

Interviewee: Claudia Whitworth
Interviewer: Dr. Reginal Shareef
Transcriber: Andrew Sterling

RS: Good afternoon Miss Whitworth. The first questions are a set of background questions and the first question is when and where were you born?

CW: I was born in Fayetteville, West Virginia on November 7, 1927.

RS: How long have you been – lived in Roanoke or been a citizen of Roanoke, Virginia.

CW: I first came to Roanoke in 1945 to work with daddy after he had started the Tribune. Of course, I haven't been here consistently since then but that was the beginning.

RS: Was that the first time you worked with your father at the Roanoke Tribune or had you come – He started the Tribune in 1939 right?

CW: Yes, but he didn't - but the publication – when we say he started in '39, it didn't mean that it started rolling off the press because it took a couple of years to work and get all of the equipment together and everything to actually start on our work and that didn't actually come until '41 perhaps.

RS: I see. So the paper's been published weekly -

CW: Regularly -

RS: Since 1941.

CW: Since '41. He started it in '39 getting all of everything together. See, it takes a whole lot of equipment when you're printing it yourself. Now, you can start things and get somebody else to print it for you and you can go with that. In those days, it took a lot of getting things together to get ready to publish on a regular basis which we've done for the last sixty-some years.

RS: What were some of the obstacles that your father and you faced in getting the Roanoke Tribune published initially?

CW: Well, I understand others had tried and started with, and since, before and since the Tribune or other black publications but unless you plan it well, as he did, and he had worked on papers before coming here. But in those days, back in the '30s and '40s, you know, there were untold obstacles. Having to print it yourself, you've got to have the equipment. You've got to have the know-how. You've got to have the help, the supporting help. He managed to get all of that and mainly through people at the Roanoke Times, believe it or not. They were the ones that helped us most. They were not our – because of their cooperation with us, teaching us, helping us to get Linotype machines which was the process in those days, Ladbed (??) presses and all of this stuff over a period of time. And then teaching us how to operate it and this kind of thing was what helped us to survive. But the obstacles, I'm not familiar with them. Of course, they'd be financial obstacles and this kind of thing. But, there was a need for it and there was the desire for it. So, I guess finances would have been the primary obstacle which, once you gained the confidence and trust of people, they're willing to go along.

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RS: Well, that's interesting what you said about the Roanoke Times. I mean, they were fellow journalists and so they were helpful.

CW: It was individuals. It wasn't the corporation.

RS: It was individuals there.

CW: But individuals within the paper who helped us right up 'til we were moved over on Henry Street. There were people that worked at the Times in recent years. If I got in trouble over there, all I had to do was call and he would be right there within a matter of minutes to help me. So, they've been – Tommy Powers and different people that worked over there at the – Bill Slusher – and I like to even call these names 'cause they're people who remember. These people – They were union people and they used to put up at the Tribune down on Gillam Avenue, you know it was all glass – They would put up newspapers around there so they couldn't see these union people in there helping us get this Tribune out each week.

RS: Oh good. That's very interesting.

CW: It is. People always want to tell you the problems they have and the bad stuff but we've had a lot of support. A lot of good people, black and white, especially the white ones.

RS: Good, good. Miss Whitworth, when you got here, say from 1945 on to say 1960, how was the Tribune primarily distributed?

CW: Well, we've always primarily been distributed through mail.

RS: Oh, OK.

CW: But, mostly through mail. All by mail subscriptions. But that mail process – we used to stack all up – we used the label and stack 'em all up and put 'em on the dock at the post office and they worked. Now, we have to do all of the post office's work. The more they charge us – I think they used to charge us \$8 or \$10 a week to get that paper and mail it out. And now, I tell you, its unbelievable. We have to pay about \$1,200 a month just to mail a few papers. And we do all of the work. Any papers – Any 6 or more papers going to a certain zip, we have to wrap individually, label, do everything – sack 'em for the different distribution centers. When they leave the Tribune, they're ready for the Melrose Branch or this branch. We've got 'em sacked. We do all the post office work. Isn't that amazing?

RS: It is amazing. And you pay more. (both laughing)

CW: Astronomical, believe me.

RS: An astronomical amount.

CW: Astronomical amount and keep going up. We have to pay by the piece, by the pound, by the percentage of advertizing, by all of this stuff. Its unbelievable having been in that business this long and see the changes.

RS: And not all the changes have been for the good. (both laughing)

CW: Not really.

RS: Were you an only child?

CW: Oh no.

RS: OK. Tell us about your brothers and/or sisters.

CW: I just have one of each.

RS: You have one of each.

CW: Mm mm.

RS: OK

CW: Neither of them is here. Both left home early. I was the only one that stuck around.

RS: Yes ma'am.

CW: You'll always find one that will stay home and kind of take care of the home fires.

RS: OK. And do you have any extended family still living in Roanoke?

CW: None never lived in Roanoke.

RS: OK.

CW: I never had any family -

RS: Alright. When you were growing up or when you came to Roanoke, what type of house did you live in? Where did you live?

CW: Well, back in those days, you just got a room with somebody. So daddy had a room over here on Rutheford Avenue and when I first came in '45, I stayed there also. And then I also got a room down here on – With Miss Bragons (??) - down on the short end of Gillam Avenue down there. C.E.

Bragons, I think they have a lodge named for him now but they misspell it. They spell it with two "G"s and they always spell their name for the record. They spell their name with one G, Charles Bragons. And I lived with 'em when I came here. The sweetest people you ever want to know. They just had one son, Charles Jr.

RS: And that was on the short end of Gillam?

CW: The very last house down there we lived.

RS: Now, in addition to working with your father, what other activities were you involved in?

CW: Oh, everything he was involved with. He was pastor at the time at – up in Christiansburg and he went there in 19 – We lived in Lynchburg, we were living in Lynchburg at the time that I was born. But, momma always went home and that's where Fayetteville came in. That was her home. But we were residents of Lynchburg at the time. And he had worked with printing down there also at the seminary down there at Lynchburg at the seminary. But, you were asking -

RS: Yes ma'am, about activities like social activities and I know -

CW: With daddy, you were asking where we lived here and daddy had been called from Lynchburg to pastor the First Memorial Baptist Church of Cambria. It wasn't Christiansburg then and it wasn't Shaefer Memorial. He changed it to that during his pastorate. And when he left there 14 years later, it was Shaefer Memorial Baptist Church. It was still in Cambria which had its own political subdivision just like Vinton and all of these places. But since then, I think its all incorporated into Christiansburg.

RS: When you were here, was your father and you by extension, were you guys members of the NAACP or group activities like that?

CW: I was a teenager then so I wasn't really into all of that stuff. All I did was help daddy. I went back and forth with him to the church because we had to commute. We stayed in Roanoke and we had to commute during the week for different services and I played for his choir and we were just together all the time and whatever he did, I was trying to back him up with it. (both laughing)

RS: Under the heading of education, tell us about your school life and where did you attend school and that type thing.

CW: OK, I did my first and second grade in Lynchburg where we were living and then when he took the church in Christiansburg, that was the first and second grade were my only public school experience. Because in Christiansburg, they didn't have public school for blacks. So, we went to Quaker schools and that was Hill School which was right on the church lot practically. They've now turned it into a center but that was where I went to elementary school from the third grade to the seventh grade. Quaker schools only have 7 elementary grades and 4 high school. So, there are only 11 grades in the Quaker schools. So I went there and graduated from Christiansburg Institute, also a Quaker school. So I graduated from Christiansburg Institute when I was 16 and went to Bluefield State College because of the shortness and then I had started in Lynchburg when I was 5 because I was born in November and school started in September but they let me start when I was 5 so that made me come out in 11 grades at age 16 and go into college at age 16.

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RS: That's interesting. Miss Whitworth, I know, I don't know but I would assume a Quaker schools or Quaker influenced schools there was, in addition to the academics subjects, a moral philosophy.

CW: Absolutely. They were very similar to your public schools. You know, the curriculum and all of this. They just put more emphasis on education. And what made it so interesting is most of my teachers and a lot of the others, most all of 'em came out of Roanoke. So I always dreaded and always hated never have gone to school in Roanoke. They always seemed to be such a closeness of the people who went through Addison and this kind of thing and that was one of my biggest regrets that I never did get to go to school in Roanoke. But, having had all Roanoke teachers had pretty much the same effect because they really produced some top students. When you come out of Addison, you went somewhere. And when you come out of Christiansbug Institute, a lot of 'em went straight into teaching because we had – it was just like it said, an institute, it wasn't just a high school. We had dormitories for boarding students. There was an Agriculture Department, a Home-Ec building, all these separate buildings and they taught the secretarial stuff and all kinds of stuff. It was just like a university really. So, when you came out of there, you were ready to go into the classroom as a teacher and some did. Some did. Some went into teaching from there. But it was quite a different experience. But all of our teachers, as I was saying, Ruth Claytor, Roberta Claytor. We had Ruth do pre, we had Connie Johnson Hamler with - all of these people came out of Roanoke. I mean they were excellent teachers and they put out some products. Just like in this valley, they did it up there at Christiansburg Institute.

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RS: Oh, see, I didn't realize that. I didn't know the people from here came up there to teach.

CW: They were very young and most of them were out of Virginia State. 20 years old, 21, or something like that. They were very young.

RS: So then at 16, you went to Bluefield State?

CW: Mm mm.

RS: Was that experience different for you?

CW: It was, let's say brief. (Both laughing) Because – I hate to put this on tape but I didn't make it to Thanksgiving. They kicked me out before Thanksgiving. (Both laughing) I was a rebel. I've always been a rebel and I used to just run with the upper-classmen and initiating and doing things to the other freshmen. It was a lot of crazy things. (Both laughing)

RS: That was an experience as well.

CW: Yeah, but it – I really didn't want to be there. I had wanted to go to Hampton and I guess with finances or whatever, it just didn't seem like a college to me and I just – Having come from – my experience is a little different from most people my age. You see folks who they were the only ones that made it into college. See, I came from 5 sisters and all, and my mother and all of her sisters who – my mother graduated from Ohio State in 1922. And they were all teachers, you see. And the others from West Virginia State from Oberland - All of them were highly educated and when I went into school, we went in educated, you see, so it was a little different. Its not just like being a street kid and rebelling and getting in – When I went into - the French teacher – My mother used to teach French and English and when I went up there, the lady who was teaching me French was just butchering it. So its kind of hard. It made it difficult and I had to stop taking it at Christiansburg because that lady and I can't call her name because she came from Roanoke too. (laughing) When you come from a whole family of teachers like I did, you're going in these places at a little different level. So that was one of the reasons for my rebelliousness.

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RS: So you left Bluefield State, where did life take you?

CW: See I went up there in '44. It was in the – I graduated from Christiansburg in '44. Then I went to – Then I went that fall to Bluefield and then when I came out of there, before Thanksgiving, I went to work at the powder plant up in Dublin. I wasn't old enough but I didn't have any birth certificates or anything so I just went to work. I always did look older than I was. So, I guess it was in 1945 that the government people knocked on our door and said that they had reports that I wasn't of age and I said, "Well, you can't prove it". And he says, "Well, its not up to me to prove it. Its up to you to prove you are." (Both laughing) So, I hadn't thought of that. That was the end of my powder plant government career. (Both laughing) So then I came down here and started working with daddy and that was in the Summer of '45.

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RS: Did you stay here? You mentioned earlier you didn't stay here continuously.

CW: I stayed here for a while. Daddy wasn't the easiest person to work with even learning the Linotype stuff and I was trying to learn it too. People were trying to teach me but it was a little difficult so I left and went to – First to Dayton, Ohio, and well, actually, I got a geography book and to pick somewhere to go. I didn't know anybody. I was so sick of everybody I knew and I picked Dayton. Back in those days, 60 years ago, they had geography books. I don't know what you call 'em now. But it had little dots for little towns and big dots for big cities and so I picked a medium sized dot. I said if the dot's too small, I can't get a job. If its too big, I'm too country to get around. So, Dayton, Ohio – I picked Dayton, Ohio. I said I never heard anybody in my life going to Dayton, Ohio or coming from Dayton, Ohio. So I always remember, I had saved up my little life savings through the summer of - \$50 I think it was. And somebody came and tuned the piano that week and charged us \$20. So I paid him. I said, "Well, when daddy comes, he'll give me my \$20 back". No he didn't. "I didn't tell you to

do it". So now I had \$30 and I walked down the hill to the train station to get my ticket to Dayton, Ohio, out of that \$30 and that was my introduction to the world. (Both laughing)

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RS: So was Dayton a good fit for you?

CW: I didn't stay there – Well it was an amazing story because when I got – as I was leaving, my brother had called from - At the time, he was working for IBM in Poughkeepsie, New York – and so he just called and I told him I was leaving home and where I was heading. He said, "Oh, I was in the service with a guy from Dayton and he gave me his phone number". So when I got there, I checked into the YWCA. Then they had rooms you could stay. I called this fella and so they came and got me and took me to their house for dinner. We were sitting out in the backyard and a car had drove through the alley there on the way and backed up and the lady got out and said, "Claudia Alexander", and she was from Fayetteville, West Virginia. I hadn't seen that lady since we were little kids and she had married a teacher and they were living in Dayton and she recognized me. And she said – she went and got my clothes out of the Y and took me home with her and I stayed with her until I got a job.

RS: God was looking out for you.

CW: As always. Always. (both laughing) I wouldn't be here – all the crazy things I've done. I have kept Him busy. (both laughing)

RS: Well, under this heading, the next heading is life and home and it says, you talked about you were with your father all the time and mainly he was a minister and he was trying to -

CW: Get the paper, right, mm mm.

RS: And, so you inherited this entrepreneurial spirit from your father. How did you feel about that?

CW: Well, my leaving home would be whenever we'd have a big falling out. Then I would go where I could learn more about the business because – So I left and went to – That was how I got – When I went to Dayton. I tried to get a job as a Linotype operator but you had to be union in those days and here I was just a teenager and a woman. They weren't hiring women in that kind of a profession. So, I wound up after not being able to find work in that profession. In New York, I had a sister there so I went up there where I got a job on the New York Age.

RS: On the New York what now?

CW: Age. The Amsterdam wasn't printed as a newspaper. The Amsterdam is more popular but its printed in Jersey. It wasn't printed in New York. It still isn't I don't think if it even exists, I don't know. But there was a paper called the New York Age. In fact – who is it that was here, Ida Wells used to work on it. Well, she worked in the news – you know in the office part. I never saw a newspaper office. I always worked in the dirty shops – the grease and graphite and hot lead and I didn't even come through the front door. (both laughing) I was always in that part of it. Learning how to do that composition part. In those days, it was pretty rough and heavy and this kind of stuff. There were no women in -

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RS: I was going to say, with the fact that you were a woman -

CW: It was hard and you had to be tough and that added to my toughness. Because being in the process, you only had – we called 'em magazines that you had to change to change fonts of type, you had to change for it and these were heavy metal things that you had to lift from the ground and put up on top. And I would have to ask for help with some of that and I used to hate to have to ask them to do anything for me. But, that was where I learned really how to operate on newspapers in Ohio. I did work in Cleveland. I went to Cleveland. I kept going different places for different reasons. I would get a job at the Cleveland Herald and in Columbus – what was the name of that one? - the one in Columbus – Ohio State Sentinel. That's what it was. And that was where I was getting my training. I'd come back 'cause I couldn't learn from daddy. He was, we just, I'd go somewhere else and learn and then I'd come back and try to help.

RS: Was he receptive to the - ?

CW: No. (both laughing) It was always a battle. But I could stick it out.

RS: So you were gaining experience -

CW: Absolutely.

RS: In your family, were there family stories that were passed down through the generations? You talked about your mother and her sisters going – all being educated women. And you knew that – was it -

CW: You know, our family – that's what's so odd about these educated families. They're not close like the other families that have to kind of depend on each other to make it. And that was one reason I wasn't that attracted to education because they were very formal with each other. There wasn't a loving kind of stuff you see with little close, uneducated families and it just didn't turn me on. There was nothing about it I wanted to be like. So that was a part of my rebelliousness. I just said, "If this is education, I don't really need it". And they would just tell us, "Now don't associate with these and don't do this and don't do that". And I was always doing the opposite. I was always drawn to certain people and especially people and trying to tend to daddy's people in Christiansburg that he didn't have time for because he lived down here. So it was just totally different for me. So, no, we didn't have family – we were very formal. We sat around the breakfast table and talked very little and they lived in DC and different – you know the sisters and when we'd get together – I don't even remember seeing them kiss each other in a greeting or anything. Just formal, very formal. And there were two of 'em living in DC and they would, one would meet, visit the other on Sunday. You'd sit in the parlor and one would serve you sherbert or something just like a stranger. You just can't imagine, so it just really didn't grab me. (both laughing)

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RS: Do you think that that was the way that middle class blacks at that time felt you should act as middle class?

CW: I think so. I really think so. I just don't know where they got that from but it just didn't appeal to me.

RS: Just very refined and cultured type of -

CW: And you had to dress a certain way and I couldn't chew gum or I couldn't do this. You know, that's what Miss Pullen said at the banquet, she wouldn't allow any of 'em to chew gum in her class and she took some to the 61st reunion, class of '61 reunion.

RS: My sister's in that class.

CW: "Well", she said, "OK, I brought some packs of gum here today. Now you can chew". (both laughing)

RS: Finally.

CW: But in those days, chewing gum was very degrading. So you couldn't do that.

RS: I think a lot of that was to show that as a group, we could have some refinement or culture or that type thing -

CW: To be examples of what you can be. It, you know, if that's what you want to be but you needed to be put with some sort of affection or something which it wasn't. It was just totally the opposite. That refined – and you know I tried to maintain a certain degree of that, you know, in my rapport now to show you that you can mix the two. That it doesn't have to be either/or.

RS: Well I think that's what happens. You know a lot of people find balance in that but – In fact, again, we used to use the term probably in a derogatory manner but we used to call them bourgeois/bourgeoisie you know from the French and that's really, when I was coming up, that was the impression that I got of certain people who were just so formal and almost so strict, you know, that they didn't even seem natural.

CW: Now, if you were born into the affluence, the black affluence, and there were a few families like in Roanoke, the Slater families, you were born into that. It's just a little different but when you come into it from the fields, you know, where you worked for the families, you see, it's a different kind of

mentality there.

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RS: And so then, during your travels, this brings us up to about what 19- when you were in New York working with the Age -

CW: That was during the 40s and 50s, Cleveland, New York, Columbus, all that was during the 40s and 50s.

RS: You would come back to Roanoke periodically to work with your father.

CW: Yes. I was never gone more than a year or two at a time and I came straight back to the Tribune to try to put that whatever it was that I had learned into that.

RS: And was the paper growing at this time?

CW: It has always been slow growth and still is. In fact, we - growth - bigness has not always been one of our goals. I remember at one of the NNPA conferences, I said, "Bigger isn't always better". And then they had the Pittsburgh Courier and the Afro-Americans and the - They had all of these big newspapers and I said its going to be hard on these big papers when this tide starts turning and now most of them are gone. Because when you're small, you can ride different - but when you're big, you're dependent on a whole lot of help, a whole lot of everything to keep you out there and the Tribune is still around. When all of these expenses and things they throw at you. Its hard to handle if you're big. So we've always kind of deliberately stayed small enough to handle what I believe in and what I don't have to - If one of your biggest supporters advertizes and somebody comes out with something wrong, you can't bite the hand that's feeding you. So, I just try to stay small enough.

RS: And independent.

CW: And independent enough. So far its worked.

RS: Its worked. Its worked well. (both laughing) Let's see, did you or your spouse or any of your children serve in the military.

CW: Yeah, daddy was in World War I and served in - what was it? - he was in the 8-0-2nd Pioneer Infantry in France and all around. And then my brother was trying to volunteer - this was during the draft days, you know back then. He wanted to go into the Navy so he tried to volunteer but we didn't have any birth certificates having been born out there in Fayetteville. You know it was a little town in West Virginia. They didn't have birth certificates for black folks. So by the time he got his birth certificate, and it wasn't his right age. He had put his age up so that he could get away from home. Like I said, I was the only one that stayed there. It wasn't a pleasant setting. So, everybody just kind of jumped ship as soon as they could get out of there. He wanted to - by the time we got all his false credentials, they said he was too close to his 18th birthday to volunteer. He was going to have to be drafted. So they drafted him and put him in the Army. They'd ask you what you want and then they'd give you the opposite. (both laughing) But they did put him in the Air Force. That's all my father and brother. There was nobody left but my sister, mother and me and none of us ever served.

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RS: Do you remember particular businesses or shops around here that you utilized?

CW: Oh my, do I ever. There were plenty of them all around. The cleaners, your tailor shops, in fact, you had to be 'cause we couldn't utilize anybody else. And that's what made the yard so special. In fact, I was writing about it in this week's paper. I brought one in to make sure you read - after the Henry Street Festival. The first years of it, I didn't even attend because I was too crushed with what had happened with Henry Street and the way it happened and everything but then the people involved with it over the years and after it got moved to Elmwood Park, we started kind of getting involved. And each year, once we started, we never have stopped. And sitting there, looking at it, I expressed it in today's editorial. Everything then, because of the days of segregation, were mostly on the yard. Your dentists, your doctors, your hotels, your theaters, even your churches, your everything, if it wasn't on the yard it was in the vicinity. You know, Gainsboro and your grocery stores, your tailor shops, everything was there so that was all we knew was patronizing our own thing. We could go downtown

and buy clothes in some places. In some places you couldn't try 'em on but you could buy 'em. Different things like that. But we had our own everything of necessity.

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RS: Well do you think as an entrepreneur, you hear this all the time at business schools, the need for the black, for there to be an entrepreneurial class in the black community. Now we once had that but obviously things changed with integration and being able to go everywhere. But, what factors do you think hinder an entrepreneurial class from developing in 2006?

CW: Well, it goes all the way back to the 40s and 50s when in the days of desegregation. So I don't know if you watched any of that "Eye On The Prize" that's going on now. The whole revolutionary process is such a distasteful one you know. Had desegregation been done through incentive instead of forced, it would, it probably, I don't even think it would've taken longer because if they had offered incentives to people who did this – They thought, it seemed like it would take forever but I really think it would have happened quicker because – but it happened the other way around. Not only, I just know about Virginia and I'm sure because I was right through the midst of that era coming into the early 50s and this kind of thing but in Virginia when you were forced – forced integration you see – and I say integration instead of desegregation because desegregation, that's desegregating your black schools, your white schools and mixing it up proportionately. We were all integrated into white schools, closed down black schools, displaced black teachers, principals, all of this kind of stuff. We were forced into situations where we were not wanted by the teachers. We were not wanted by the parents and the students just reacted to that. You see what I'm sayin'. And through that – I kind of put it by saying, summarizing it by saying, "If you've got somebody holding all the cards forced to deal in somebody that doesn't even know the game, how many winning hands you gonna deal 'em". This is what happened. The race desegregation happened. They made 'em do it. They were determined its not gonna work and it hasn't. And look at what – it just allowed us to come in where we weren't wanted and so now that mentality is still there. We never go rid of that. Frank Totive (??), when he was here, and we worked closely with him – A lot of people fussed about how much he made – That man, I don't know when he slept. He was up around the clock. He could call – If he meets you, he'll call you a name if he sees you tomorrow. He knew people. He loved people. He spent his whole time desegregating these schools through incentives he called it. He put the first magnate schools, all of 'em in black schools. If you want these schools you're gonna have to come over here. And he spent his whole time putting Roanoke on the map in magnate schools which they are getting rid of all of them now. And he said, "OK, I succeeded in doing that but I'll admit, I never got off the ground with teacher attitudes". He couldn't deal with that. He brought people in here from Florida with conferences to try to work with attitudes and this person I knew, I didn't know who he was when he brought him but he was on the Board with me at Norfolk State and he was Cecil Cod and he had been hired in Florida to deal with the same thing with the population that wasn't black population. It was different.

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RS: Hispanic-

CW: They were being integrated into public schools. The same thing they didn't want. So, working with teacher's attitudes and this kind of thing, it was a stonewall and that's where we are today because all of the schools that were integrated or desegregated whichever you want to call it, have re-segregated. I walk to work from down Melrose Avenue past Forest Park, that was all white. And they forced us into that. Now its all black. And all the teachers are white. Its not happening just in Roanoke. I mean they're talking about everything else but they're not dealing with the real problems. And when you're forcing kids out into the street, and that's what it is now, you're making it oh so uncomfortable. They're not learning. You're not trying to teach 'em. That's not the point. You're trying to prove a point here that they're ineducable.

RS: So the magnate school concept where you got an incentive – If I'm interested in a particular subject and I'm a black parent and she's got a white daughter and she's interested in the same subject,

there's an incentive to go to that school.

CW: The dance school, the aerospace, nothing there. See it was connected with BPI and up there in Flemming, all of this was connected. I worked through these programs. Let all of them disintegrate, never tried to keep it going. The groundwork was there to really do things but it wasn't wanted.

RS: And so when you force people, you're going to get this resistance.

CW: You're going to get it. They're gonna do it if they have to do it. And on top of that, the, you see, you couldn't get any assistance if you peacefully integrated schools. No assistance whatsoever. You're on your own. If you could start a riot, you'd get riot funds. Any amount of riot funds. Now what kind of picture is this?

RS: They created dis-incentives.

CW: That's right.

RS: I mean this is what economists talk about all the time. You have to have your incentives lined up or whatever your strategic goal is. So, if you try to do something peacefully and you don't get any reward, but if you start a riot or if you start trouble then you'll get the reward.

CW: That's what I'm saying.

RS: Its the incentives that create the problem.

CW: That's right. And I can go into some proofs of that right here in this city. And then I was listening on "All Things Considered" or "Fresh Air", one of these talk programs, and someone who worked with the state at that time in Richmond was saying, "I never even thought of that. Not only did you not get money from the state to peacefully do it, they were threatened to get funds withdrawn" he said. If you do it, we're gonna cut your funds off. So, all of this behind the scenes. So you see what we were dealing with then and we're dealing with the same mentality now.

RS: You make a good point. Again, I like your analogy about the magnate schools because then people literally have freedom of choice based on their interest so there is an incentive to go.

CW: To go and -

RS: You don't come with all the attitude that somebody has forced you or pushed you to go somewhere that you don't want to go. I actually hate to see Roanoke City abandon the magnate school concept and I know that Toter had put Roanoke City Schools on the map with that.

CW: No other school in the country had an aerospace school like he had here and had it in – they made sure that died a natural death. You see what I'm talking about? Instead of taking advantage of that and putting Roanoke on the map with it.

0.44.20.7

RS: So we're going to have these antagonists -

CW: Right!

RS: Because of this almost coercion to put people together. Well that's interesting. I never thought about it -

CW: A lot of people don't think about it and I've been out there in the middle of this stuff and I know. I'm not a bench-sitter. I've been out there in it all the way.

RS: Now Miss Whitworth, I think it was in 2004, you were Roanoke's Citizen of the Year and I wrote that column. (both laughing)

CW: I don't know what happened there. Whether it was a pacifier or what.

RS: I wrote that column and one of the things that I talked about was always your calm demeanor, your spirituality and I did a very imperfect evolution of you as a child of a minister and going to Quaker schools and then being involved in the Bahai Faith so, could you fill in my gaps there? How did you end up in the Bahai Faith? Tell us something about the Bahai Faith .

CW: Well I certainly wasn't looking for it. It is very unusual that – It was on Henry Street and there's no community here at any time. I came through street teaching is what they call it. Because the Bahai Faith came into this country on this high elite. Because it started in Iran but the persecutions and all of the history of it was so – well, I don't know how I'm trying to condense it into just a little something but

during the Baha'u'llah, the founder of the faith exiled and persecution and imprisonment over a period of 40 years. It was in 1910 after the Turkish Revolution that they were forced to release all of the political prisoners and that's when – but over that period of time, the faith had drawn people from universities and all, Oxford and everything – to recognize who this person was and so when it came into this country, it came through these universities. In fact, the early Bahai's, when we came in 35 years ago, you even had to take a written exam in order to come into the faith at that time until the grandson of the manifestation said, “No, no, no, this is for everybody” and he says, “You're gonna have to take this to all of the people”. So that instituted what they call street teaching and they were going through plantations and this place, bringing the faith to ordinary people. That's how I, that's where I'm coming from. They were coming through Henry Street street teaching and it was a little gray-haired white lady from South Carolina and her husband who was from Vinton and a Persian lady, those three people. And she walked into the Tribune and said have you every heard of Baha'u'llah. I said, “No, and I don't want to hear about him”, just like that. And she said, “Don't you believe in love and justice?”. And I said, “Doesn't everybody?”. I told you I was a rebel. (both laughing) She just kept trying to talk to me and I was just so rude and I was looking at how she was taking me and that, to begin with, kind of softened me. And she held up a little pamphlet that had a big sun on it that had God in it and it had rays with Moses, Muhammad, all of the former manifestations and it had Baha'u'llah at the bottom, the promised one of all ages. And the way that – it kind of took the sting out of me because I said, “That's possible”. Its what they call progressive. Now there's only one God that speaks to man periodically according to mankind's maturity and need. And I said, “That makes sense”, you know. And this age seemed to be a different age which required a different manifestation. So then I stopped being mean (chuckling) and started listening to her and she gave me a little pamphlet which I was going to throw in the trash until I read it. It was the Bahai Faith was a new independent universal religion who's aim is to revitalize mankind spiritually, to break down the barriers between people and to lay the foundation of a unified world society based on two principles, justice and love. I can't fight that. So I started investigating and the more I investigated, its the most astounding thing I've ever known in my life. Its bringing all the people across – all the sheep in to one shepherd, into one fold, one shepherd. Its always been prophesied but here is the blueprint. So that's why I started following the blueprint and it is working, believe me. It is working. Thank you for asking. (laughing)

0.50.01.8

RS: Oh sure. Because I think, not a lot is known about the Bahai's.

CW: No. Do you know why? Because the whole world is run by religion and politics, right? And there is no money in the – The Bahai Faith is a religious order and a political. So that's why the Ayatollah said “Yes” when – what was her name? - the one who interviewed that doesn't speak well, what's her name, has the lisp talk, the famous lady, you know, what's the famous interviewer? She's old now.

RS: Barbara Walters?

CW: Barbara Walters! That's the one. She was interviewing the Ayatollah and she asked him about putting the Bahai's to death because they were putting them to death by the thousands. And he said, “Yes, we are putting them to death because they are not a religion. They are heretical.” Well I said, “You're not all wrong. We're political and religious”. But there's no money in either. And that's why nobody is – If you are elected to office, there's no individual who has any title or any power anywhere in the faith after Baha'u'llah died. But its so designed that everything is done locally on elected bodies of 9 individuals, nationally elected bodies of 9 and Universal House of Justice on the side of Mount Carmel, elected bodies of 9 individuals. These people consult and agree on whatever goes out through the whole – and everybody – and its all through love. Everything they send you is so loving. Its something I've never experienced. And its done the whole world the same in every continent. And we don't have paid, nobody's paid. If you're elected on the local level, the national level, or even in Israel, you're not paid to go there. You're gonna have to pay your way there. Or if you need assistance, you

can get it but only if you need it. Who is gonna promote something – Look at all the money in campaigning for election. Now you take all of that out. Who's gonna promote a religion that's coming in saying all this is not needed? We're a threat to everybody. And its gonna – and its working. I wish I had invited – We had a conference at the, used to be Holiday Inn, Quality Inn up there on the hill. I wish you could have seen that. People of all nationalities, races, just in love. We greet each other in love. We don't even understand some languages but that love is a universal language and we have a plan that comes from national, a blueprint that we all have to follow and its coming together so unbelievably, unbelievably – worldwide. And look at the time is now when the meek shall inherit the earth. You know it sounds like, “What does that mean?”. Well when you see how well-prepared when that thing comes down and I had no idea it was coming down as fast as it is, then you'll understand 'em. And that's why it hurts so bad about 'em – you know our philosophy is not to dwell on people's faults. They say if they have 10 bad faults and one good one, dwell on the good one. And let me – There's some things in there that just shocked us like it is better to be killed than to kill. Can you imagine such a state? Some of 'em so shocking that we just don't sign on the dotted line and we're there. It takes training in love and just like they train you in hate. They've got to train you to go out here and kill innocent people. You know that. You gotta be well trained to go out there and kill folks you don't know. And I found out when I went to Sac Air Force Command with Lynn Holton. They took us through this 6 weeks basic training and how you have to train these recruits to go over there and hate and kill people they don't know. You have to train people in love.

0.54.29.7

RS: And so you have to train people to love.

CW: Its training. Its basic training, hard training. And that's what these soldiers are into.

RS: And so when in that column I wrote about you, I talked about Turtle Tracks so -

CW: Mm mm.

RS: Sometimes, you've mentioned your faith there, but often-times you don't but there is almost this philosophy of love.

CW: There is.

RS: Is that what you're trying to do?

CW: Yes. And you know what? I try not to write when I'm down or anything like that. I've got to because the faith is, it brings you out and you're looking the wrong way if you're down. Your face is facing the wrong – Its a reflection – you look into that sun, you're gonna reflect brilliance and light and that's what I'm trying to reflect, the light, the brilliance, the warmth, the hope which is not in recording what's going on in the world.

RS: That'll depress you.

CW: Its depressing everybody. Its making people suicidal and everything. You know, to get people in that kind of mentality and where the “haves” just keep wanting more and more and you're so helpless and when you feel helpless you do all kind of crazy things. So we got to just turn people any kind of little way without flooding 'em with it. Just suggest, “Please, just look, there is hope. But not the way you're looking”.

RS: That's what I always find in Turtle Tracks. I really look – I read Turtle Tracks. I understand – I have some understanding of the Bahai Faith and I know something about you so I try to get this message that you're promoting.

CW: That's what it is and you'd be surprised at how many people are really getting it. When I first joined this faith and this was in 1972 and there were no Bahais here and I didn't know anything about it and there was a pioneer here back in the 50s that she had books in this library 'cause it connects her to this library – one of the ladies died and she had a book in her possession when they were getting through it and it was a book donated to Miss Mitchell here at this library, one of the Bahai books you know and this lady had it in her possession. There's so many things that tie this faith into this valley. Its awesome. Its really, really – because the Guardian who was the last member of the holy family to

institute the administrative order. Before that, it was all religious, spiritual, in Iran and this kind of thing. When it came into this country, the administrative order was added to it which was very difficult because the Iranians don't believe in administration kind of thing. And the Americans don't believe much in spirituality. But they said its easier for an administrative person to seek spirituality than for a spiritual person to seek administration. So its kind of a – But the tie in to this religion, to this valley, its just awesome because the Guardian Himself wrote to this lady, Maude Taylor, who was in the Roanoke Valley and she said I've been here for years trying to spread the faith and teach and I have not gotten any response whatsoever. Its just – I'm so disappointed. I don't have – And he wrote back and he said to her and I paraphrase that, “The work you have done there, you are not even conscious of it, you know, the fact that you don't see it. You're just planting seeds that someday”. But he says, “Once Roanoke” and he called Roanoke by name and he'd never been to this country. “Roanoke is well established. It will affect the whole Southeast”. Then when I came in '73, the first thing I wanted to do was get rid of this paper so I could go teach this faith. I said, “Wait a minute. I've got a big congregation here than any church in the valley 'cause they got hundreds, I've got thousands of people”. But I was afraid to do it and I didn't mention the faith at all in this bible belt. What changed it was I had a Bahai lady from Florida who had a column called “New Reality” in which she just talked about ordinary things from taking children to school, this happening, that happening, whatever she started it off with, it would appeal to anybody. She'd bring 'em out through the Bahai faith through some principle that would address whatever it was. Doing that – then she got married and apparently to a non-Bahai, I don't know – but anyway, the column that she wrote in, she said she was gonna have to stop the column. After that, I got calls, I got even from ministers, “What happened to “New Reality”? They missed that column. So I said, Do I dare mention it in my editorials?” So I started just a little bit. But I try to do more quoting the actual writings because they speak for themselves rather than me taking it out of context and doing something to it.

1.00.16.7

RS: Now what year was this that you first started mentioning it -?

CW: In the editorials? I'm really not sure because it hasn't been that long. Well, yes it has. I go back and look at some of them. I mentioned it periodically but not consistently as I do now because the need seems so much greater now for you to investigate. And now, over the web, its so much easier to investigate than for you to come to a meeting that I would have. And I knew I wasn't able to compete with these pulpits and them and – But, now with the web, there's just so much love and stuff, beauty in everything out there that would draw people and its an organized love. That's the only thing in it. Because hate – love has always been stronger but its not organized and that's what I think I had in it a week or so ago. Hate is so organized and it looks like its stronger. Because love is just like fireflies. You know you're flickering here and there but there's not enough light on, staying on long enough for you to see. But that hate, you can organize that and that's why I think that its intentional, all of these programs they show you to make you keep hating each other, the dogs, everything about the early days of integration. They keep pushing that to you, pushing that. They don't tell you the good stories of the people that did – the John Browns that spent his life you know for black and going to the galas, he's – black people don't even talk about him. You see what I'm saying?

1.02.07.7

RS: We talk about the hate -

CW: You talk about the dogs and this kind of thing. You can sell that hate so easy. And we've got to get this love sold. The people are going to turn eventually out of desperation when there's nowhere else to go. But those of us, we are told, who will turn now of your own volition, the prize is unbelievable and I know what they mean just everyday. The prize is that you recognizing that which you wouldn't recognize if you weren't a part of it.

RS: As the editor of the Roanoke Tribune, do you see the Tribune serving a bigger mission?

CW: That's right. Not volume or this kind of thing but spreading this love that just getting you hooked

into some vein so that you recognize it when you see it again.

RS: Well, Ms. Whitworth, we're at the end of our hour, let me ask you this final question. Is there anything that we didn't cover that you would like to share with us?

CW: Not really because the main thing I wanted to talk about was this school system because that really bothers me so much. Because the older people are just products of the youth you see. And if we don't – we can't do but so much. Its like bringing people into the Bahai Faith. All emphasis now is placed on children and youth. We've been battling each other in this faith coming in. Just stop. Go to the children. Cure hearts. Bring these children before – See I've been in it thirty-some years. If I had brought children in there, they'd be so rich into this instead of trying to work with these adults which are too old and they're not going to change but so much. So now if you can instill this love and respect and humility, that humility. There's nothing in society that makes you want to be humble. It makes you look like a wimp or this and all of this stuff. It takes the strongest amount of pride to show humility. And when I am in the presence of it, I just melt. There are some - Especially males, females, anything and there are some giants that – Doug Covington was one of them – In their presence. Its nothing you can teach. Its something that's a heart to heart community. When you're in the presence of 'em, you know, “This is a humble person”. And this is a person who dares to be different and you're going to be persecuted. You're going to be - He and you know what he went through up there.

RS: He certainly did. You're right. They miss him now that he's gone.

CW: Oh.

RS: I mean the students, the administrators, everybody misses him.

CW: This humility. And this is – Everytime I recite this prayer to people, (papers shuffling) they want me to call, please come and the Bahai's said, “There are other Bahai prayers other than that”. And I said, “This is the one that reaches people. This is the one that says, 'please come back and tell me this again’”. We're at the end of that.

RS: Yes ma'am.

CW: I thought you'd be here all day with me.

RS: That's what we wanted. I told Carla (??) that I know you have great strength in your faith and I wanted to talk to you about that for this recording and so that listeners can see how your faith influences your life, how you run your business and everything.

CW: Absolutely.

RS: We wanted to talk to you about that.

CW: And you know, it especially appeals to me and I think you are born to be whatever you are and although you don't recognize it and this is why I think my life, the way my life has been has prepared me for this because there is – I've always been the, what do you call it, the black sheep of my family. I told you about all the educated ones and all. Even my sons, they don't want to listen. They come in to work on the paper, they don't want to hear anything about it. I've been doing this 60 years. I'll learn, I'll find it out, I'll figure it out. You know they don't want you to tell them anything. I've had to learn humility for the first 60 years I've been fighting it, trying to demand respect. And all of a sudden, you know, I'm learning, “Uh uh, that's not the way to do it. Stop fighting this thing”. And this humility, learning that humility is – and this prayer has done more to de-ego. And it is a kind of an ego. The fact that its not wanting to be over somebody. That wounded ego is worse. Because you don't recognize it as such. So I think I have done more damage with that wounded ego all my life trying to defend myself, prove myself. I'm worth being your daughter, I'm worth this, I'm worth that. And it has just turned everybody off. This prayer when I was inducted into the Hall of Fame in Richmond, what was it, '99 or something and that was the first woman from this area, not black, white or anything. And I had people calling me saying, “How in the world did you get to do that?” I said, “Why ask me, I wasn't on the selection committee. I wasn't a judge. I don't even know who proposed me or whatever. But anyway, Don Beyer.

RS: Oh yes.

CW: Don Beyer was the Lieutenant Governor and I was on the Board at Norfolk State down there. Don't ask me how I got on a Board of Visitors at Norfolk State and got kicked out of Bluefield State College before Thanksgiving, I don't know. (both laughing) Cause I said, "Do you know you're asking?". He said, "I know". I told him if you knew who my _____ (??) and you still want me on this board, I'll do it. They said, "We want you up here". I said, "OK, as long as you know what you're doing. I don't want to be sitting up here under false pretenses". But anyway, they were so political on that board and I told Harrison Russett and at the end it just got worse and worse and he had the whole board full of Democrats and he'd put on these new ones that just – the whole meetings were politics and I just said its too much and they were going to give Mary Sue Terry some distinguished award, Norfolk State's highest award and I said, "Your timings off". She was running for governor. And she had run around Don Beyer who was Lieutenant Governor who was gonna run. She jumps out and runs around him and everybody starts brown-nosing her and, excuse the expression, and jumping on her bandwagon. I said, "You're making a big mistake". And he said, "But she's done this for this school". I said, "I don't care what she's done. Your timing is off". If you want to honor her, wait 'til after the election and honor her. Don't do it now when she's running for office. Well, whatever. And Don Beyer took it so graciously. He is such a precious person. I said I don't know what you doing in politics anyhow 'cause he doesn't even belong in it, he's such a precious person. So she lost! Everybody knows she lost to Allen. Alright. Nobody ever thought that was going to happen. They thought she was – why didn't he clean the house on that board. See, in Richmond, he cleaned house. He said, "I even told 'em you were a Republican". I said, "No you didn't". (both laughing) We're going to get kicked out of the Bahai Faith. We can't be Democrats and Republicans. You can't be anything that divides mankind. Now we can vote but we cannot join anything that divides people. We can't just preach one thing and do something else. And nothing divides people more than politics. Anyway, so there was Don Beyer running for – I'm bringing this to a point. I said I'm going back so far. Don Beyer was running for Lieutenant Governor and the whole Republican slate won except Lieutenant Governor, Don Beyer, one Democrat won Lieutenant Governor. And when - that was before this, that was after this whatever it was, the Hall of Fame thing. And I had, at the end of it, all of the people – there was a nun there – Don Beyer's grandmother was inducted at the same time so he was at the podium with me and all of them were telling how they got there and who contributed to what but there was no mention of God in the whole, even from the nun. So when I got up there, I just said, "The eternal flame of many a kindred soul lit my pathway to this podium but I won't call names because its too many. I'll just leave you with this prayer that did more than anything to get me here". And I recited this prayer verbatim. When I got through with this prayer, there wasn't a dry eye in the place. The whole place was in tears because its humility, the whole thing. I want you to take a copy of it. I did this to a church 'cause I did it last year at some program and they said, "Please come back and do it again and bring copies". So I fixed these copies for this. And I stood up there and said this prayer and the whole place went down. And so Don Beyer was calling my office every day, "Please give me the prayer, please". And I didn't even have it on paper because when I saw it, somebody had it on a little piece of paper and I memorized it. So I had to put it on paper and then I got it to him. Well, after that, every time I would see him in a meeting, he'd start talking about the Bahai Faith and this poem and that he used it and this was during that time because when he won the Lieutenant Governor, the only Democrat on the whole ticket, his acceptance speech was this poem.

RS: Oh really?

1.13.15.0

CW: When I'm fit to go. With patience and gratitude. I've been to the task of the hour. He quoted that poem and every time I'd see him, he'd talk about this poem and the house of worship and he had seen the shrine on the side of Mount Carmel and he'd spend half his time talking about the Bahai Faith. And so he said he carried it on his dashboard all the time. So I saw him years later. I said, "Are you still carrying the poem on the dashboard". He said, "No, got it on me." He reached in his pocket and

pulled it out. So I know this thing has power. That man – the only Democrat on the slate that won and there he was. And people don't even remember that. It was so quiet and so peaceful because he was a good Lieutenant Governor to a Republican Governor. They didn't acknowledge his existence but he was. So this faith has so many – And one of the prayers when I got to that part, it tells us to be as dust, dirt under the feet of my loved ones. We've got to learn how to – and I said, “be dirt under the feet – Woah!- That's taking it down there”. And then there's the point that says, “What is dirt? What is Earth? Everything on Earth came from it. Everything on Earth is coming back to it and everything on Earth is totally dependent upon it in between”. So its the most important thing on Earth and we consider it the lowest form of matter. You're cheap as dirt. Your something as dirt. Isn't that something? So it totally turns your perspective around.

RS: That's what spirituality will do.

CW: It is.

1.15.03.2

RS: It will make you see what you ordinarily won't see.

CW: What nobody else sees and what you cannot be perturbed because they don't see. You've got to keep your eyes where that strength is coming from, the hills -

RS: I think when you do that, I mean, that will allow you to be humble.

CW: And then just in the few years, look at how many people – now to be a doctor, you had to go through some stuff to do that, didn't you?

RS: I certainly did.

CW: Anybody that had that title. Now, they got people who ain't got GEDs passing out Doctorates. I don't know how its happening and ain't nobody saying anything. But look at how fast this world – everybody is trying to get a title and we don't have titles. We can't have titles. This is getting you totally turned the wrong way, trying to impress man who ain't gonna do anything for you if they could. And the world is just so far gone now. People, doctors who can't say a straight sentence, can't pronounce their names, but they're doctors.

RS: Well, that's what it is. I mean, we're a society that evaluates you.

CW: Caught up in that ego.

RS: All that title and a lot of material things. There is no spirituality in our society.

CW: Got plenty of churches, plenty of religion, no spirituality. You know what? I should've warned you I'd be here all day. (both laughing) But, American Indian, they asked me to sponsor one of these programs on Public Television and I did it. But the whole series – a Native Indian at the end of it was worth the whole series and he said, “Religion is what you get when you're scared to go to hell. Spirituality is what you get when you've been there”.

RS: There's a lot of truth in there.

CW: Now that's saying something. No who's been through more hell than a Native Indian. You know. Coming from him – when he said that, that put that whole program in perspective. All this religion everywhere, ain't none of 'em got the spirituality. Spirituality is what you get when you've been in hell.

RS: Well that's true.

CW: You'll come out spiritual, I tell you. When I try to get there without having to go through that. Except you don't have to go there. You can – humility can come without humiliation. Once they get that humiliation then comes the humility, you know. Look at these people in congress now. All of 'em that go to jail and they get humility. See, that ain't no humility, that's humiliation. There's a difference. There's a big difference. When you voluntarily give up that pride and stuff and come on down, that's awesome. That's humility and that's spirituality.

RS: Well Miss Whitworth, we thank you so much and I'm gonna keep this prayer and its beautiful.

CW: Learn to recite it. I don't care what religion or no religion, just read that thing. I'm telling you, 'cause I've been wrestling and trying to love people - and see, I didn't come up in love remember. It wasn't in my family, it wasn't in my mother's family. It was just full of rigidity and then in something

else, it was something else. But it wasn't no love. I didn't come up in it and now you tell me I gotta love everybody and I ain't never loved anybody.

RS: Well also when you were talking about you were a woman, you were African American, see you've had -

CW: All of these tests.

RS: You've had a lot to overcome.

CW: And now I understand why. All of the things when I first came into this faith was, it said, you have to free - purify yourself was the word of all hate and love. Purify yourself of love?! And I found out well, I'm already there. Ain't got nothing to do but turn around. He freed me of the love. I tried so hard to love boyfriends and all these things and I thought, "I'm some weirdo. This ain't working. I don't care if they come or go". (both laughing) I had three husbands. I didn't know love. Its just different reasons for each one of 'em but love – what's love got to do with it. (both laughing)

RS: Well I think you have to go through all of that.

CW: You do!

RS: To really realize -

CW: And now when I come into a religion that says you've got to purify yourself of love which is the hardest thing. You can possibly purify yourself of hate if you kind of understand your motives and that you can work on but purify yourself of love? When you've got loving parents, loving children, how do you purify yourself of that? I didn't have it. So you see, I have been brought up a special way for a special reason.

RS: And you're a special lady.

CW: (laughing) Well, no, I ain't there yet but I'm struggling. And this prayer just touched me because it said, "Make me a hollow reed from which the pith of self hath been blown that I may become a clear channel through which Thy love can flow" and that made sense to me. And since I started getting that out, God has loved so many people through me that I wouldn't have been nowhere near under any circumstance and here He is loving these people through me. You know? Its a whole new world, believe me it is. Thank y'all for putting up with me.

RS: Yes ma'am. (both laughing) Thank you Miss Whitworth. Thank you.