laughs]

- KB: 01:00:14 Sounds like you lived a good life.
- CW: 01:00:17 I have. I really, really, really have. It's just for my younger life, and I really think that was good, too. I have no regrets on that. My young life, I have no regrets on that.
- 01:00:30 And I have had a really good life. Roanoke's been good to me. The gay life's been good to me and jobwise I've always got a pretty good job and always went from down to high supervisor, whatever, manager. So it's been good to me. It's been good to me.
- 01:00:50 And my bosses, they know what I am, and Blah Blah Blah. And so they say, one time they told me "you can come as Carolyn but you have to come every day as Carolyn." And I said, "oh no, I'm not. Uh-uh." [laughs] I say "thank you, but I'll continue coming as me." That was my boss. She was a good woman. She was a good one. Good boss. I said, uh-uh. I can do the shave and even all of that every day. Oh, God, no. And then you have to, you know, deal with straight people, you have to deal with them. And they already look! They look at me as a freak now when they see me. I deal with a lot of different salesmen and stuff like that. When they see me coming, they say "We're looking for Calvin." I've even been to public places and go in the bathroom in the men's bathroom and they run out. The men run out. I go, "come on!"
- 01:01:49 "Do I look that dumb to go into a men's bathroom if I was a woman?" I have. When you come out... I have got a best friend, a lady, my best friend she'll say [whispering], "They was over talking about you. Going in the men's bathroom." I say "I don't care!" I say "that's what I am. That's me." If I go in the women's, they gonna suss so bad. If I go in the men's, they'll fuss about it. I guess I just don't care [laughs]. But yeah. I guess stupid stuff like that happens to me. I know when I go to eat, I mean I have like a little shadow(?) and they go "yes, mam. Can I help you? Yes, mam." And my best friend, she's, "I ain't paying no mind. I'm used to you." I say "okay." Fine with you. I don't pay no mind either. My life is pretty good. I'm happy. I'm content and



that's the main thing about it. I'm just happy being content with my life. I wouldn't change it for anything. If I could go back and make a couple of years, maybe 20 years ago, but I know what I know now, and you know, I would be dynamite.

- KB: 01:03:03 What would you change? Knowing what you know now?
- CW: 01:03:06 Oh God. Well, I would know my life better. I would know what to do with it, you know. I would probably... not probably going to, not college, but a little what? What'd you call them? Colleges. Not four-year colleges...
- KB: 1:03:23 Like vocational schools?
- CW: 1:03:24 Yeah, something like that. I will go to something like that and get a trade. I always liked it, wanted to do something like hair or something like, you know, get into that for... but just typically pickup a curling iron. I would probably run outside and get a pitchfork or something. *[laughs]* "This is what a curling iron is?" But yeah, I'm very, very happy with my life. I love my life. Like I said, I'm content. I don't have nobody to bother me. I've been over here for 17, 18 years and I've never had any incident with anybody. Nobody bothers me. I don't bother them.
- 01:04:00 Um, you know, I'm just happy. You know, I have one neighbor up the street that I talk to, my neighbor here. But everybody else out of... They'll waive at me, "hey." But I don't want nobody knocking on my door for some eggs and sugar and milk and all of that. You know, that's what neighbors are. That's what neighbors do. But I don't want that. I just, I'm private. I'm very private and I'm a private person and that's the way I live, private. I don't want anybody knowing my business and if they think they know it, fine. If they don't know it, fine. That's what I am. I'm private. I don't get out there in the middle of my yard and have a show, do a show for em *[laughs]*. I'm just private. But I don't care if they know what I am. I am me. You know, if they know what... If they think they know what I am. I've never been to none of them so they don't know what I am, but if they think they know, fine. As long as they don't bother me. And I won't bother them. That's the way it is.
- KB: 01:05:09 Okay. So, we're a little over an hour, so...
- CW: 01:05:14 Oh let's do two! *[laughs]*
- KB: 01:05:19 You got more to talk about? We could.

CW: 01:05:20 That's up to you. I'm just gossiping. I like talking.

KB: 01:05:24 Okay. So maybe kind of wrap it up. Is there anything that you'd like to see in the future and like in the community, in the movement, any, uh, like I know they're talking about like the bathroom bill and rights and just like different... I know like, gay marriage is now a thing. Is there anything else that you'd like to see?

CW: 01:05:49 Oh Lord, no, not really. I think they're going through everything that I would like for them to do. I can't think of anything right off hand. I think my life, my life... but if I could do to help them, yeah, but no, I can't think of anything that um, I would like to have done. As far as the bathroom thing and stuff like that. That's wishy-washy to me. I think if you dress like a woman, you should be able to go into a bathroom in the women's bathroom and if you're dressed like a guy, you go into the guy's bathroom. But no, I can't think of any bills and things that I need to add on.

KB: 01:06:47 Okay, well I think that we're through. You want to keep going? We can keep going? *[laughs]*

CW: 01:06:53 That's up to you. If you've got more questions, yeah, but if you want to, that's up to you. I ain't got nothing to do.

CL [Caitlyn Lewis]: 01:07:07 It's up to you. I can text and say that I'll be a little bit longer. It's up to you.

KB: 01:07:11 I don't know, is it gonna mess up the timeline if I like start going back?

CL: 01:07:18 I don't see why not.

KB: 01:07:19 Okay. Well, I do want to kind of ask about, like, I know like street queens were a big thing. Like how? I know like they talk about like you go—I heard in some other interviews—they talked about like you go downtown and they're just like everywhere and like...

CW: 01:07:37 Used to be. Well, I was one of those. *[laughs]* I was one of them back in the days. Yes I was. When I was saying about the Market area. We used to go down there and carry on and stuff. And yeah, I was one of those.

KB: 01:07:56 What did that entail?

CW: 01:08:02 Ah... God. Finding a man. *[laughs]* No. We was working. We was working. We was working. We were doing tricks back then. They called em "tricks." Back then, yeah. They ran us from the market and then moved up to Salem Avenue and then that's where I disappeared. I got out of the scene. And I started working at the bar, in my other job.

KB: 01:08:29 You said they ran you from the market?

CW: 01:08:31 They wouldn't let us come down there! They wouldn't let us come down and standing and stuff. Which we weren't down there doing anything mean. We just go down there and stand and whatever... whatever happens, it happens. But, they ran us, they told us we couldn't stand around down there and so we went up to Salem Avenue, and I wasn't out on Salem too much cause I had to start working at the bar and it was, you know, cutting me and my lifestyle out from theirs. So... *[laughs]* Back then I was like this small [really small]. I was real tiny. They used to call me "mop legs[?]," and stuff like that. But I was real tiny, and back then I was a.... well, I was small and attractive and you know, I had a lot of boys after me and stuff. That's why I had five boyfriends and stuff like that. *[laughs]* But it was interesting. But then I got out of it. I just got out of it. You know, it got so bad where they were killing you and shooting you. I had a friend that has been stabbed, shot, and everything, from there. And I got out of the business. And I said, "I have to find a better business to go into."

KB: 01:09:50 So, did it just kind of become progressively worse? So was it like relatively safe like in the beginning?

CW: 01:09:57 In the beginning it was safe. And then they would rob you; they would try to rob you and stuff like that. And that's when I got out. But then, in the early days, no. But after, after it went on and on, they start trying to rob you and killing you and stuff and stabbing you and cutting you, shoot you, whatever. And I said "not today." It's not for me no more. But we had fun doing it. It was exciting. It was interesting. *[laughs]*

KB: 01:10:27 So when you got out of that business, what did you do for money then?

CW: 01:10:32 I started working at The Park. I started working at The Park and then I had a regular job at Lewis Gale. I was working there, so that's when I stopped doing it. It just went out of mind, and I never got too good or nothing like that. You know how people say, I thought I was better than them and stuff like that, because I didn't do it no more. It wasn't me. I could care less

about it. You do you; I do me. If you do it, fine with me. I'm not gonna knock you for doing it. Everybody's got to live in some kind of way. And that's where we were living. And so I was for it.

- KB: 01:11:15 So when you started performing, um, did you have people to help you out? Like, you know, help you figure out makeup?
- CW: 01:11:23 No, I had nobody.
- KB: 01:11:25 Nobody like who was... like I know a few other people would talk about like, you know, people were like, "yeah, you gotta do this. You can do this." Like they mentored them and taught them all this stuff and...
- CW: 01:11:35 Yeah, I mentored a few people but nothing major. I showed them how to put the makeup on, eyelashes, and stuff like that. But nothing major. I never did take anybody and put them under my wing and say "you're my daughter," or "you're my this," "you're my that." Never did do that. Cause once, I think I've always seen people, once they put on makeup, you know certain people, they thought they knew everything. You know, they knew how to do this, they know how to do that. They know how to do this. So you don't, it just pushes you back from them, saying, "okay, you know how to do it, then okay, fine with me." But once they put on that makeup, oh they know everything. They know all the models and stuff [*laughs*]. So I just back off from them, you know, that's the type of person that... if I'm trying to help you and you don't want to and you just give me the thought that you don't want me, I'll back off from you. Go on. Help yourself. It's your loss, not mine.
- KB: 01:12:40 So, we heard people talk about like they have like families, like within like the performing, like you know, they get a mentor and then they get a new mentor, someone else's. And it's kind of a thing. You never...?
- CW: 01:12:52 No. Well, I did have a couple of daughters that I helped out a little bit. But like I say, they went over back on their own, but I did have a couple of daughters. Yeah, I did have that, and like they just got too grown and they went out on like, you know, they went on. I said "Okay, fine with me," but they still come back and ask me "well, can I borrow?" It's not help, it's "can I borrow?" you know, I say "take it out of the closet and go on," and I never see it again. That's the amazing thing [*laughs*]. I never see nothing again. I spent a lot of people want to borrow from me. I don't have any... I have a couple of daughters and that's it.

KB: 01:13:36 So do you have any, like your friends now... Are they still, do you have any friends who are still active within the community? Performing or otherwise?

CW: 01:13:48 Oh yeah, lot of them. Lot of them. Quite many. But they divided... when The Park was sold or whatever, it divided. You know, the ones that I knew from the ones that's now, from what I understand, the ones at the bar now don't want the old people performing, and this person performing, and that person performing. But the new people, like at the Jefferson [Center] where I've performed, at the Jefferson, they want the older people and stuff like that. That's what they want. So I just say, "oh well, more power to you."

KB: 01:14:29 So you mentioned a few times where like, you know people need help, do you volunteer or anything like that?

CW: 01:14:40 What, volunteer to help em?

KB: 01:14:41 Yeah, like you said you went to an event at the church? So do you do things like that often, if people ask you to?

CW: 01:14:48 No. Only if they ask me. If they ask me to help them out, I'll be glad to help them, but they don't ever ask. I guess cause I'm just to myself, you know, to myself. I'm quiet and I just don't... I'm not out there, you know, with them and they never ask. If they ask they ask. If they don't they don't. But I'll help them if they ask. I would like to get into that type of stuff, but it's too one-sided for me. It's just... One year with the Pride in the Park [festival], it's the girls, the lesbians won't take off the.... One year it's the gay guys want to tell ya..., then the next year, this one, and they don't want this one to perform. They don't want that one to perform, and then they go out of town and pay somebody out of town to come here, [give] money to do them. You got girls here that would like to perform, but then you don't pay them. And just going back to the bar... now the bar they pay all these entertainers to come in from out of town. They pay them big money, but they want to pay the people that perform here—I don't perform there—but they pay them zero. And I go, "why do y'all do that?"

01:16:07 I'm not going down there to do nothing for free. I think I'm just as much better than Miss whoever comes in from out of town. Yeah. There's just so one-sided to me, you know, it's just... And I don't fool with that stuff. I really don't get into it. I try to stay away from all that controversy. It's too much.

KB: 01:16:31 So, looking at the people you frequently impersonate—Janet Jackson, Patti LaBelle, Aretha Franklin—is there a reason that you chose those people? Like, were they people you were really interested in, or have you gotten “oh, you kind of resemble such and such...”

CW: 01:16:50 *[laughs]*. No, I just like the music. I liked their music, you know, the music. I was interested in their music, the songs, and stuff like that. I try to go by what I think the people like, you know. That’s what I tried to go by... you know, the popular songs, you know, they’re gonna like that. Now if I do something about Aretha Franklin now they’re gonna go “God, who in the world is that?” They’ll go “who is Aretha Franklin?” *[laughs]* But you have to go along, for me, you have to go along with the age of the music, though. The more modern music. Some people like older music, some people... But these younger kids these days, uh-nuh, they’re not trying to...

01:17:35 They don't support you in any kind of way when it comes to that. Uh, I noticed last time I was at the bar I used to make, and I'm not bragging, but I used to make buku(?) tips. Oh God. I used to come home with some money. But, I didn't make—I made some, but not very much like I used to make. The young kids, they don't, they don't support you. But the older people do. They know about what you got to go through in drag and you know, the makeup, the hair, the gowns, and they know what you spend. But the younger group, they don't know nothing about it. All they want to be is pretty. That’s what they want to be. They don't care about stuff like that.

01:18:22 But going back to the, I just... I do what the music... what’s more pop right now. That's what I do.

KB: 01:18:31 So was there a lot involved? Like I'm thinking like makeup, costumes, a lot of practice I'm assuming. Was it like intensive?

CW: 01:18:40 Some of the music is. Yeah, like I used to be in a group called Bowties, from The Park and, they will give you Broadway music. Oh God, I never learned this song. Cause I never heard it before. But that’s intense, when you gotta try to figure out what you're going to do, what you're gonna wear, back then in Broadway-type stuff. So it can be. It can be, yeah. If you don't like the song. Like if you give me a song to do that I don't think I like doing, it ain't going to go very well with me. I'm not going to perform it at my best. I don't think I will. I’ll try to. But you know, I just want to perform it good. But if something I like, and you gave me. I like it. “Yeah. Oh yeah. I’ll do that for you.”

KB: 01:19:35 So you said group the Bowties? Is that... like did you have to audition to be a part of this group?

CW: 01:19:46 No. It was just for all the entertainers that wanted to do something, you know, do the show and it was really good. We went to DC, we went up to DC and we took the group. Well, we went to DC in the year that Redskins won the Super Bowl, whatever year that was [1983?]. God that was moons ago. It was moons ago, and they paid us no mind. Oh, Lord I was so upset *[laughs]*. It was like "Super Bowl! Yeah! Redskins!" You could hear it through the whole [place], "But what about the Redskins?" Oh God, we came up here for nothing. Spent all that money and stuff for nothing. But yeah, it was pretty good group we had going up.

KB: 01:20:33 Did you do group performances?

CW: 01:20:34 Yeah, we did group. We did singles. We would do singles, you know, let's sing a number and then we would do a Broadway number. Stuff like that. It was interesting. I enjoyed it. I wish they would have kept it up. But it folded, like everything else folds.

KB: 01:20:59 So just to... I think we're kind of winding down here. Alrighty. I know you talked about a lot of, you talked about how if you could go back knowing what you know, looking back? Anything you would change or anything that was particularly memorable?

CW: 01:21:22 I don't think so. I don't think I would change anything. Cause, like I said, I've had a pretty good life except for my early life when I, you know, left home. But that wasn't bad. But uh, no, I don't think I would change anything. Anything in my life. I really don't think I would.

KB: 01:21:52 OK. So, like other than Miss Gay Roanoke, the infamous title, what is like the proudest thing or like the best, your best accomplishment?

CW: 01:22:02 I think Miss Gay Roanoke. I would like to have had Miss Virginia, but I didn't have the money for that, you know, the money you have to spend on that, that pageant, because that's a very expensive pageant. But, I would like to have had Miss Virginia. Or Miss Gay America would've do, but I would've never gotten that. Never. *[laughs]* But yeah, that's about the only thing I would like to have done, won Miss Virginia.

KB: 01:22:40 Alrighty. It was really nice interviewing you. Thank you so much.

CW: 01:22:41 No problem. You're more than welcome. I enjoyed you. I haven't talked so much in all my days. Good God almighty.  
[laughs]

[END]