

**The David and Barbara Pryor Center
for
Arkansas Oral and Visual History**

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Arkansas Memories Project

Carolyn Ann Smith-Williams

Interviewed by Kris Katrosh

August 16, 2011

El Dorado, Arkansas

Objective

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Transcript Methodology

The Pryor Center recognizes that we cannot reproduce the spoken word in a written document; however, we strive to produce a transcript that represents the characteristics and unique qualities of the interviewee's speech pattern, style of speech, regional dialect, and personality. For the first twenty minutes of the interview, we attempt to transcribe verbatim all words and utterances that are spoken, such as uhs and ahs, false starts, and repetitions. Some of these elements are omitted after the first twenty minutes to improve readability.

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- Em dashes separate repeated/false starts and incomplete/redirected sentences.
- Ellipses indicate the interruption of one speaker by another.
- Italics identify foreign words or terms and words emphasized by the speaker.
- Question marks enclose proper nouns for which we cannot verify the spelling and words that we cannot understand with certainty.

- Brackets enclose
 - italicized annotations of nonverbal sounds, such as laughter, and audible sounds that interrupt speech;
 - annotations for clarification and identification; and
 - standard English spelling of informal words.
- Commas are used in a conventional manner where possible to aid in readability.

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Kris Katrosh interviewed Carolyn A. Smith-Williams on August 16, 2011, in El Dorado, Arkansas.

[00:00:00]

Kris Katrosh: Okay, this is an interview recorded by the David and Barbara Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History. Uh—the interviewer is Kris Katrosh. The interviewee is Carolyn—uh—A. Smith-Williams. And the recording is taking place at Miss Williams's home in El Dorado, Arkansas, on the sixteenth day of August 2011. Miss Williams, you'll receive a copy of all materials, including a full transcript to review. Once approved by you, the interview will be made publicly accessible on the Pryor Center website and other publicly available sources. If you agree with this process and statement, please say so now, and we'll proceed with the interview.

Carolyn Smith-Williams: I agree.

[00:00:38] KK: Okay. Thank you so much. We're gonna start out with some easy stuff. Please say and spell your full name.

CSW: Carolyn Ann Smith-Williams. *C-A-R-O-L-Y-N A-N-N S-M-I-T-H W-I-L-L-I-A-M-S.*

KK: Exactly like it sounds. Thank you so much. That way we

know for sure we have it right.

CSW: Yes.

[00:01:01] KK: Um—so when were you born, and where were you born?

CSW: Ladies don't usually tell when they're born, but [*KK laughs*] I was born [*laughs*] October the twenty-eighth, 1946, in Strong, Arkansas.

KK: Strong, Arkansas.

CSW: Yeah.

KK: Is that *S-T-R-O-N-G*?

CSW: Yes.

[00:01:17] KK: Where is Strong, Arkansas?

CSW: It's eighteen miles east of El Dorado, and once you get to Strong, then you go north three miles, then you turn right and you go one other mile. [*Laughs*] So that's Strong—Ebenezer. I was born in the Ebenezer community.

KK: The Ebenezer community . . .

CSW: Yes.

KK: . . . of Strong, Arkansas?

CSW: Yes.

KK: Ebenezer, just like—uh . . .

CSW: *E-B-E-N-E-Z-E-R*. Like the rock in the Bible. Ebenezer, the

rock.

KK: Gotcha.

CSW: Yes.

KK: Gotcha. So Ebenezer was not an actual town now. It was
a . . .

CSW: No.

KK: . . . subset of . . .

CSW: It's a community.

KK: Mh-hmm.

CSW: New London at one time was a town.

KK: Mh-hmm.

CSW: And—um—which shared the county seat with El Dorado at
one time.

KK: Oh.

CSW: [*Unclear words*]

KK: Okay. Great. Okay. Well, good. Um—so what we usually do
is talk about—uh—your parents a little bit first, and then we
even reach back maybe to their parents. And it's a lotta
names.

CSW: Yes.

[00:02:17] KK: But it's helpful for us to hear these names and
have them recorded. So—uh—tell me a little bit about—uh—

your parents. Uh—let's start with your—the names of your parents.

CSW: My mom is Doris Louise Smith, but her maiden name is William. And a long time ago, they gave people long, long names, so her—uh—full name is Dora Doris Louise Williams-Smith.

KK: Okay.

CSW: And my father is Carl Lee Smith Jr. And what else did you ask me? [*Laughter*] You wanna know their parents?

KK: Sure. Yes.

CSW: Okay. My mom's parents were—uh—Hubbard Williams Sr., Joe Hubbard, and her mom name is Irene White-Williams. That's my mom's parent. My father's parents are—uh—Altha—uh—Alpha Omega Williams Smith, and her husband is Clark Smith—um—Sr. We were always told that he was not really a Smith, that before he came here, his last name was Himes, and he came as a slave to Arkansas.

[00:03:32] KK: Hmm. So tell me a little bit how he became a Smith then.

CSW: Because a Smith bought him, purchased him.

KK: Hmm. Mh-hmm.

CSW: And so that he took on their name. Uh—but we were always

taught that he was a Himes.

KK: I understand.

CSW: So . . .

[00:03:47] KK: Now let's go back to Alpha Omega because did you have a short nickname for her then?

CSW: Altha. We ca—we would just say Grandmother Altha, but her name was Alpha Omega.

KK: Yeah. How do you spell the nickname Altha?

CSW: A-L-T-H-A.

KK: Okay. Okay. Gotcha. But Alpha Omega, just like from the Bible, then?

CSW: Right. Mh-hmm.

KK: Okay. Great.

[00:04:07] CSW: Now you want their parents' name?

KK: Wow! Do you have that, too?

CSW: [Laughs] Yes. Okay. [Laughs]

KK: That's amazing.

CSW: Yes—um—Alpha Omega, or Grandmother Altha for short, her mother name was Pricilla. We don't have her last name, but her mom—uh—name was Pricilla. And her father was a—a Williams. [Laughs] So we have lots of Williamses. Um—his name is Charlie Williams. Now I can't go any farther than

that with her. But on my mom's side—uh—her Grandmother Irene's mother's name was Laura Wainwright. Her father name was Jonah—uh—White. I have to get it right. You have to think. It was Jonah. No, Jonah Wainwright. We don't have Laura's maiden name. Laura . . .

KK: Okay.

[00:05:04] CSW: But she married a Wainwright. So—um—and I can't go any farther than that on my grandmother's side or my mom's side. But the father's side, Papa Hubbard's parents were—um—Sarah and John—uh—George Williams. That's . . .

KK: John George Williams?

CSW: No.

KK: George Williams.

CSW: George Williams. Uh-huh.

KK: Okay. Not John.

CSW: I skipped one. Papa Hubbard's mother was Rebecca Powell-Williams. His father name was John Williams. Her mom was—uh—his—the parent before that was George and Sarah so . . .

KK: Wow!

CSW: . . . [*laughs*] Williams.

KK: Yeah, that goes way back.

CSW: And that's the one I have the—I have their records where they were sold down in—um—in Mississippi from 1836.

KK: Mh-hmm.

CSW: But they all made it here in, down in the New London area, which was previously Harrison Township, in 1839. They came in as slaves. Uh—the Williams' family brought my mom's family, on her father's side, family in. And—and my—on my grandfather's side also, the—uh—Norsworthys came in with their—they're on my grandfather's mother's side. She was a Norsworthy 'cause she was a slave owner's child.

KK: And what, now, what is that name again?

CSW: Norsworthy.

KK: Norsworthy?

CSW: Uh-huh.

[00:06:38] KK: Okay. Do you know how to spell that?

CSW: I spell it *N-O-R-S-W-O-R-T-H-Y*.

KK: Uh-huh.

CSW: Now I didn't know if that's how—because when I look at the census record, it's—you know, sometime the Norsworthy is spelled differently.

KK: Mh-hmm.

CSW: But we were all taught that . . .

KK: Mh-hmm.

CSW: . . . that she was part of the Norsworthy family—uh—although she used the last name Holly. And—but my mom—uh—always told us that the Norsworthys came—the older heads would always come to see Grandmother Eliza when—uh—they were in town.

KK: Mh-hmm.

[00:07:14] CSW: One other grandparent that was involved on the Powell side was Tarlton Powell. His wife was named—uh—Eliza. We don't have her maiden name, but she married Eliza—he married Eliza Powell. She was—became a Powell when she married. So I can go further back on that—on my mom's—uh—grand—my mom—mom's dad's—my grandfather—and go all the way to my great-great-great-grandmother.

KK: Wow, that's incredible that . . .

CSW: Um . . .

KK: . . . you have all this knowledge.

CSW: Yeah. And the oldest grandmother that we have record of is Rebecca Powell that came with the Norsworthy. She was already eighty-six years old when she shows up on the census

records in 1870.

KK: Mh-hmm.

CSW: She's eighty-six years old. It shows her, Rebecca Powell. It shows one sister. It doesn't say—have the sister's name. It just say she's seventy-five years old. And there's one grandchild and two great-grandchildren, all on the same census record. After 1870 there's no record of the sister or the grandchild or the great-grandchildren. So I don't know if they died or sold. Probably sold to different people, and there's no record after 1870 on them.

[00:08:26] KK: You've spoken a lot about your family's ancestors in terms of how they moved around because they were sold as slaves.

CSW: Mh-hmm.

KK: And—uh—it's a little shocking to hear that—uh—you know, and—and I—I know you're used to talking about it because you've dealt with this a lot.

CSW: Yes.

KK: But I think it's a pretty heavy subject.

CSW: It—it's heavy, but I always had a desire to know who I was, where my family came from. And when I look back at it all—the—all—at all the records, I can follow the Norsworthy and

basically follow my—on my grandfather's side, on my mom's side, I can follow that and all way—brought us all the way to Arkansas. Even down to the point that when they came in—I have a map that—uh—from Virginia where the Norsworthy came in—uh—in—in Sandy—uh—Spring, Maryland—uh—and then into the Virginia area, on down as they moved all way to Alabama where some of the Norsworthys are buried, even down to Samuel Norsworthy, who's buried in the New London Cemetery, on down that way. And up until my grandfather and my uncle died—my grandfather died in 1973—uh—and the Norsworthys were always taught to call him—his—his name was Hubbard. They were always taught to call him Cousin Hubbard . . .

KK: Hmm.

CSW: . . . even the white side. My Uncle Manuel, who died in 1999 at the age of ninety-nine, they still, until his death, they call him Cousin Manuel. And—but that's as far as it's acknowledged. And it—uh—of course, they know the story as well as I do but—uh—the older heads know, but, you know, it's not acknowledged anymore. But up until my grandfather died, it was acknowledged. They called him Cousin Hubbard and Cousin Manuel—the whole—all the—my grandfather and

his siblings were known as "Cousin This" or "Cousin That."

[00:10:32] KK: Now why were they known as Cousin This or Cousin That?

CSW: Because the Norsworthy—the white side had been taught that the—uh—my grandfather and them were their relatives.

[00:10:41] KK: Mh-hmm. Even though—okay, for the benefit of people who have—maybe can't follow this complex story, [CSW laughs] and it's tough for me to follow, some of these families have white members and some . . .

CSW: Oh yeah.

KK: . . . of these families have Black members.

CSW: The Norsworthys is a white family.

KK: Mh-hmm.

CSW: Okay. But because my—my—uh—grand—my—my grandfather's grandmother was white . . .

KK: Mh-hmm.

CSW: . . . was half-white. She was a slave owner's child. Um—it was always acknowledged that they knew this; the white side knew this, as well as the Black side.

KK: I see.

CSW: And [unclear words] like I said, until my grandfather and my uncle died, which were the last ones to be living the—on that

side—uh—that age . . .

KK: Mh-hmm.

CSW: . . . the white children were taught to call them Cousin Hubbard and Cousin Manuel.

[00:11:28] KK: Well, you know, that's interesting because not all families want to acknowledge . . .

CSW: Right.

KK: . . . the connections that were often made between—uh—slave-owning families and the relationships they had with slaves . . .

CSW: Right.

KK: . . . that resulted in children.

CSW: Mh-hmm.

KK: But what you're saying is that this was an open secret.

CSW: Yes—uh—especially ?like I said? with my grandfather and—
and my uncle—um—we were always told that. Uh—
Grandmother Eliza—li—uh—lived, you know, to—uh—died, I
think, the year before my mom—uh—was born. No, I take
that back. She was die—she died in 1942. I think it was
[19]42. It was [19]42. So my mom knew her, and my
mom's now eighty-five. But the story has always been
passed down to us.

KK: Mh-hmm.

[00:12:17] CSW: And you know, when people'll—I hear the questions all the time that—they'll ask me, you know, "Who do I say I am?" You know—uh—you know, do you say you're an African American? Do you say you're Black or whatever? And I tell you—I've told you before that I always tell them what Grandmama told Mama and Mama told me. And it's not necessarily like that because I lived in a house with my grandparents.

KK: Mh-hmm.

CSW: But from the earliest time that I can remember, we were told that my greatest-grandmother, who would be Rebecca Powell, born in 1786—[178]4—1878—[187]4.

KK: White or Black?

CSW: She's—she's Black.

KK: Uh-huh.

CSW: Okay. But she's the mother of the later one's slave owner's child. So that—she would say she was an African who was brought to America and sold to Americans.

KK: Mh-hmm.

[00:13:09] CSW: You're an American born on this land, and you must claim it. By blood, you're Indian related. By human

bondage, you must be a cousin to the white man. Now what does that make me? I'm just a child of God [*KK laughs*] as far as I see it, and I'm just a human being. But you know, to say that we were—I wasn't taught that I was an African American. I am an American of Afric—from African descendants.

KK: Mh-hmm. Mh-hmm.

CSW: But you know, it doesn't bother me, whatever you say.

KK: Mh-hmm.

CSW: Um—so that's the way we learned it.

[00:13:46] KK: Well, that's interesting that your family—uh—was dedicated to—uh—giving you a sense of where you came from very clearly.

CSW: Well, living in a house with—uh—I tell you, I was born in a dogtrot house, the house with the hall down the middle, and in that house was my grandmother Irene and my grandfather Hubbard Williams, my mom, my dad, my two brothers, myself, my auntie, her three daughters, and my two uncles. We all lived in this big house together. So at night, we didn't have TV then, at night, my grandmother sat in—my grandmother was about three hundred pounds, and she had this big chair that she sat in. And so she would read us Bible

stories first. And after the Bible stories, we could ask her a question. And so I—I—I was always curious about what they did, how they did it, and who this and who that. So that's why I can, you know, I can write it on paper, and I can write them in order. But sitting here telling you verbally, I have to think about it, [KK laughs] who comes first. But I can go by—back as far as Rebecca Powell, from 1784 all the way down—uh—to my mom. [00:15:05] And right now, on my dad's side, I tell you there are five generations right now. And I have an uncle that's ninety-seven this year. I have auntie that's ninety-three—uh—and their father was a slave called Clark Smith, on my dad's side—uh—had fourteen children. He was the one that was married to Alpha Omega. Uh—Alpha, my grandmother died in 1965, the same year I finished high school. Uh—my grandfather died in 1949, but he was born in 1859. And to live to 1949, it was three years after I was born. He had fourteen children—uh—and two of them still livin'. They're ninety-seven and—uh—ninety-three. You know, and that's how close my connection is to slavery. You know, to have two—um—I—I have two—uh—family members to say that their father was a slave. That's, to me, that's kinda unique, unusual. And then to have about three—

he—my father has three nephews who're in their nineties. My father would only be eighty-seven if he was living now.

KK: Mh-hmm.

CSW: He died at age fifty-seven in 1981. His oldest brother died in 1980 at ninety-three, so that was the span between the oldest and the youngest child.

KK: That's a pretty big span.

CSW: [*Laughs*] That's a big span. So—uh—but that's—he was fifty-seven. The oldest died six months prior to my dad was ninety-three. And to still have two children out of those fourteen still livin' is somethin'. And to have—my—my—my father would have nephews old enough to be his dad. If he was gonna be—if he would be eighty-seven this coming December, he still has a nephew that's ninety-six. He has one that's ninety-five. He has one that's ninety-three. And he has a niece that's living that's ninety-two. So . . .

KK: That's a pretty big family.

CSW: If that means that I'm gonna be here a long time, I [*laughter*—I'm . . .

KK: That's the way I would take it.

CSW: . . . lookin' forward to it.

KK: That's the way I would take it.

CSW: So . . .

KK: Well, this is—this is a lot of information happening pretty quickly.

CSW: Mh-hmm.

KK: And it may not be easy for everyone to—uh—grasp . . .

CSW: Yeah.

[00:17:29] KK: . . . what it means. What I would like for you to consider doing if you can is choose a relative that you—that has an interesting story and tell us their story a little bit, their history. Just any one of the people that you have mentioned.

CSW: I haven't mentioned her, but . . .

KK: Oh good.

CSW: . . . my—uh—uh—my grandmother's sister, Altha—Alpha Omega . . .

KK: Mh-hmm.

CSW: . . . has a sister. Uh—her name is Willietta Williams because my . . .

KK: I'm sorry. Willietta?

CSW: Willietta. Willietta—etta. Yes.

KK: Okay.

CSW: Um—uh—my grandmother on my father's side maiden name was Williams. My mom's, on my mom's side, maiden name is

Williams. [*Laughs*] My mom's maiden name is Williams. My mom married a Smith. My maiden name is Smith. I married a Williams. My grandmother on my father's side was a Williams. She married a Smith [*laughter*], so it just seems like they're—the Smiths just won't go away. [*KK laughs*] But Grandmother Altha, Alpha Omega, had a ?children? named Willietta Williams. She died in 1986. She was 105. And Aunt Willietta never married. As far as we know, she never married. She never had children. And she only went to the doctor when she was, like, 104. And the doctor told her that's why she had been here so long 'cause she had never been to [*laughs*] a doctor. But she still had some of her original teeth. And Aunt Willietta worked for the same white family about seventy-five years, and she travel as their nurse—uh—live-in nurse—um—for a family right here in El Dorado, the Rushings.

[00:19:09] KK: The—the who?

CSW: The Rushing. They were the Rushing. Their last name is Rushing.

KK: Just like the country?

CSW: Mh-hmm. I—the—uh—yeah.

KK: R-U- . . .

CSW: No, no. Uh-uh. Like the rushing, mighty wind or [*unclear words*].

KK: Oh, *R-U* . . .

CSW: *S-H* . . .

KK: . . . *S-H-I-N-G*.

CSW: Mh-hmm. Yeah. So—and she raise—uh—the children—some of the children and some of the grandchildren. When my dad died in—in 1981—uh—Aunt Willietta, she lived with us unt—uh—for a few years before my dad died. And after my dad died, she had to go to a nursing home. And one of the white children—grandchildren that she had raised came and got her, Dixie—uh—Rushing. I don't know her married name, but—uh—she was Dixie Rushing, I think. The—they lived in Russellville, Arkansas. Came and got her from the nursin' home; took her to Russellville; kept her in the same house with her mom until she died.

KK: Wow.

[End of verbatim transcription]

[00:20:06] CSW: And when she died, she brought her back to her home down in Strong. She was buried in Strong. She's buried in Ebenezer Cemetery. So I still have some of the same things, some of her belongings that she—that were

passed down to her through the white families. I still have some of those things. And Aunt Willietta was—she was only—I'm five three and a quarter—three [*laughter*]*—three-fourths of a quarter, so I call myself tall. I consider myself tall. Aunt Willietta stood maybe four feet five, somethin' like that. And she was a very tiny, petite lady. She never threw away anything, and I don't know if—today she would be called a hoarder, but she was just a collector to me. And she always—my dad was her favorite nephew. So havin' her live with us for those few years and to tell us the stories and things that she went through—how she listened to Joe Louis's championship boxing match standing outside a white person's window. You know . . .*

KK: Oh.

CSW: . . . they let the window up . . .

KK: Right.

CSW: . . . so the Blacks could hear him—as she called him, "the Brown Bomber,"—fight. You know, those kind of stories mean a lot to me, you know. [00:21:37] I've had people that say, "Why do you wanna hear those stories? Why do they mean so much to you?" Because this lets me know whatever they endured is nothing today. And to be told, you

know, "We grew you up to be better and do better." Well, when I think of their character, their stamina, their wisdom, not necessarily from a book, but from life itself, it makes me know that they had to have a heart. They had to know who God was. And I—so I have to—if they had to know who he was, I have to know who he is to do and be whatever it is I am today. So when I think of her, I think of this little lady with such power, such might. To work for some seventy-five years, and then for someone to think—you know, for a white child to think that much of her to come and get her and keep her until her death, you know, that's a lot. That's a lot. And so that's—that story sticks with me.

[00:22:49] KK: Sure. Absolutely. I can't tell—I can't imagine how it wouldn't stick with you. The—it's just interesting that there was a period of time in the United States, a number of decades in the transition between slavery and civil rights . . .

CSW: Yes.

KK: . . . where there was still a long-term role sometimes for Black women in white families.

CSW: Mh-hmm.

KK: And I guess that she was not a slave.

CSW: No.

KK: She was—she had a job.

CSW: Yes.

[00:23:28] KK: But for that to be her job for seventy years is a pretty remarkable thing that still feels a little bit like the family owned her.

CSW: Aunt Willie never—I don't think Aunt Willie ever, ever looked at it like that. And I've talked to one of the Rushing siblings in the last five or six years. I called her, and I just wanted to know if she remembered Aunt Willie. And she told me, "Yes. Yes," that she wasn't raised in the house with her, but she remembered her. And she had fond memories, you know. The little that she told me, it was a joy just to know that even today—and I had gone to Dixie's house in Russellville, Arkansas. I—we had gone there to visit Aunt Willie, and their doors were open to us to come visit. And you know, at—when Aunt Willie died, they called my mom because my mom was big—I told you my dad was her, Aunt Willie's, favorite nephew. And so they always stayed in touch with her. So they left it to my mom—what she—how she wanted to handle the funeral arrangements or whatever. And so you can't help, you know, that [*unclear word*]. Aunt Willie never, ever felt like she was owned. It was a job to her. She took it

serious. And she looked at those children as her children. She looked at the grandchildren as her children. And so, you know, that can't help but bind the races together. You know, I can't speak for someone—another race or I can't speak for another person, but I know how I felt about the Rushings even today. That—to know that Aunt Willie worked for them all that—all those years, and I never really ever heard her say something negative about them during the years that she lived with us. I never heard Aunt Willie speak badly about them.

KK: Right.

CSW: And they kept a record. I remember Dixie havin' a book and—that her mom gave to her. That when Aunt Willie started getting Social Security, they wrote it down. They wrote it down. So you know, that's a bond and that—those are bonds, as far as I'm concerned, that I will have with—Dixie's deceased now, but you know, I have those fond memories . . .

KK: Yeah.

CSW: . . . that—how she treated my auntie. So slavery, although Aunt Willie was after slavery—even for my mom to tell me how Grandmother and I sa—when I—I just say grandmother

or my greatest-grandmother. Grandmother Eliza talked to them. [00:26:15] You know, Grandmother Eliza who had, I think, had seven children. And I still have one of the old trucks—trunks—the camelback trunk—humpback trunk that belonged to her. And so every month, she would go to a different child. You know, they would load her up in the wagon, and she'd go spend a month with this child, and then after that month, she'd—they'd bring in a wagon, and she'd go to this child. And my mom told me of one time, she split her foot cutting stove wood, and it was time for Aunt—Grandmother Eliza to leave, and she stayed on another month [laughs] because she wanted to see after my mom's foot. And so it—those stories just go on. They just tell you. I've found that sometimes relatives won't openly talk about them, but if you stay around them enough and you ask 'em enough questions, eventually, eventually, they'll talk to you when they feel comfortable with you. Because a lot of times, they take it that you're asking questions just for the hell of it. But if you—if they really get the feelin' you're askin' because you truly wanna know, then they'll open up to you. [00:27:37] So—and my grandfather—my mom—Eliza Norsworthy husband was a Cherokee Indian.

KK: Okay, so Eliza . . .

CSW: Badjer.

KK: . . . Eliza Norsworthy was a white woman?

CSW: Half-white. You know, she was a slave-owner's child.

KK: Okay.

CSW: Mh-hmm.

KK: And she married a person who was full . . .

CSW: Born in North Carolina. Cherokee Indian.

KK: . . . full Cherokee?

CSW: Mh-hmm.

KK: Okay.

CSW: Badjer. And that's—his name was Badjer, like the animal.

Badjer. And that's the one that I'm often told that I resemble because of the color of my hair. And I find myself doing things that my grandfather did from that experience, that Native Americans do, because we lived with that. It was like a cross- culture with us. You got a slave-owner's daughter married [*laughs*] to a Cherokee Indian, you know, and—but it was Badjer and Eliza.

[00:28:42] KK: Now tell me again who Badjer and Eliza were to you.

CSW: They were—that was my grandfather's grandparents.

KK: Your grandfather's grandparents.

CSW: On my mom's side.

KK: On your mom's side. Okay.

CSW: Right.

[00:28:52] KK: Yeah. So you have some of that.

CSW: Yeah.

KK: Quite a mixture.

CSW: Yes. Mh-hmm. So it goes around, and you know . . .

KK: Yeah.

CSW: . . . a Cherokee married to a half white and for—the—you're tellin' all the—I'm tellin' all the family secrets now [*laughter*] that even my mom, you know, would not—at twelve years old, I didn't understand. And I had a streak that went through my hair that was white, that went from here all the way back. [Points to streak in hair] And I didn't know that I was really different until I was twelve years old, and kids started teasing me that, "You're old because you have that streak." So then I learned, I guess, that, down through the years, that Badger was like that. And at twelve, I lo—would look at my mom and didn't understand how she looked the way she look and I look the way I look [*unclear words*].

[00:29:52] KK: And how did she look?

CSW: My mom was, as we would say, she was so high yellow, you know, meaning that she was very, very, very fair skinned and had beautiful hair, and it was long. And I didn't understand, "How could she look like that, and here I am, dark?" I had long hair, but I didn't understand the color. And that was confusing to me, so it took me a long time to ask her why. And so the—I wouldn't ask her in person. And this is when we get telephones, so then you know we're way on down the line. So I called her and—but for—this is since I've lived here. Now I've been here eleven years. I call my mom and ask her, "Mom, explain to me why when I was growing up, you looked—and people call you 'Shag.'"

KK: Shag.

[00:30:52] CSW: Her nickname was Shag. "Miss Kate." I never understood those terms growing up. "Why do they call you Shag? Why do they call you Miss Kate?" And she would never would talk to me about it. She would not because it was an unpleasant situation or conversation for her. So finally, one person, Mr. Charlie O'Guinn—this is—now he told me—explained this to me before I moved here because he's been deceased a long time. He told me that they call her Miss Kate because she was so high yellow, and that's a name

given to Blacks who are high yellow, could look like they are mixed with white; they call 'em a Miss Kate.

[00:31:34] KK: Wow. Do you know why? Where Kate came from—where the word—name, Kate . . .

CSW: Well, there was a play—the—long years ago, there was a play and the person, the white person in the play—the play was written for white people, but Blacks were doin' it, and the lady name was Miss Kate. The white lady's name was Miss Kate. They gave that role to my mom. And so from then on, she was known as Miss Kate. And so he said, "That's why they call her Miss Kate because she was so close to bein' white." And that puzzled me, and I still couldn't get the nerve to ask my mom. My mom would always freckle. In the summertime, she would have freckles, and her hair would have a red—get a reddish tone to it. She was always very curly. If she didn't—if she put water or anything on it, it just straightened out, like your hair. [*Laughter*] But other than that, she just had locks of curls, and that was the confusing part with me growing up. And only after I moved here, came here to El Dorado, that I call her on the phone because she wouldn't have this [*laughs*] conversation with me in person. And I called her on the phone one evenin', and I ask her,

"Mom, tell me why they call you Miss Kate. Tell me why they call you Shag. Tell me if what I've heard is true." And I said, "I've heard that your dad was white." She hung up on me. She hung the phone up. So I waited a while, and I called her back, and I asked her again. I said, "I'm not trying to start anything. I just wanna know. I really wanna know." I said, "'Cause as a kid, I was always confused. Why was I dark?" But I was accepted because I had long hair. And that's even in my own race that, you know, if you were dark and had long hair, you were okay. And so [*laughs*]—"And—but you look like you looked. My brothers were a shade lighter than I am. Why me? I'm the only girl. If anybody's gonna take after you, why wasn't it me? And so I just wanna know." She said, "Yes! I was told that my dad is white." And I said, "You"—well, other people had always said that, you know, but I wanted to hear it from her.

KK: Yeah.

[00:33:58] CSW: And she said, "Yes." And so she said, "I'm supposed to be—they say Aggerton [pronounced *Ā*-ger-ton]. Some people say Aggerton [pronounced *Ă*g-er-ton]. I'm supposed to be an Aggerton." And then the—another relative, who's also ninety-two now that's still living,

explained it to me two years ago that that was a conflict between my grandparents because my mom dad's is supposed to be white. Now a lot of people from my family will probably be upset after [*laughs*] they see this, but anyway, it's the truth. So—and—but at a birthday dinner for my mom's first cousin—and she explained it to us, which, you know, none of the other family members would ever dare talk to us about it. And she said that when her mom would—her mother and my mom were sisters. Aunt Birdie Lee—her name is Birdie, my grandmother's sister. Said when Aunt Birdie would keep my mom and her sister—and she was a only child. Her name was Gertrude. And they would be playin' in the yard, and whites would pass by, and they would stop and say, "Whose child is Birdie keepin'?" And they said—they would say, "That's 'Rene's' child." They called my mom Rene. Grandmother Rene, for—short for Irene. "That's Rene's child." And they would be in awe. And so, you know, so people during her age knew about the situation but we—that was just somethin' that was never, ever discussed in the household. And it took me all these years to really confront my mom. Not wanting to hurt her feelings or hurt her in any way, but I wanted to know. I wanted to know if what I heard

all those years was true. And this [*unclear words*]. She did confirm it, but she didn't go into detail. But my cousin did tell us about it two years ago.

[00:36:01] KK: So she said she was supposed to be an Aggerton.

Does that mean that that was the white father's . . .

CSW: Yeah.

KK: . . . name was . . .

CSW: Ager—some people say Aggerton, and some people say Aggerton, so I don't know. But I . . .

KK: Do you know how to spell it?

CSW: It's A-G—it's in the telephone book. I know the name 'cause there are family [*laughter*] members who are still there . . .

KK: Yeah.

CSW: . . . in Strong . . .

KK: Yeah.

CSW: . . . that have that last name.

KK: Could you spell it for me?

CSW: I don't know if it's A-G-G-E-R-T-O-N or what. I don't know.

KK: Yeah.

CSW: I never—that never really interested me. It was just I wanted to know . . .

KK: Yeah.

CSW: . . . if what I had heard as a child . . .

KK: Right.

CSW: . . . growing up was true and so—but we learned a lot.

[00:36:40] KK: Sure. And of course, those questions are difficult.

CSW: Yeah.

KK: And when you think of the time that she came out of, it was very, very . . .

CSW: Yeah.

KK: . . . difficult.

CSW: Taboo.

KK: Yes, yes, understandably.

CSW: 'Cause my mom was born in 1926, and so, you know, during the time when everybody had a washday at the spring and then when—I guess the story even went on into the detail about how this person would come to the—it's just a long story but—and even today, you know, it's still like a taboo story. But I have often wondered if the whites know the story like we know the story. But that's just life, and it's—and in a way, it's history because nothin' is gonna change history. It's already made. It's not gonna change it.

KK: Right.

CSW: But you know, it sets you free. It answers those questions that you've wondered about, and I don't like to wonder. I like to know. And I'll ask. That's how I've gained the history that I've gained . . .

KK: Yes.

CSW: . . . by asking questions.

[00:37:59] KK: Certainly. You think that story's too long to tell? You—didn't you say—you were about to tell me what washday at the spring was like . . .

CSW: [*Laughs*] Well, everybody had a . . .

KK: . . . and why it's relevant to this.

CSW: Yeah. Everybody had a day—you know, the wells were shallow, and if you were gonna wash at home, you would have to start drawin' the water the day before and put it into the tubs and still, I mean, the well may not afford enough water to, you know, rinse the clothes twice or whatever. So the springs already had water. And there was a spring that was located, even growin' up with me, there was a spring located down behind the property that my parents—grandparents owned. And so everybody had a day. There was a clothesline down there and everything, so everybody had a day to go to the spring. And my grandmother's day

was on a Tuesday. So they would go to the spring, and they would wash their clothes in the—they would go in the mornin', wash their clothes, hang them up, and go back in the evenin' after they're dry to take 'em in. And so the next day would be someone else's day. And you know, there wasn't ever a problem 'cause everybody knew the day that they were gonna be at the spring.

[00:39:11] KK: Now did white people and Black people . . .

CSW: No.

KK: . . . use the spring? This was just Blacks?

CSW: Mh-hmm. 'Cause most of the Blacks—the whites would bring their clothes to the Blacks, and they would wash them, and then they would come back to pick them up.

KK: Yeah.

CSW: They would wash them and iron 'em. And I can remember my mom doing that, the ironing, for, like, fifty cent. Fifty cent.

KK: A whole load.

CSW: Yeah.

KK: Oh.

[00:39:37] CSW: Uh-huh. So that just shows you the value of fifty cent in those days. [*Laughs*]

KK: Yeah. It was worth a hard day's work.

CSW: Yes. Mh-hmm.

KK: Or maybe two days' work.

CSW: Well, all the ironin' usually took place in the mornings because they had this charcoal bucket that they put the coal in and heated the irons so—and they would stand and iron for hours at a time and fold them, and then the white families or whoever would come back and pick them up. Two white families that I remember my mom washin' for was a lady named Lois Norris—the nor—was the last name Norris—and Ethma Turbeville. So I remember them washin' for 'em. My grandfather always worked for Sam Turbeville.

KK: What's that last name?

CSW: Turbeville.

KK: Tubesville?

CSW: Mh-hmm.

KK: Okay.

[00:40:42] CSW: My grandfather always worked for him peelin' poles or plowing. And so he was one of the major employers . . .

KK: Yeah.

CSW: . . . for Blacks during those times.

KK: Yeah.

CSW: So . . .

KK: You say he was plowing, or what was the other thing he was doing?

CSW: Peeling poles.

KK: Peeling poles?

CSW: Poles. Yes.

[00:41:02] KK: What does that mean?

CSW: You peel the bark off of a tree that's been cut up. You know, instead of [*clears throat*] it—I don't think it was used for pulpwood. I think pulpwood—I think it was used for basically poles or whatever. And they would peel the bark off it with a drawknife, and so he did that. You know, one lady told me that it was a cord if it was as—like, five feet tall—if it was tall as you were. It was a half a cord if it was waist high. And so they got paid by the number of cords or half cords that they peeled. So . . .

KK: Wow.

CSW: I have [*clears throat*] my uncle's—I have some records of my uncle where he got paid by Sam Turbeville for workin' for him, and there's this—you—it was—it's like—his Social Security number was sent to Sam Turbeville, and Sam

Turbeville was—he was supposed to report to Sam Turbeville.
I still have that.

KK: What about—bout what year was that?

CSW: I think it was in—I don't know if it was between—in between
[19]33 and the early [19]40s.

KK: Okay.

[00:42:16] CSW: Yes. And they always celebrated Juneteenth. I
never under—now that kind of threw me, why the whites
celebrated Juneteenth. But Sam Turbeville would always
have this huge dinner, huge dinner, over in a pasture by his
pond, and he'd even would have tables made between the
trees, just lots and lots of tables. And the week leading up to
that, my grandfather, my uncle, my cousins, you know, all
the Black men—Mr. Cleveland Payne; Mr. Noe Wainwright;
my grandfather, Hubbard Williams; my uncle, Manuel
Williams; my other uncle, Johnny Williams, would all be there
to barbecue goat all night, to barbecue hogs all night.
Whatever needed to be done, they did it. And they would
have these pits that were long pits that were dug in the
ground to barbecue the hogs and things. And whatever was
left after that big day, you know, and I'm talk—people would
come from miles around. The whites would all come and—to

eat that day. And whatever was left then, they would divide it among the Black men who had worked. And that's the first time that I have any knowledge of eating goat. Barbecue goat. [*Clears throat*] But they would do that. [00:43:48] My grandfather worked for 'em once, and they cured hogs. You know, in the fall of the year, they would kill all these hogs. They would cut the meat, salt it down, and the chitlins would always be sent home with the Black men and distributed among the wives, and they would keep the chitlins and the hog heads and the hog feets and thing like that. That was given to them. But they would cut the hogs up and packed 'em in salt, and after so long in salt, then they would hang them up. So one year, the skippers, which is like a little bug or a worm that gets in meat, cured meat, got in it. So Mr. Turbeville gave all this meat to my grandfather, and he load it, had it on the wagon, and he brought it home. And he was tellin' me, he said, "Mr. Sam gave us—gave me this meat and told me to throw it away because it wasn't any good because skippers were in it." Well, my grandmother said, "No!" Said, "Go out there and build a fire around that washpot. Fill it up with water." And once it gets boilin', they dipped every piece of that meat, which was, I guess, a lot of

meat. They dipped it in it, and those things would come out of there when they hit that hot water. She would dip 'em maybe three or four times in that hot water, and those bugs or worms or whatever they were would come out of there. And they saved all that meat, and they would say, you know, "You can't say anything because he'll want it back if he knows it." [*Laughter*] So—and that was just another way they had—and not just one person in the community. You know, if one person had hog, everybody in the community had it. So that's the story—a story that I remember, that they dipped all those pieces of cured meat, the hams, the middlings, the shoulders, and all that in that hot water in that pot and—to save that meat. So I think that was pretty smart.

[00:45:54] KK: And the whole Black community got to share in that.

CSW: Mh-hmm. Yes.

KK: Yeah.

CSW: Yeah. When you kill hogs, whatever family it was, they would—you know, we were like delivery people then because they would say, "Carry this piece to that person. Carry this piece to"—so we were like errand boys and girls then. We'd have it to carry to the different family in the community.

Everybody got somethin' from the hog killin' because they didn't kill just one hog. They would be killin', you know, six, seven, eight hogs or more at one time.

KK: It's very interesting.

CSW: So that's my growing up. That's my upbringing. And I remember those things be—I was little, but I remember them, from the washpots to you name it.

KK: Yeah.

CSW: I've cleaned lots of chitlins, too. [*Laughter*]

[00:46:46] KK: How do you clean 'em?

CSW: Well, once my grandmother would separate them, and my mom would separate them . . .

KK: You might explain to people what you're talking about.

CSW: Okay. That's, as they say—Jed Clampett would say, "That's the inners of the hog." All his intestines, you know. And they're together like a little, thin web together, so you separate them. And once you separate, you cut them in section, makin' sure that nothin'—once you cut it, you got that end so nothin' drains out of that to the others. [*Laughs*]
You hold it, and there may be a section that's long. You know, for us, it was short because we were kids. And you pour water—someone—you hold it—you hold this end and

open this end, holdin' 'em up together, and someone would pour water in it, and then you would do it like this and rinse 'em out [moves arms alternately up and down] and then go out away from the crowd and let that drain out, which rinses all the . . .

KK: Digestive juices.

CSW: Yes. Digestives, [*laughter*] grasses, corn, whatever, from them. And then you'll come back and do it a couple of more times. And once you did that, you would put that section in an area, a tub, and then you'd go and get another section. And so everybody would be doin' this until—and the—once you did the hogs, you cleaned the inners out. Everybody—the first thing that was cooked were the—was—they did backbones. I never understood why they would always have the first part of backbones the day of the hog killin'. But everybody ate. You know, you cooked enough for everybody.

[00:48:26] KK: And backbone was something else that the whites did not want?

CSW: Well, that was when—no, no, that was when Blacks were doin' their own.

KK: Oh, when they were killin' their own hogs.

CSW: Mh-hmm.

KK: Okay. So they were using every piece, and you're givin' us examples of pieces and how they used 'em.

CSW: Yes. Uh-huh.

KK: They started with the backbone . . .

CSW: They would eat—yeah, eat the backbone.

KK: . . . as far as eating.

CSW: Uh-huh.

KK: Yeah.

[00:48:44] CSW: And then they would do the lights. We always had lights, which is somethin' like the liver, cousin to the liver. But they would always do lights and . . .

KK: But it was some sort of organ.

CSW: Yes. Uh-huh.

KK: Uh-huh.

CSW: And so those would be the first parts, you usually—the backbones and the lights—that they would make, like, a hash out of the lights. And we grew up eating chitlins boiled, and the older people sometime wanted them fried. But we basically ate them boiled. So they cleaned the pig feet and the heads. They made hog-head cheese from the heads.

[Laughs]

[00:49:31] KK: Not actually cheese, obviously.

CSW: No, but it gels in a form like cheese.

KK: Oh.

CSW: Yeah. They put pig feet and hog heads and boil until they just totally came apart. And then they would put—season it, then do vinegar in it, and overnight, the vinegar would make a gel. So you could slice it just like you do cheese.

KK: Wow.

CSW: So they called it hog-head cheese. You can buy it in the store still today. But that was a big deal. They did the hog-head cheese. So they use every part. Every part.

[00:50:09] KK: Well, I know that for many families who are homesteaders or pioneers, killin' a hog and usin' all the pieces was how they survived for a whole winter.

CSW: Yes. And even the beef, even a cow, if there were—those who were fortunate enough to—you know, if a cow died from childbirth, you didn't throw the cow away. Well, not of childbirth. From birthin' a calf. You didn't throw the cow away. And to do a h—you can—you—imagine this. That to—we didn't have refrigeration as we know it today—that they would pickle. And my grandmother—my mom would tell me that my grandmother would—it would take a gallon and a half to serve them a whole meal for the seven children. My mom

was one of seven children. And so she would do a gallon and then a half. And she would even cook the meat, beef, or whatever, and add gravy to it, can it in jars, and they would do, she said, over three hundred jars during the summer to carry them through the winter. So they could pickle or can a whole beef to preserve it.

KK: That had to be a lot of work.

CSW: But you did what you had to do. And everybody participated, you know. It wasn't one person did this, and one person did that. Everybody had a role.

[00:51:38] KK: And what time period was that that you're speaking of where they would pickle the—a whole . . .

CSW: My mom was born in [19]26, I told you, so—and I don't think that just started in—when my mom was young. It was done—you know, that was just—the pickling of the beefs, that even came down from slavery. Even the cannin' came down from slavery, all the way—even—people don't can—you don't see it happen a lot now, but there are still those older heads that will still can a lot. You know, I know people now that still can 'cause I do myself. Not beef or anything like that but . . .

KK: Vegetables, for instance.

CSW: Uh-huh.

KK: Yes.

CSW: Yeah, just to keep the tradition goin' . . .

KK: Yeah.

CSW: . . . just to see—I have jars of food, canned jars of things, now that my auntie and mom did that will probably be well over twenty-somethin' years old, and it's still good. So they canned greens, peas, whatever. Rabbits in a jar. Squirrels in a jar with gravy already made to it. They'd cook it, put it in a jar, and make gravy to it, so when they open it up, all they had to do is just heat it. So one of the woodstoves on my porch is from a family member down at Strong. So . . .

KK: One of the woodstoves?

CSW: Mh-hmm.

KK: Yeah.

CSW: Yeah. Mh-hmm.

[00:53:03] KK: Because, you know, for many generations, people cooked with wood, right?

CSW: Well, all the way up until, like, the early 2000, Miss Mary Rochell still had her woodstove in her kitchen. You couldn't tell her that food—she said food taste different if you cooked it on a gas or electric stove than it did on a woodstove. So until she got down and couldn't do it herself, she cooked on a

woodstove, and she had a wood heater.

[00:53:36] KK: Wow. Did she chop all that wood?

CSW: [*Laughs*] No, the kids—you know, if Mama said she wanted it, the kids didn't question. "Mom, it's too cold" or "you don't have to do that anymore." They kept her wood there.

KK: Yeah.

CSW: They kept her wood. And that's the thing. With older heads now, those who still have children, like my mom. My mom had a stroke, and she's in a nursin' home now. But you didn't question it. If they said, "Do it," you did it. And it—livin' in a house with my grandmother, if my grandmother said somethin', you didn't dare—I didn't dare ask my mom.

[00:54:14] You know, I just went—if Mama said it—'cause I call my grandmother Mama. I call my mother Madea.

KK: Madea?

CSW: Uh-huh. And if Mama said it, that was it, and you'd get in big trouble if you—if I turn around and ask my mom somethin' and Mama had told me no, you didn't do that. You know that. I hear kids talkin' about, "Talk to the hand." You say that [*vocalized noise*] to my grandmother, your hand'd be over here, [*points to the right*] your head'd be over there, [*points to the left*], and you might find the rest of your body

somewhere else, you know. [*Laughs*] You just didn't do that. You didn't do that. And any, any adult in that community had just as much right to discipline you as your mom and dad did. Not only did—could they get you. When you got home and they told it, you're gonna get it again. So it wasn't worth . . .

[00:55:06] KK: When you were a kid, you're talking about . . .

CSW: Yes.

KK: . . . this was the way it was done.

CSW: Mh-hmm. And even my mom. Yeah. My mom. That's the same story that's been passed down, you know.

KK: And what was your nickname for your mother? How did you . . .

CSW: Shag. You talkin' about Shag?

KK: No, no, the Madea.

CSW: Oh, I call my mother Madea. My kids call . . .

KK: How do you spell that?

CSW: *M-E-D-E-A*.

KK: *M-E-D-E-A*.

CSW: Yeah. Uh-huh, or *M-A-D-E-A*. Either way you wanna do it.

KK: Uh-huh.

CSW: Yeah, it's just like the movie, *Madea*.

KK: Aah, okay.

CSW: Uh-huh. So it—somebody—some say you—some say
M-E-D-E-A, and some say *M-A-D-E-A*. So . . .

[00:55:38] KK: But that was a term of endearment from you to
her.

CSW: Uh-huh.

KK: Okay.

CSW: Yeah. Oh, total respect. Yeah.

KK: Yeah, yeah, yeah. Okay.

CSW: My kids call me Madea. They call my mother Mama. I call
my mother Madea. I call her mother Mama. And that's the
way we did. So it's just an inverted way. The mother is
Madea. The grandmother is Mama. And that's the way most
Black families today—they'll say—well, I don't know about the
real young generation of Black. Those my age and those
right under me will say Madea and then Mama.

[00:56:12] KK: So this is a common African American . . .

CSW: Mh-hmm.

KK: . . . way of speaking about your mother and your
grandmother.

CSW: Yes. Yeah. Mama's the one who has authority, the
grandmother. [*Laughter*]

KK: Always . . .

CSW: Always.

KK: . . . sounds like.

CSW: Always. Yes, always. Yes.

[00:56:28] KK: Well, I know things have changed a lot now, but the impression I'm getting from you is that this style of discipline, this style of living, the canning of everything, the saving of everything, the teaching of children to make use of every little thing that comes their way, has gone back generations.

CSW: Yes. You didn't get rid of anything. You kept it, just in case. And the just in case meant you never know when you might have to go back, so that's why you're taught how to do it, you know. I know I can go to a store to buy soap today. But I also have lard under my cabinet that belonged to my *[laughs]* grandmother, just in case I got to—in a position that I couldn't buy soap, I know how to make it. So twice a year here, I do lye soap. I do lye soap, just to keep it fresh in my mind and for my kids to know, although they don't wanna know. But they can't say that Mother didn't try to—Madea didn't tell us. For even for makin' moonshine, hog-head cheese, lye soap, I know how to do it. I have a washpot that came down through our family. I have whisky still *[laughter]*

that's part of our family. Just things that—I have some pieces of lye soap that are old. You just kept things. You kept them, just in case.

[00:58:04] KK: And in your case, it sounds like that a lot of the reason that you keep these things, and you still try to do them some, is you just wanna save that history.

CSW: You know, I can't appreciate Ivory Soap if I'd never had to use—if I hadn't had to use something else that was so strong that, you know, you had to have enough water to get it off your skin 'cause you couldn't let it stay on there. So I appreciate Ivory Soap now.

KK: Yeah.

[00:58:32] CSW: But if I couldn't get Ivory Soap, sure, I know how to make lye soap again. Not only do I know how to make it out of lye soap—out of lye that you would buy from the store—well, now, you can't buy it over the counter anymore. You have to buy something called Thrift, which is just the same as lye. And—but I can know how to save the ashes from the heater and put it in a barrel and put holes in the bottom of the barrel and let the water drain on the—rain on the ashes, and the water that drains from those ashes into a pan, and it is just as potent or as strong as lye that you will

buy in a can to make soap. So you know, they used the ash hopper, and that's called doin' it the ash-hopper way. And all you gotta do is just save all your bacon drippin's and whatever to pour in there to kinda neutralize it, and some water, and you can get lye soap. So what is the sayin'? "If I show you how to fish, I can—you can feed yourself for one day. But if I"—no. "If I give you a fish, you'll feed yourself for one day. But if I show you how to fish, you can feed yourself from now on." So that was the way that it was—that I don't wanna—I didn't just wanna—they didn't just want us to know that you can go to a store and buy soap now. And at that time, you didn't e—it didn't even have a wrapper on it. It was just bars of soap in a bin. It didn't have some of the—it didn't have the fragrance to it, definitely. But they bought that soap from the store, but they knew how to make soap that they washed because they weren't buyin' washin' powder and stuff like that and dishwashin' liquids and ?stuff?. They used lye soap. And trust me, if lye soap didn't get it out, the spot out, it couldn't be gotten out. [*Laughter*]

So . . .

KK: Pretty strong stuff, huh?

CSW: Yes, it—very strong.

Bruce Perry: Two minutes.

[01:00:22] KK: Okay, thanks. [*Laughs*] You know, you've already told us such—so much great stuff.

CSW: [*Laughs*] Yes.

KK: And once you got started, I didn't see you act like you were really nervous about it anymore, so you . . .

CSW: Oh.

KK: . . . you've done a good job of [*CSW laughs*] movin' into it.

CSW: I probably told you more than you wanted to hear but any . . .

KK: That's not true. No. You have not done that. And since your work, your life's work, has been to preserve these stories and to preserve these methods of living, we do wanna spend a lot of time on 'em. And I think it's really important that we hear and record these stories so that future generations can remember how these things were done. Because, like you say, there are so many conveniences today, it's gonna be hard to get people of my generation and younger to make lye soap.

CSW: Yes.

[01:01:20] KK: Now when people come here to visit, do you sometimes show them how to do these things? Is that part of

what you do?

BP: Out of tape.

CSW: Twice a year. The last Saturday in March and the last Saturday in October, I have what they call dinner on the grounds. That day, we start out of El Dorado from the—right next door to the welcome center.

KK: Oh, are you out now?

BP: Yeah, we're at thirty seconds left.

KK: Oh, okay. Let's hold that story . . .

CSW: Okay.

KK: . . . until we change tapes.

[Tape stopped]

[01:01:48] KK: Okay, let's talk a little bit about bright colors.

CSW: [*Laughs*] Bright colors.

KK: You just—you were talkin' to me before [*CSW sniffs*] the camera was rolling about something that sounded interesting to me.

CSW: Yes. My great-great-great-grandmother, George and Sarah, that I have their papers where they were sold in Lafayette County in Mississippi—the story that she told to my great-grandparents and on down through the years were that they were in Africa, and they came from the Ivory Coast. But they

were in Africa. When they were in Africa, and the whites came and were showin' 'em all the bright colors and fabrics and stuff. And so, you know, they told—they had some onshore, but then they had more aboard this big boat and told them to come aboard. They were gonna show them all the colors. And they got caught up in all the bright colors, the pretty fabrics and things, and when, she said—she and her brother were on the boat, and when they paid any attention, they were way out in the water. And she said some of their friends, people that she knew, jumped overboard. But they came on, and when they got to Tennessee, that her brother was sold. You know, they came aboard someway else, but when they finally made it to Tennessee, they were split up. Her brother was sold and went somewhere up in the Illinois area, and she was sold and then wound up in Arkansas or in Tennessee and then came on to Arkansas, and that was the last that she heard of her brother. And so when you talk about bright colors, I always think about that, and I only imagine when I look at orange and reds, I'm always reminded of bright colors that that's how she wound up in America.

KK: That . . .

CSW: It's fascinatin' to know that simple—something so simple . . .

KK: Yeah.

[01:03:58] CSW: . . . could get you so mesmerized or so enthralled in somethin' that you forget about anything else. You forget about your surroundin'. And it's a lesson in that, you know. Never get caught up in s—in anything so that it makes you lose focus on what's going on about you.

KK: [*Knocking sounds*] Okay, stop tape for a second.

[Tape stopped]

[01:04:20] KK: What we were talking about before the tape break was how you take things like the making of lye soap and things that were done in the past, canning and things of this nature, and demonstrate them a couple times a year.

CSW: Yes.

KK: Tell us a little bit about those events.

CSW: On the last—I do it twice a year. On the last Saturday in March and the last Saturday in October, we have what they call dinner on the grounds. And I call it dinner on the grounds because when we had family reunions or—the second Sunday in August was what they call our 'ttractor meeting Sunday when everybody that was away from home came home, and they would have—my grandmother and them

would fix cakes, dressin', pies, and all these things, peas, and things, to carry to church. And my grandmother would have a—maybe a dishpan, and she would have all these things arranged in a dishpan and tie it up with a tablecloth and carry them to church. She may have more than one and carry to church. And everybody got dressed. You put on your best dress then, and my mom and my grandmother were seamstress, so you always had new dresses. You always had new dresses. They sewed for everybody in the community. And my grandmother never had to use a pattern. She just knew how to cut it out . . .

KK: Wow.

CSW: . . . and do it on newspaper and then make people dresses. So we get to church and after the morning service, after the preacher preached, we would go outside and have dinner on the grounds. You know, they had quilts for the kids to spread out on. They would bring the benches out of the church and all—out of the trunk of cars or whatever that they would have there. You know, back before I remember—I got to the age where I remember—they only had the wagons there. And everybody would spread their dinner out and everybody—you got a little of this from that person. You got a little of that

from that person. But you just went around, and it was really a celebration. You know, that was, you know—there would be so many cars and even wagons sometimes, a few, that you couldn't get close to the church, you know. All up and down the road, vehicles would be parked because people always came home for our August meetin', or older people would say 'ttractor meeting.

[01:06:47] KK: Now why did they call it a tractor meeting?

CSW: Because it attracted everybody. It attracted, so . . .

KK: Oh!

CSW: . . . the things you're sayin', like, a tractor. No.

KK: Yeah, yeah.

CSW: Uhn-uhn.

KK: I thought that's what you were saying.

[01:06:59] CSW: No, attraction. Attractor meet. You know, older people and even Blacks today cut things short. We don't pronounce the whole word. You know, instead of, like, "fore I can," "fore I can," we say "forican." You know, older people will still say things like that. They don't say the full words, you know. Even in the church today, you can be singin' the same song out of a book, and you're singin' the actual words. But if you listen to a Black church sing the same hymns, we

don't say the same words because so many of them couldn't read, and that's where a lot of people say that they are, what, rapping or whatever. That one person who possibly could read would chant the word, you know, "I heard the voice of Jesus." So one person says that; the other person follows. All the congregation follow. So they may not say it exactly right. They're sayin' what they think they heard. So we could be singin' the same song and usin' totally different words, but we're singin' the same song.

KK: Yeah.

CSW: So that's the way it is with 'ttractor meetin'. A-ttraction. But it's 'ttractor meeting. We havin' 'ttractor meeting. So attract—'ttractor meeting instead of attract. So they had 'ttractor meeting. And so it depends on who's talkin' to you as to how they say it or what they say.

KK: Sure. Sure.

CSW: And—but the favorite thing out there is instead of saying "fore I can," they'll say "forican." They just put all those words together. So—and that still happens a lot so—but you know, everybody gathered together. [01:08:57] You know, there were from—there were—we called 'em—like, five churches. They're called sister churches because family members from

this church had member who were married into that church and on, so and on and so forth. All of them came together that day, the second Sunday in August. We just went through that this past Sunday. So it never changes. It never changes. Ebenezer's always the second Sunday in August. Mount Zion's is always the fourth Sunday in August. Used to be Christian Chapel, they no longer have service there, but that was the first Methodist Church for Blacks there. They always had theirs the third Sunday. So you know, you were at ever—and the first Sunday was Batts Chapel, so you were either at Batts Chapel the first Sunday, Ebenezer second Sunday. Christian Chapel was a Methodist Church, but you were there the third Sunday. Mount Zion, you were there, and then Shiloh, you—which was a church that came on in later years. Shiloh is probably the youngest church. And then most of the Baptist church are much older. My church, Ebenezer, started in 1864. Christian Chapel was earlier than that. Mount Zion, I don't know the exact date of Mount Zion, but Mount Zion is a very old church, too, and so it's in Urbana, Arkansas, but the people in Strong are in Harrison Township/New London area, married into Mount Zion and so—but those churches are always gonna come together.

They're gonna come together. So Sunday was our big day. You know, the—and so we still have dinner. Only thing now, they basically cook it in the kitchen . . .

KK: Yeah.

CSW: . . . and some people will bring it. [01:10:40] Where long time ago, we had dinner on the grounds outside. And that's what I do here. On that last Saturday in March and last Saturday in October, I have dinner on the grounds. So we ride the covered wagons from El Dorado out here, and we usually leave El Dorado maybe nine thirty or ten, so we get out here just about time for lunch. And anybody that wants to wagon—ride in the covered wagons, can come and get on them and ride out here. Once they get out here, our standard dinner—we have brush-arbor service because long years ago . . .

[01:11:17] KK: You have what now?

CSW: Brush arbor.

KK: Okay.

CSW: Long time ago, when slaves didn't have a physical house church to have church in, they had—they took three posts and put in the ground, and then the fourth post would usually be a tree, and they would build to that tree with brushes,

limbs, and thing, so only the preacher was covered.

Everybody else sat out on benches made out of trees that were cut down and laid down, and they sat on those. So it's brush arbor. So we still have that. The preacher preaches, and after he preaches, we have dinner outside. Our standard menu is always fried chicken, collard greens, turnip green, black-eyed peas, neck bones, pig feet, chitlins, and peach cobbler. And we always cook—do the cracklin's in the washpot. We do lye soap. And ahead of time, because hog-head cheese has to gel to take shape, we do the hog-head cheese prior to that day. So people start comin' on Friday night and so Saturday—there's no charge, and it's open to the general public. So the last two years, we've had a mixed crowd. You know, whites are starting to participate.

Because, you know, just be—lots of people think these were experiences just Blacks went through, but everybody had the same experiences. We just did them separately so long. And then if we were there, we're in a different role than we play now. You know, we were the cooks, or we're the servers or whatever. But now we come together, and, trust me, I have people come from Texas, from Mississippi, Oklahoma, all around, to come to my dinner on the grounds. And we have

tea cakes because tea cakes play a very important role in the Black community.

KK: Really?

CSW: Yeah.

[01:13:16] KK: Tell me more about that.

CSW: When you carried the kids—if you're in the wagon—because this is a long journey in the wagon for the kids, you carry tea cakes, so they could eat on. So—and the most important thing about any baked goods for Blacks is that if you don't have your fingerprints in them, then you haven't done your job. So once you make tea cakes, biscuits, what—you always do your fingerprints. You push down on it so your fingerprint—that means you made it, you know. You've really done it. So tea cakes, a real tea cake, is a—has the fingerprints of the maker in the top of 'em—or a biscuit.

KK: That's interesting.

CSW: But they always take—carry tea cakes. So when I go on trail rides, and I go on trail rides from—we'll leave on a Sunday and be gone till the next Sunday.

KK: Wow!

CSW: So we ride from Monroe to Baton Rouge. I ride from Beaumont, Texas, to Houston. I ride from Tyler, Texas, to

Winnsboro, Texas, you know. So different times a year, I go on, you know, that's—we don't do so many trail rides when it's really hot. But in October we start. I'll go from Tyler to Winnsboro, Texas. In February I go from Beaumont to Houston with my mules. I have mules that pull my wagon. In Texas on the—from Mon—from Beaumont to Houston, you have to use the old-timey wagon with the wooden wheels. You have to use that. But most other rides, you can use the rubber-tire wagon. But I always take—sometime I take two hundred tea cakes. And so everybody—sometime they—now not only do they call me the quilt lady, they call me the tea-cake lady. [Laughter] So—but my cousin, we call him "Doc" Frost. His name is James Frost. He's a fantastic tea-cake maker. So I'll tell him, "I can do it, but I do so many other things," so I don't even worry about that anymore. So I—because I know that his are gonna taste like they used to taste—my grandmother and auntie—that I'll tell him, "I need 150" or "I need two hundred tea cakes." And he's gonna get them here. So time I get on the trail, that's what people start lookin'. "We want tea cakes. We want tea cakes. We want"—and I don't sell them. I give them away. I give them.

[01:15:46] KK: How did you get started with doing these trail

journeys?

CSW: Because I wanted to know how my—and I wanna say great-grandparents. I'm talkin' about greatest-grandparent. So you know, to have to really walk behind the wagons . . .

KK: Yeah.

CSW: . . . from—whether they were comin' from Virginia all the way down to—from Virginia—Maryland to Virginia, Virginia to the Carolinas, on to Georgia, to Alabama, Mississippi, and to finally make it into Arkansas. I wanted to know if I could've survived that. And I will tell you right now, "No." [Laughs] But it's exciting to know that, you know, you didn't stop because it rained. You didn't stop because it snowed. You didn't stop because it was just outright cold. You kept goin'. And so it's really something.

KK: Yeah.

[01:16:44] CSW: Now I've modernized my wagon. I have a rest—bathroom on [laughs] my wagon. [KK laughs] And if I have to, I can sleep on my wagon 'cause I can close the doors. But at that time, they just had a cover over them. And you can only imagine, you know, I—well, I can't even begin to imagine how they survived . . .

KK: Yeah.

CSW: . . . this. And when I go on that ride in February, and it has snowed on us, and I'm thinkin'—and to go through a storm, you know, it's—you know, you are sayin', "Thank God for my family and my family's friends" and they—that without the support of each other, there is no way you could've survived. But you know, when I think about my Grandmother Irene, and she says that it's—we would say, "It's tryin' to rain—or it's tryin'"—"no! You can't say that. God doesn't try to do anything. It's either rainin' or it's not." [KK laughs] You—and so we knew, you don't say, "It's tryin' to rain." And I tell people that even today. During the time I was in the service and when I'm on that trail, they say, "It's tryin' to ra"—"Uh-uh. You can't say that 'cause God doesn't try to do anything." And so when it's rainin' [laughs] out there on that trail, and you're sitting up there on the seat, and you have to have a raincoat on, and I imagine that—I don't think they had a raincoat, you know. They just had to endure it. And then when you catch a cold out there, and you're thinkin', "Now I can stop at Walmart or—and I don't have to sleep cold because I drive my motor home ahead. [Laughter] So when I get off this wagon, I can go in my motor home."

[01:18:38] And then I understand why they had so many

remedies. Now they knew what bushes to cut, what leaves to boil, what sticks to do this, and what cockleburs, and we've learned that, you know, that, you know, you drink—every day you drink sassafras tea. Instead of coffee or tea, you drink sassafras tea. And they knew which roots to cut to boil. And sassafras on the back of the stove was just as common as you keepin' the oil from the drippin's. The cockleburs are from the gum tree. You knew that you could take the dry ones, put them in a pan in the oven, and roast 'em until they came apart, and they would make a poultice for a sore—the—a burn. You know, they knew that you—my—you got a boil or a risen, you cut salt pork up and put it on the back. Those things. Those things. My Aunt Minnie never used—well, later on I think they—now I know they didn't buy toothbrushes, but she always had a sweetgum twig that—and she dipped snuff. She always brushed her teeth with a sweetgum twig. You know, people don't know anything about that . . .

KK: Yeah.

CSW: . . . today. That if you had a earache, they took a betsy bug, broke his neck, and put that little drop of blood in your ear for a toothache.

KK: Wow.

CSW: Every fall, you know, Miss Ethel Liven would go down to her pond and gather a can of minnows that you fish with. We had to swallow one for whooping cough, to keep us from havin' whoopin' cough. That if you had a cold, you had to go out and pick a dry cow chip. They came and put it in—you brought it, and my grandmother put it in a rag and put it off in a pot and boiled it and then—and the rag kept it from the—all this dry stuff, manure, from getting all in it, and then they took it out, and they put a little sugar in it. You had to drink it for a cold. [*Laughs*] You know, mullein, made a tea out of it. Just all kinds of things that today people would say, "Oh, that will kill you." [*KK laughs*] Well, it didn't kill us, but I don't know if cow chip is a—I'm quite sure cow chip isn't the same now with all the stuff they feedin' 'em . . .

KK: Yeah.

[01:21:20] CSW: . . . but they were just eating grass then. But all those things that we still know, and sometime we don't swallow the minnow, but the mullein, you know, there a lot of houses down in Strong or out in Ebenezer who still grow mullein because they have grandparents who still believe in mullein tea. Now you know, they sell sassafras where . . .

KK: Kay.

CSW: . . . you know, long time ago and even now, if you know what you're lookin' for, you go out there and cut it, and you boil it and use it. That—the dye to the feed sacks that they quilted with. They know if they go out there and get those red berries that—I call 'em boysenberries. I don't know what they are, but I know that if you burst them and they get on your clothes, it's not coming out. They use that to boil it, strain it, and then to dye the feed sacks if they wanted a different color for the lining of a quilt. They dyed it. They boiled roots and leaves and things to get the different colors. Those are the things that my grandparents taught my mom. My mom passed it on down to us. And I said it in that manner, but a lot of it I was there because my—I was in—we were in the house—she's—my cousin that was in the house with us that we learned these things. You don't forget them.

KK: Yeah.

[01:22:45] CSW: And you remember them, just in case.

[*Laughter*] Just in case, you know, that you may have to do it again. And so, of course, my kids don't wanna hear some of these stories today, but it doesn't make any difference 'cause I'm gonna tell them anyway. [*KK laughs*] And I always tell them, you know, "The things that I have that I

have kept down through the years, that I've collected, you know, I can tell you those that are tie into my—our family. I can tell you who they belonged to. I can tell you the meaning behind them—that if you do somethin' that I didn't leave instructions for you today, I will be just like Arnold Schwarzenegger. I will be back." And so I tell them that all the time. So if they do something that I said not do when I'm gone, I'll be back. [Laughter] So—'cause I was taught, I was brought up believing that those things happen. That there were ghosts. There were ghosts. So . . .

KK: Do you . . .

[01:23:54] CSW: But it's just—when I think about the growing up and the things that I learned, and the reason I do what I do the way I do it even today is because I appreciate the stories. And if we don't continue to tell them, they're lost. They're lost. And as many stories as I've been told, as many things as I heard, I know that there are still so many . . .

KK: Yeah.

CSW: . . . that were never told, and they're gone for life. They're gone for life. So that's why I live like I do. I live very simple and very plain because it's just good to know that if you had to—if there were no lights, that I still have a kerosene lamp.

If I couldn't go to the grocery store to buy food, I know which leaves and which bushes that I could use. And even if there was no runnin' water, I know that I can go to a stream, and I can boil it or find a spring, and there's one on this property, that I could still make it. That there are so many things that if I didn't have or if I had to be without, I could still survive. I could still survive. [01:25:24] When I think about the telephone, my grandfather, Hubbard Williams, every mornin' about six o'clock or at the break of day, he walked to the back porch, no shoes on, and he always slept in BVDs or union, as we call 'em, he would walk to the back porch, and my Uncle Manuel lived about a mile away, and he would—my grandfather would go to that porch and do this Indian-type yell every day, every mornin', and he would stand there and wait for the other brother to answer back. If he did not answer, my grandfather got dressed because he knew something was wrong, and he was goin' to see. But I never knew him having to do that but one time. Other than that, my uncle always answered back. But that was every day as long as he was able to go there. He did that yell. And you know, to think that your mouth, your voice could travel a mile [*unclear word*], but that was every morning. Every morning.

And that's somethin'. And that's why I tell you a lot of Native American customs . . .

KK: Yeah.

[01:26:40] CSW: . . . and my grandfather never adjusted to use an indoor bathroom. He would go out [*laughs*]*—there was a pine thicket right there, and he would bend this sapling over, a tree, a sapling, over, and that's what he'd use. Bathroom, he just never got adjusted to that. You know, I'm not gonna say he didn't use it sometime, but as far as just totally accepting it as his way, hm-mm. No. His weapon was always a piece of chain about this long with a leather strap hooked onto it that he could hook around his hand, and he could do a lot of damage with that. But—and he carried that in his back pocket. Always carried, I'm tryin' to think of the name of it, in his pocket, a buckeye, because it was said to have medicinal purposes. So you didn't see the people in the community, the men, without havin' a buckeye in their pocket. I still have my grandfather's. I still have it. One side is thin and has a hole in it, but I have one that's good. Always. He always had a buckeye in his pocket and that little piece of chain with that leather strap in his back pocket. And we used to tell him that he smoked a pipe because that was*

his peace pipe. [KK laughs] And—but it's just those things that I remember about him and growing up. He always called me Mehite Belle. Mehitte Belle. That was my Native American name. My grandfather's the only person that never called me Carolyn. He called me Mehitte Belle. And there are only two people that are still living today that will say that to me, and that's James and George D. Evans because they remember their—George D.'s—James is probably in his early seventies. George D.'s probably closer to eighty, and they still live in Strong. But they call me, even today, Mehite Belle. But my grandfather gave me that name, and he always said that I looked like Badjer, the Indian, Cherokee Indian, and he named me that, Mehite Belle.

So . . .

[01:29:11] KK: What does that mean?

CSW: Mehite means blessed one.

KK: Ah.

CSW: And I think he did that because I had that streak of gray . . .

KK: Yeah.

CSW: . . . that was through my hair, and I was the only one that was born with that. I used to wonder why about that one, too, but I realized that there was—nobody had the answer to

that. "Why me?" But that was what my grandfather called me, Mehite Belle. And he had nicknames for basically all of us, different things that he called us, but mine was Mehite Belle.

KK: How beautiful. How nice it is to have that. And the gray streak in your hair, he took as a sign of something very positive.

CSW: Yes. Mh-hmm.

KK: Isn't that nice?

[01:30:01] CSW: Yeah. Now I told you I didn't think I was different until I was about twelve.

KK: Yeah.

CSW: And then when kids started sayin', "You're old! You got that"—and by the time—when I was in my early to middle twenties, I almost looked like I look now. It just—I usually could cover it up, and I would see my uncle—one of my uncles would get sut—soot—or sut from the heater and mix it with a little water and [*laughs*] then put it in his hair to try to color the gray. I even tried that. I never dyed it, but I tried that to see because I didn't understand why kids called me—why I was old because I had this streak in my hair.

[01:30:50] And it just continued to do like it is now, just

[laughter]—so now I've had people to say it—some people call it a prophet streak. I've been told that. I always am reminded of when I met you the first time, and I told you of an experience that I had at a cemetery. You-all were wondering if I was gonna show up if you took my picture [laughter] because—and I just had that experience recently that I was told that they couldn't see my face because the gray hair just blinded them in the sunlight, and when I got in the building, people were comin' around to see if there was a face that went with the head on the shoulders. And they ask me questions that—"What is it? Why is it?" And I told, "I don't know." And I don't. But I've had lots of strange things then. I don't understand the prophet streak. I don't understand bein' told, "You have a gift." So certain things, you just learn. You don't question. So those are the things that I don't question. When they say that, I just look at it—"If you pinch me, I'm real." [Laughter] So—but it's—I've had some really interesting things said to me and about me. To me, I'm just me. And I'm just me with white or gray or silver hair. But I'm much grayer than my mom. Much, much grayer. And she's eighty-five. I don't think there's anyone in the immediate family that looks like me, that have hair the

color of mine. So I guess I'm blessed, just blessed to be with old hair and not-so-old face yet. [*Laughter*] So . . .

[01:33:07] KK: Let's talk a little bit about, somewhat in chronological order, a little bit about your life. You were born in, you know, in this area, but not directly in El Dorado, right?

CSW: No. I was born in Strong. And, well, I say Strong. Ebenezer, New London area. That was where I was born and raised, out there in that little community, a mile stretch that goes between Pigeon Hill Road and New London Road. Everybody on that road is related by blood or by marriage. And I went to high school—elementary and high school in Strong and rode a bus from—I've gotten on the bus, and it wasn't good daylight . . .

KK: Yeah.

CSW: . . . in the mornin'. And then as the seasons changed, sometimes when we'd get home in the evenin', it'd be dusk dark. That's how long we rode a bus. And I went to a segregated school. That never, all of my years there, growing up there, I was never—I knew that Blacks went in the back door and that we couldn't go certain places and things like that. But I didn't think that much of it growing up because that's what my mom did. That's what my

grandmother did. So nobody ever had to tell you you had to do it. [01:34:48] You just did it because that's what your parents and grandparents did and everybody else. After high school, I went to college. I never thought that I would be able to—my parents would be able to send me to college. And so I really thought that, immediately out of high school, I could be the best wife any man could ever have. I truly believed that. I truly [*laughs*] believed that. So my first year—I graduated in [19]65. I didn't go to college until 1966. I got married and—because my mom was working in El Dorado for thirty-five dollars a week. She had to pay five dollars to ride with someone, so that mean she brought home thirty dollars a week. And there was no way that my mom was gonna be able to send me to college makin' that. I have an older brother, so I'm in the middle. I have two brothers. One's older; one's younger. My oldest brother—my mom worked for the Reynolds, H. D. Reynolds' family, you know, here in El Dorado and—makin' thirty-five dollars a week. [01:36:02] She borrowed [*shows emotion*] enough money for 150 dollars in advance from the Reynolds to pay my brother's tuition to send him to school, so I knew that there was no way that me graduating—and he graduated in [19]64,

and I graduated in [19]65. She couldn't keep both of us in. And tuition was only 150 dollars. So—and I told you my mom was a seamstress, so not only did she work for H. D. Reynolds and helped raise Jack Reynolds, Dessie Reynolds, Ruth then—Dessie is deceased now, but Jack and Ruth, I think, still live—Jack lives here in El Dorado still. But she worked for that family and they—to think that they would allow her to borrow against her check to come up with 150 dollars, you know, says a lot. And I always thought highly of Mrs. Reynolds and H. D. Reynolds. Mrs. Reynolds is deceased also, so we've—I've kept up with her family. [01:37:17] And that—he was in school, so I thought the only thing that I can do is get married and be the best wife that I could ever be and hope that my kids would be able to someday go to college. But my brother, that was durin' the Vietnam time, so my brother was drafted. And although he was in college, he coulda got a deferment, but he didn't because he said it was more important for the girl to go to school. So ?Sully? was the guy that I was married to. He was in college, too. He—and both of 'em were drafted, and they went on to service. So my mom did the same thing with the Reynolds that she had done with my brother to send me to college. And I had

my first child. I started college when my daughter was six months old because my mom said they wanted to raise me to be better and do better. And I always say that to kids now, "When you know better, you supposed to do better."

[01:38:39] But I can remember just before I got out of high school, I was elected Miss Gardner High. And I didn't wanna be queen of the high school because I knew that you had to have a suit and that—at that time, the Miss—the queen of the school would have to have a suit with a hat and all that. And I knew my mom couldn't buy that. And I'd have to have a balldress to wear durin' the homecoming ceremony, and I knew she couldn't do that. So I didn't want to be elected queen. I was hoping that—but I was elected anyway. They—the high school from ninth through twelfth voted, and they voted for me to be queen. And I didn't wanna put that burden on my mom. But Mrs. Reynolds told her to go to Samples, a store in El Dorado then, that they had some last-year dresses, and she had talked to them and told them to let my mom have a dress for twenty-eight dollars. And twenty-eight dollars is not a lot of money, but then, twenty-eight dollars for my mom, for the average **?back?** then, it was a lot of money. We're talkin' about 1965. But my mom got the

dress. But Mrs. Reynolds pay for that dress and allow my mom to pay her two dollars a week. [*Sighs*] I still have the picture from that. My dad bought fabric, and my mom made my suit, but Mrs. Reynolds bought the hat for me to wear. [01:40:43] To this day, when I think about sacrifices that my mom has made for me—I am sixty-four years old now, and to this day, I've never gotten into an argument with my mom. Never. I'm not gonna say I didn't feel like it. I was maybe sometimes—would've been just a—but I never did because I remember the sacrifices she made for me to go to school and all those other people to go to school. And so I went to school. I never made a bad grade in my college. I studied because I knew I had to. It was like I had one chance. I didn't have the option not to do good. And that's where, I tell people, that's where I got my heart from, my mom. Because not only did she do that to help me, she did it for my cousin. I can remember my dad having to pick us up from school. And we were—I went to college at Pine Bluff. That was AM&N. And they know—my cousins know, too, that sometimes when we get almost back to Strong and the gas just—the truck would start to jerk. My dad has gotten out and blowed in the gas tank to make it on into Strong. Those

are the things that I remember. That my parents sacrificed for me and for my cousins so we could go to school and be better and do better. So when I think about my family's history, I'm reminded what I think was very difficult for me to deal with and live with, the sacrifices my mom and dad made for me. [01:43:28] It was just a different form of slave. Different form. A higher grade. Higher level. But in so many ways, I know my mom cried a lot of night, [*sniffs*] wonderin' how she was gonna do it. But the one thing that we always been raised, and I knew she was raised the same way, that if you believed and that if you would ask God, that he would make a way, and he did, even for my ancestors. And I can only imagine that they told their kids the same thing, that he's gonna make a way, and he did. So that's why it's important for me today to do what I do to let kids know that if you truly want to, and I had to truly want to. I had to truly want to go to school, do the best I could. Like I say, it wasn't an option for me to fail. It wasn't an option. I had a duty to do the best I could every time I could, everywhere I could, because that's what my mom had taught me and showed me. My mom was quiet. She didn't say a lot. I would wonder why sometimes I would see her stand, washin' dishes, and

tears would roll down her face, and when I'd say, "What is wrong?" She'd say, "I'm okay. These are not tears of sorrow or sadness. They're tears of joy. They're tears of joy." And I would ask her sometimes why she always expected so much of me. She said, "'Cause I raised you to take care of yourself." And she always said that. "Don't let your pride keep you from askin' for help." And I know she said that because she had to get rid of her pride to ask the Reynolds for help 'cause she was not thinking about herself, but she was thinkin' about me. She was thinkin' about my brother. So even today I don't have that kind of pride that if I need help, I won't ask. And I think that's why I know so much about my ancestors is because I ask questions.

KK: Yeah.

[01:46:26] CSW: I wanted to know. I wanted to know. And that's why I live as I do now. I tell you, I live very simple. [*Sniffs*] I never wore makeup in my life. I never wore makeup in my life because I want—never wanted to alter who I was. I wanted to just be Carolyn. And my dad said that "You're the best person that you know. And if you don't think that, how can you ever convince someone else that you're a good person?" So I tell you today, I'm the best person I know.

[*Laughter*] I'm the best person I know. But as far as my mom, there's nothing, there's nothing, if she was able to ask me to do, if it was in my power, I would do. And Sunday for our 'ttractor meetin', for our dinner on the grounds, I took her from the nursing home to take her back to church. And she's not able to go and do anymore by her—on her own. So I get a chance to carry her to church twice a year now, and that's at Easter and on August meetin'. I carry her. I have to have help with her, but I carry her.

[Tape stopped]

[01:48:13] KK: When we think about what our ancestors had to sacrifice to help us be where we are today, and for you and your family, that's so close to the years of slavery. And then you also mentioned that workin' for thirty-five dollars a week for a white family was also not very far from slavery.

CSW: No.

KK: Just like sharecropping was not very far from slavery. And for you to sit here today and to be able to enjoy your life, and your kids can enjoy their lives, you know, that's very emotional stuff. We understand that.

[01:48:48] CSW: But you know, my mom, just as my auntie didn't look at it when she worked for the Rushing family, didn't look

at it as they owned her.

KK: Right.

CSW: My mom had the highest respect for the Reynolds, you know. She could tell you right now that Jack Reynolds's favorite thing was a chocolate pie and she—how she—"I made Jack this chocolate pie, " and, like I said, Jack Reynolds is a prominent businessperson in El Dorado today. And—but you know, to hear my mom talk about that [*unclear words*] or Ruth or Dessie or whatever, you know, it wasn't like—she didn't look at it as a burden that she was workin' for next to noth—that wasn't it. That wasn't it at all. She was workin'. She was gettin' paid. And what she did with thirty-five dollars, like I said, it wound up being thirty dollars 'cause she had to pay five dollars to ride back and forth. [01:49:49] What she could do with thirty dollars, wind up with that she had, what she could do with thirty dollars, and you know, I can't imagine with tuition today, even when my son and my daugh—my son was in grad school. My son finished from Ole Miss at—in 2000, and then he finished from down at University of Monroe [*sniffs*] two years later. When I think about his tuition, when I think about out-of-state fee at Ole Miss, you know, thirty-five dollars or thirty dollars.

[*Laughter*] My goodness! And when I was making, even up to—when he was—got out of Ole Miss in 2000, trust me, it was a struggle. But I had the same attitude that my mom had. "Somehow, I'm gonna do this." And I did.

KK: Yeah.

CSW: And when I—one semester, one semester, his third year at Ole Miss, and you know, a lot of people asked me, "Why would you want your son to go to Ole Miss? With a school with that reputation, why would you want him to go to Ole Miss?" "That's where he chose to go." You know, he knew where I had gone to college. He knew his dad had gone to Alcorn State University. That didn't make any dif—we said, "Where you wanna—wherever you want to go." Why he chose Ole Miss, I have no earthly idea, but he did. So that was fine. My thing was, he's goin'. He wants to go. That's it. And so we paid the tuition for it. You know, there was no problem the first year or the second year. But then, you know, out-of-state fee was about what tuition was for a semester. So when the—his third year, in January—you know, at Ole Miss you paid tuition in December before they come home for the holidays. I couldn't pay it then. I could not pay it then. So in January when they went back, I had a

choice; pay out-of-state fee or tuition. And so I said, "Well, I'm gonna do the out-of-state fee." I said, "I'll pay the out-of-state fee." And I told my son, I said, "Because I have longer to pay the tuition than I do the out-of-state fee."

[01:52:15] I said, "You stay in—you"—they had assigned him a room. And I said, "You go to your room. You go to class every day. You sit on the front row. You make sure the instructor sees you. You make sure that you turn in every assignment." And I said, "And make sure your name is not only on the top of the page, it's on the back of the page, so [laughter] there is no question as to whether you did your homework or not." And so he did that. So after a while, you know, if your tuition is not paid and they don't get this list from the business office, they drop your name. I told him, "You stay in class. You stay in class." I said, "And you stay in the dorm until they put you out." I said, "You put"—my son went to class every day, and I went and talked to the financial aid officer. You know, how you, you know, you make too much money to get qualified for this, and not enough to do any of—it's just—so I said—I talked to him. I went and talked to him in person. I said, "I can't pay this tuition." And I said, "But I'm payin' the out-of-state fee."

Well, he didn't—really didn't understand what I was sayin'. He's thinkin' that "Well, a couple of weeks from now, she's gonna [*laughs*] pay the tuition." [01:53:45] From January, it took me to the last of March to come up with three thousand and somethin' dollars [*unclear word*] to pay that tuition. So when I got the money, I went back to the school, and I told him, the financial aid officer, Fitzgerald—Fitz—I can't remember. But anyway, I told him, I said, "I came to pay my son's tuition." He said, "What's your son's name?" I said, "Rogia Williams III." And he said, "Well, Mrs. William, it's too late to pay tuition for this semester, so he can just start in the summer for the"—I said, "Oh no, he's been here all the time." I said, "I paid the out-of-state fee. He's been [*laughs*] in the dorm, and he's been goin' to classes." "No, there's no way. I'm quite sure. If his name didn't come out on the list, he was dismissed from class." I said, "He's in class. He's been in class every day." He said, "No." I said, "I'm tellin' you, he's been in class. I know he's been in class." And so he said, "Well, we can't accept this money now." "Well, you let him stay in class all this time. He stayed in the dorm all this time." [*Laughs*] Although I don't think he knew it. I know he didn't know [*KK laughs*] that he was still in the

dorm. He thought they had put him out, and definitely he just knew that they had put him out of class. I said, "No! He's in the dorm." I told him his room number. "And he's in class." He said, "Well, Mrs. Williams, if you can go to each one of his instructors, and they tell me that he's been in class and he's up to date"—I said, "Okay." I went to every one of my son's instructors, and they wrote out, said, "Yes, he's been in class." And I came back, and he took my money. And [*laughs*] I'm thinkin', "Nothin' but a God." And so, you know, when you think about—and he's the—this is a white gentleman. And I thought, "Oh, thank you, Lord. Thank you, Lord." [*Laughs*] That he accepted this money the last of March, the last of March, which was supposed to have been paid before the end of December, definitely by the [*laughs*] middle of January.

KK: Yeah.

[01:55:57] CSW: And here it was, the last of March. So you know, when you think about good people, you know, as the way that you always been taught. I've always been taught that all white people are not bad. All Black people are not bad. And I can say that I've met up with some good white people. [*Laughter*] Some truly good white people. And—but you

know, just—I fought for my son.

KK: Yeah.

CSW: Just like my mom, I had to drop my pride and go to somebody and say, you know, "This is what I can do and this is how"—[*laughs*] and you know, and I truly—I don't believe—maybe—I don't know if he truly understood what I was sayin' when I was explainin' to him, or he did not. I don't know. But I forgot about, "You know, well, he can just sit out." I didn't want him to sit out. I didn't want him to sit out.

KK: Yeah.

[01:56:51] CSW: And so I thought, "That's the way my mom felt when she had to go" . . .

KK: Yeah.

CSW: . . . "to someone and ask for help." So yes, things are a lot different now but the struggles—they may have different names. They may be for different causes but the struggles—you still got the struggles. The hardships are still gonna come. So whether you're today or back then—you know, we're taught in church that you're either in a storm, you're comin' out of a storm, or in a storm, or goin' into one. You know, it—one or the other. But there's always somethin' that you're dealin' with. And that's the way I look at it. That I've

been outside the storm; I've been in the storm; and I've been goin', and so you're either goin', comin', or in it. And that's the way I am today. I'm either goin' or comin' or in a storm, whether it's for someone else, whether it's for myself, or for a cause. But any way, it's a struggle. So I don't look at it that my kids are grown and gone because there always somebody's kids who need help. I still do that. Doin' what I do. Helping where I help. [01:58:07] At First National Bank, my last semester in college—I finished school in January, but I went an extra semester to become a certified teacher, just in case, because I am a dietician. I have a degree in dietetics. But I felt like, "You know, I might need that teacher's certificate. I might can't find a job." You know, people who are dietitians stay forever; they don't change jobs often. So—but I'm thinkin' I have all my credits to graduate, and I find out I need one credit. I still needed one credit. And now I'm figurin' out, "Well, I don't know. I was goin' just to get—become certified. Now they're sayin' I need one credit to—even before I get my actual piece of paper." And I'm thinkin', "There's no way my mom's gonna be able to do this." And I say my mom because, you know, although your dad's there, your mom is the one who handles everything,

[laughs] who knows what's goin' on. Your dad might add financial value to it, but your mom is the one who figures out how it's gonna work when you got two dollars and you owe four. My mom's gonna figure out how you're gonna—"How am I gonna do this? How am I gonna do the—what needs to be done now? What can I wait on, or what can I pay on, or whatever?" That's why I keep sort of referrin' to my mom. And so I thought, "There is no way. How am I gonna do this? Now I've gotten down to the last, the last straw, and I can't figure out how I'm gonna do it." And I went to the bank, First National Bank, and I can't even remember his name, but he was president of First National Bank at that time. And I talked to him, and I told him I needed 150 dollars for—to go to school, to finish, to get my degree. Oh, I can't remember his name. But anyway, he said, "Well, there's a program that if you're a senior and you got this average or whatever then we can do that." And I thought, "Oh, thank you." He said, "But you gotta go to school. Get them to fill out this and get it back." And it was already almost ten, so that meant I had to get all the way to Pine Bluff, get this paper signed, get it back to the bank by the time they closed at two o'clock.

KK: Ooh.

CSW: But he told me, he said, "All the doors will be locked except for the door on the end." He said, "You go to that door, and you come in." He said, "They're gonna stop you. But you tell them who you're comin' to see." And I wish I could remember his name, but he's retired, and I often see him, and I remind him of this story. And I did that. I drove all the way to Pine Bluff, got that paper signed, got back, went in that door, and just like he told me, they stopped me because they said, "The bank is closed," you know. I said, "But he told me that if I—you know, to—which door to come in and let"—and he signed off that paper, and he let me have the 150 dollars. This is another white gentleman in my life. So that's what I was saying, you know, that you—I can't say that all my experiences growin' up with whites have been bad. I can't say that because they haven't. They haven't. And when I think of—not even my great-auntie was 105. You know, I look back on the things that she said. I can't say that. And I'm not minimizing, and I'm not, trust me, and I'm not sugarcoating the struggles. But at the same time, there had to be some good people along the way . . .

KK: Yeah.

[02:02:02] CSW: . . . because I would've heard a lot worse stories.

I would've heard a lot of worse stories, and I would've experienced a lot of worse things than I experienced. So the struggle, it doesn't make any difference. There's some form of slavery always goin' on. It may be drugs now, alcohol, or so many other thing that we can say that enslave us 'cause, to me, anything that changes you from your right mind, that changes your thinkin', alters your disposition in any shape, form, or fashion becomes your master, and you become its slave. So physical slavery may be outlawed here in the US as far as we know, but there are so many mental types of slavery that have taken its place. So you know, I—that's the one thing that I always pray and ask God for, and that's why it hurts me when I think of my mom. That all the things that you could take away from me, whether it's my—and I spent two and a half years in a wheelchair, so I know what it means when you can't get up and move about at will. But I still had my eyesight, and I still had my hearing. I still had my speech. But if you take away my mental capacity, none of those things mean anything. So I always ask God every—"Give me a reasonable portion of my right mind, [*laughter*] you know. You know, I'm not sayin' 'Give me all of'—but give me a reasonable portion of my right mind." And you know,

for me to shed tears, I'm so thankful that my mom is still with me, but you know, some days her mind isn't what it used to be. And—but only one time have I gone to my mom, and she really couldn't place me right off, but she'll always say, "That's Carolyn." And well, she doesn't say Carolyn. She say, "That's Carolyn Ann" 'cause she always called me Carolyn Ann. "That's Carolyn Ann. That's Carolyn Ann." And so I'm all that—you know, I'm her voice. I'm whatever it is that she needs. And like I said, I'm there. I'm there, and it hurts me so. It hurts me so to see her not be able to do and go. But I'm so thankful. I was so thankful that she gave me those memories that I shall never forget, never, ever forget.

[02:04:45] KK: I love the way you've been talking about . . .

BP: Thirty seconds.

KK: . . . struggle because what you're really saying is, doesn't matter what generation you're in, you still need the strength . . .

CSW: Yeah. Right.

KK: . . . still need strength to help yourself.

CSW: Mh-hmm. Yeah.

KK: Or . . .

CSW: I can't ask you for what I'm not willin' to do for myself.

KK: Right.

CSW: Yeah.

KK: We're gonna [*CSW sniffs*]*—we're done with that tape.*

[Tape stopped]

[02:05:10] KK: I wanna ask you—I wanna actually get a little bit more early life of you, and then we'll get more back into this other stuff.

CSW: Okay.

KK: You've mentioned your siblings, but I wanna make sure we get their names and what order you were born in.

CSW: My oldest brother is Carl Lee Smith Jr., and he's two years older than me, so he's—I'm sixty-four, so he's sixty-six. My youngest brother is Hubbard Van Smith, named after my Grandfather Hubbard, and he's deceased. He died when he was twenty-two. But he would be two years under me, so he would be sixty-two. So it's like he turned—would turn—would have turned sixty-three the thirteenth of October. I will turn sixty-five the twenty-eighth of October. My oldest brother will turn sixty-seven the sixth of December. So we're two years apart. But my youngest brother was wounded in Vietnam and died.

KK: Oh, so he was a soldier for the US Army in . . .

CSW: Yes.

KK: . . . Vietnam.

[02:06:14] CSW: All of us were in the same time. My oldest bro—my two brothers were in the army and my youngest—and I was in the navy. But when—my oldest brother came from Vietnam in July, and my youngest brother went over in August, and he was wounded in November. He was there only about four months before he was wounded, and he later died.

KK: So your older brother did a full tour of Vietnam and came back.

CSW: Uh-huh. Yeah.

KK: Okay.

CSW: He stayed eleven months and so many days. And so a full tour is considered to be a year. Yes.

[02:06:57] KK: Right. So did you join the navy after getting out of college?

CSW: Yes.

KK: Tell me how that transition happened.

CSW: I'll tell you, my major was—is institutional dietetics, so I came back to—after I finished college, I came back, and I wanted to get a job. And I started work at what was then Warner

Brown Hospital. It's Catholic, operated by the Catholics.

KK: What town was that in?

CSW: El Dorado.

KK: In El Dorado.

CSW: Mh-hmm.

KK: Okay.

CSW: And at that time, Janice Long was their dietitian. So I worked under her. I had been there maybe six months or so. Then the state of Arkansas passed a law that you had to have a degree in dietetics in order to work as a dietitian, and she only had the experience. She didn't have the degree. So I would've thought that I was there, and I had a degree, that I would be next in line to be hired, but it didn't work like that. They hired a young lady out of Louisiana to come to be the dietitian, so I decided—I knew that wasn't fair and . . .

KK: Right.

CSW: . . . so I quit. And I still knew that I needed a job, and I started to work for the army recruiting services here in El Dorado at that time. And so I kind of recruited myself. [Laughter] Yes. And the strange thing about it—because I had my degree, I took the officer exam to go in as an officer. But because I'm a dietitian, that's in the medical field. The

navy had not integrated its officers' program at that time.

[02:08:49] KK: What year was that?

CSW: [Nineteen] seventy-two.

KK: Really?

CSW: Yes. The navy integrated their officers' program in 1973. So I had already been in a year when they integrated the officers' program. You know, a lot of people say, "Well, the militaries were integrated in the [19]50s when Truman was president." True, but that's the general military. You know, the officers' program, some of 'em were still not integrated, and the navy's officers' program was not integrated until 1973. And so—but I went in, and I couldn't be an officer because of that policy, so I stayed on as enlisted, and I always fought for my rights though. And I had told you that I was a—I spent some time in a wheelchair. I went to basic training out of Bainbridge, Maryland. And out of, like, three hundred recruits, there were only two—three Blacks that actually graduated. I don't think there were about four out of the whole three hundred. And one was Brenda Handy, and I think she was from Alexandria, Louisiana, but I was the only one from Arkansas. After basic trainin', you'd usually get your—start gettin' your orders at least two weeks prior to

graduation. Well, I didn't get any orders, and I'm thinkin', "Oh my goodness. Why haven't I got orders?" So other people graduated, their classes graduated, left, and I stayed there. I had to wait until—I had to live in the barracks with the trainers, the people who were training there—the recruits. I kept waiting for a little over a week, waiting for orders. And we had always been told that, because this was a time that the military was sendin' ladies to—aboard ships and stuff like that, but they would always send you in two. They would not send you anywhere there were not other women . . .

KK: Oh.

[02:11:08] CSW: . . . unless they sent you in pairs. Well, guess what. That didn't come—didn't hold true with me. I was sent to Saufley Field in Pensacola, Florida. I was their first female and their only female for almost a year. And I can tell you that growin' up in Strong, no one had ever told me that I had to go in the back door. But when I got in the United States Navy at Saufley Field, I was living in the officers' barracks, the BOQ. I was told I had to go in the back door. I could not go in the front door. And so this was—Saufley Field was the first place that the marines and the navy sent their pilots to be—start of their training.

KK: Okay.

CSW: I was there for—you know, I lived—the BOQ was built like the holid—old Holiday Inns were. You had a wing here and then all that, so I was placed on a back wing that overlooked a parkin' lot on the third floor. And I was the only person in that whole wing.

KK: Wow.

CSW: And you know, if the lights were—the outside lights were off, they really didn't care. And for my welcome, I think the commanding officer, Dr.—I meant, was Commander Hartman, and he welcomed me in this manner. He said, "Welcome. You're Saufley's first. You fill two quotas. You're Black, and you're female." That was my welcome to Saufley. And I told myself, you know, still I'm tellin' myself, "I can handle this. I can handle this." And they didn't have a place for me to sleep initially.

KK: Wow.

CSW: So they carried me each night to Corry Field, which they had some—a communication base, and they had seven females over there. So each evenin' at three thirty, they carried me back to Corry Field. Each mornin' at six thirty, they would—someone'd be there to pick me up to bring me back to

Saufley Field. The only ladies that would be on the base were the civilians who worked there. Other than that, I was the only female. There was a lady officer that was there. But enlisted, I was it. I was it. So I ate with all these guys, everything. [02:13:46] I—and you know, some of the things that were said. I had a cap—a gentleman, the chief that was over me. He would have lots of change in his pocket, and he would stand over me and just rattle the change in his pocket. And he would tell me—oh, Chief Odoms. That was his name. He would say, "This should be a familiar sound to you. The chains of slavery." And he would just rattle the change in the—and I would think to myself, "I don't know anything. I wasn't a slave, so I don't know anything about this." But I couldn't say it to him because he was a chief. And they put me in special services. I worked in special services. [*Sighs*] You know, to say that—how hatred or dislike of a person felt, I don't think I ever knew it until then. But I still told myself, "I can handle this. I can handle this." He would—didn't care what I did. You know, I couldn't have done anything. I could not have done anything that would have pleased him.

KK: Yeah.

[02:15:03] CSW: He disliked Blacks. I don't think it was just me, a

female, although that had ?some?—I think it was just his dislike of Black and for him to—one to be workin' under him was—he just couldn't handle that. And you know, it was constantly, constantly somethin', all the time. All the time. Everything. Every day it was somethin'. And there was a guy there named DeBoise. His last name was DeBoise. DeBoise was a white, young man. Well, let me tell you—I don't—I never—we never kept in touch with him, but DeBoise became one of my best friends. You know, it—because I was Black didn't make any difference with DeBoise and didn't care what Chief Odoms said to me. Didn't care what Chief Odoms had me do. DeBoise was gonna figure out a way to help me. He was gonna figure out a way. This went on from—I got there in, like, June, July—last of June—middle of June. This went on, and so one day, I went to—lunch was at eleven. Some people went at eleven thirty. I had a chief called Chief Brown. They'd put me in special service maybe this week. The next week they'd move me over to the galley. And so when the soldiers, the sailors, would come through, and they would show this ?meal? thing where they pay for their meals, and I did that. And I thought Chief Odoms was bad, but Chief Brown turned out to be even worse. [02:17:08] But I still—I

made up my mind that I was gonna do this. I was gonna do this if it killed me. I was not gonna be deterred by someone's comments or their actions. I was not. There were three retired cooks that were in the galley. One last name was Johnson, and I can't reme—I can't—one, they call Bugs, and the other one, I can't remember his name right now, but they were all retired from the military. And they—you know, it was like they took me under their wings. And when Chief Brown would really say horrible things to me, they would just walk up and let their presence be known. And then he would, you know, it was, like—they were older than he was, and he would—Dave. The other guy's name was Dave. And they were like the buffer. So one day I went home for lunch, went to the BOQ for lunch. I had a knock on my door. And I said, "Yes." And they [*unclear word*—knocked. They still didn't say anything, so I opened the curtain 'cause there was a big window right by the door, and there was three gentlemens in uni—white uni—officers' uniforms, and I'm thinkin', "Oh, my goodness!" And my thinkin' is, "What have I done now?" And so I open the door. I open the door, and I said, "Yes." And they said, you know, "We brought you three hard ones." And I'm thinkin', "What?" you know. And so then the laugh

on his face, you know, let me know that it wasn't an official anything. So I started to close the door, and he put his foot in it. [02:19:16] So I'm a sexual assault victim from the military. Not all three, but two of them. And the third one just stood, didn't do anything, just stood there and watched—so any—but they left me for dead. I—after they left and I finally got where I could crawl to the phone and I call and asked for help, they came and picked me up in an ambulance, and they carried me to the—like, a clinic or dispensary, it's called on the base. And they carry me to a dispensary. And the doctor there, I'm tryin' to tell him what happened to me, and of course, he's a white doctor. He doesn't wanna listen to a Black woman accuse officers of doin' somethin' like this. So he just ignored me. And rather than to carry me on to the local hospital and do what needed to be done, he didn't. He tried to spray somethin' that, you know, would freeze the area, and he was gonna try to stitch me up, and that didn't work, so he gave me a shot. I don't know how many. I know he gave me—I remember the first one, and I was out. When I came to the next morning before day, I'm back in my room by myself. [02:20:54] The military really did nothing. That's when I truly felt the brunt of ?servacation?. But I

made up my mind—well, I got a call later on, a month or so after, on the second of November. I was getting ready to walk out the door to go to work because they didn't give me any time off, you know. I still had to go to work. I went to work, and I'll tell you about the call after I—but I went to work. This is before I got the—a couple weeks before I got the call. I went to work, and I'm sittin' on a stool. And where the doctor had tried to sew me up, it had not healed, and I soiled my clothes. And Chief Brown, Chief Brown went all over me when I ask him, "Could I go home?" [02:22:11] And he said if I hadn't been there, it wouldn't have happened to me. If I had stayed in my place, this would not have happened to me, and "you wouldn't be tryin' to accuse these people of this 'cause you know. Who are you?" And those three guys, Johnson, Bugs, and Dave, that were retired cooks—he's in—we're in his office—the chief's—Chief Brown's office. Chief [*unclear word*] puts his hand on my shoulder and pushes me to the door. When he pushed me to the door and he swung that door open, those three guys were standin' there because they could hear outside. And they asked me, "What's goin' on?" And I was cryin', and, "You all right?" And I never will forget. One had one of those big meat cleavers in

his hand. One had a skillet in his hand. I don't know what Dave had. But I knew it. If I had said, if I had told what had happened, their careers, even—although they were civilians at that time. They were civil service workers. You know, all hell would have broke loose. So I couldn't say anything. I couldn't say—I just left. I went to my room. I went to my room. From then on—Dave had three daughters. I think three or four daughters. And from then on, Dave became like my father. You know, he would come get me to take me to church. He just, you know, he just—I did. I just sort of became like his daughter—one of his daughters. And then one mornin', I was gettin' ready to walk out the door to go to work. This was back under Chief Odoms. [02:24:14] And the phone rang, and they called and told me my brother had died, the one that had been wounded in Vietnam. So I was about thirty minutes late for work. So I went into work, and time I walked in, Chief Odoms just jumped all over me, you know, for bein' thirty minutes late. So when he finished, I said, "Chief Odoms." I said, "I received a call today. My brother died." He just changed, just like that, you know. "What can we do to get you out of here?" I said, "You can't do anything for me. You can't do anything for me." But the

commanding officer gave me leave to fly home, and here I'm thinkin', "My brother has died from wounds that he received in Vietnam, and I'm takin' this, goin' through this, from the military." [*Clanging sounds*] So I made up my mind while I was home, I was not gonna go back. I said, "I'm not gonna go back." But my oldest brother told me how you have to go back. He said, "Because they will come and get you. They'll come and get you."

KK: Yeah.

[02:25:37] CSW: And so I went back after a week home. After that I spent—I could not accept the fact that this had happened to me, that I was what they call a sexual assault victim. I just thought it was just rape. That's just it, you know, but they kept sayin' sexual assault. An alleged sexual assault. A alleged sexual assault. I spent three months in a mental hospital.

KK: Wow.

CSW: Three months. Because I thought it was my fault for being there. Because that's what I had been told. If I hadn't been there, if I had stayed in my place, it wouldn't have happened. Three months. Three months. I stopped talkin'. I just, you know, I just—my oldest brother came to see me. And

because I was so messed up in my head, he started to walk toward me, and I broke to run because I'm look—I'm thinking, "This is those people comin' after"—and then one night, I was in Biloxi hosp—Biloxi, Mississippi, in their VA Hospital in the mental ward. And I tell you that it's always just before day, someone called my name. All it said was just, "Carolyn!" And I jumped, and I thought, "Oh my goodness. If I run out of here screamin' and hollerin' or if I go to screamin' and hollerin' in this room, they're really gonna know I am totally gone. There is no hope." [02:27:42] And it came to me. My dad told me, "I raised you to be better and to know better. And just as you swore to serve and protect your country, you put your life on the line to fight for your country if you had to. Why don't you fight for yourself?" So on March—on April the twenty-second—I had been there since January—on April the twenty-second, I was released from the mental hospital. From that day on, from that day on, I made up my mind that if I was gonna put my life on the line for my country and my country did nothing to try to help me, nothin' at all. I've lost my brother. All three of us, my two brothers and myself, we've all served our country. I had married somebody that was in the military. This was after

the assault. I married somebody that was in the military. [Sniffs] If I was willing to fight and give my life for my country, why couldn't I do it for myself? So I never hired an attorney. I started to fight for myself. I had told 'em, "Nobody could tell my story better than me," so I went to Washington, DC, twice. Everywhere that I could, I told what happened. I wrote letters. [02:29:31] But the thing about it, the day that I was released from the hospital, the twenty-second of April, was the day that Social Security put me on Social Security disability.

KK: Oh.

CSW: Yeah. I didn't file while I was in the mental hospital. The social worker in the hospital filed for me. So that gave me some income to take care of myself while I fought for myself. [02:30:03] I never went ba—had to go to back to a hospital, but I had had all kinds of therapy, all kinds of counselors. I had counselors where I could call every day. One counselor I had for at least ten years. Even up until this day, I have her number that I can call her when days got bad. And so I had to develop a personality that this one I can handle this with. The other I can be normal with. And that's the way I had to handle things like that. So I was ?labeled?, "Oh, she's

schizophrenic. She's schizophrenic. She's whatever." I didn't care because labels never bothered me. "You had taken everything away from me. You took my pride. You took my self-respect. You took my confidence. You took everything from me. You stripped me down to nothin'." But I felt like just because I was down, I didn't have to stay down. And I felt like, "What better place could God have me other than on my knees?" And that's where I basic—my knees used to be black because when I was in that wheelchair, I couldn't walk, and I had to learn to crawl. If I couldn't walk, I could crawl. I still had that. I have had three major back surgeries. They said I never would walk again, but here I am. And if I didn't tell you that I have a metal plate with four screws in my back, you never would know. I have a fusion—the three discs in the top of my neck. I have a bone that was donated by—through a bone in my back, but I'm still here. And he did what I ask him. I said, "Don't take—give me a reasonable portion of my mind," and he did that. [KK laughs]

[02:32:09] So I fought, and I fought, and I fought. It took me twenty-six years to win my battle against the United States Navy, but I did. I did. In 1999 they sent a special agent, someone from Naval Criminal Investigative Services,

all the way here directly from Washington, DC. The closest base is Millington, Tennessee. They sent someone from that navy base in Millington, Tennessee, from NCIS, right here to El Dorado to apologize to me on behalf of the United States Navy. Twenty-six years. But I refused to give up. I refused to give up. My mom, even today, will never say, even on our good days, she will never say that Carolyn was raped. She'll say, "Somethin' bad happened to Carolyn." She's always said—because in her day, you didn't say that. You didn't acknowledge that. And for—you know, I had so many people, even my church family, so many people who said, "Why don't you just get a hold of yourself and forget about that? Don't even"—but I couldn't. I said, "It didn't happen to you. It didn't happen to you. I have to—how can I live with myself? How can I teach my children about standin' up for your rights? But let no one take your self-confidence. Let no one take your self-respect. And don't you dare—definitely don't give it away." And so, you know, when this gentleman stood in the—he would've come to Strong, but there was no building, no courthouse, or nothin' in Strong. And he said, "Where can I meet you?" And I—we arranged for the courthouse. And Mr. Depper, the attorney in El Dorado, came

through. He knew me, and he said—I introduced him to the gentleman, and I said, "We are lookin' for somewhere we can talk." And he carried us up to one of the judges' chambers. And that gentleman listened to me, and he stood in the courthouse, and he said, "On behalf of the United States Navy, I apologize to you." So I can't help but to believe that it was remembering how my ancestors struggled and lived to be ninety and a hundred somethin' years old. They didn't make it by givin' up. And I thought that was the worst thing that could ever have happened to me in my life. [02:35:34] I thought there was nothin' that would ever be worse than that. And I have three daughters. All three of my daughters went in the military, and people would say, "Why would you let your daughters go in the military after what happened to you?" I said, "It's a choice. That was their choice. But the difference is I didn't have anybody to fight for me, but they have me."

KK: Oh. Yeah.

CSW: And only one time did I have to go to Fort Jackson to stand up for one of my daughters. And my ?theme? to that captain in the army was, "If you're not willin' to put it on—in writing, your word means nothin' to me. Because I know you can say

anything, but if you put it in writing, I can say it later. I can say, 'You [*unclear words*]'—this is what you said.'" I said, "So if you're not willin' to put it in writing, what you're sayin' to her did not mean anything." And I said, "I'm standin' here on her behalf. Not standing here because I'm a veteran. Not standin' here because I'm a parent." I said, "I'm standin' here because I'm a human being and she is, too, and I refuse to let you take her rights from her." Of course, that ended anything that he had to say because he wasn't ready. He wasn't willing to put it in writing. [02:37:12] And that's what I say to any young woman—women who are servin', who have served, is servin', or will serve, you know. "Get it in writing. Yeah. Anything that's worth bein' said, that you consider to be important, get it in writing." 'Cause had I not opened my medical records on my way to a doctor and saw where they had made copies. For twenty-three of those years that I fought, the military swore they had no record, no record. But I had mine. I had mine. And even though they said, "Don't open," I opened it because I didn't trust. I didn't trust those people that I was at that day. They hadn't given me any reason to trust them. They told me everything. That my records had been burned in St. Louis from the fire to you

name it. But I had mine. [02:38:16] And finally, the sexual—it's called SAVI, Sexual Assault Intervention Team or somethin', out of Millington, Tennessee. The—after the Talihook incident, after all that, so I lived through all those years, from 1972 all the way to 1999, without any help until that sexual intervention team was developed up in Millington, Tennessee, and they became an advocate for me. Yet all these people down through the years, every time someone interviewed me, every time for—they would say, "This happened to that lady. You all need to go under"—my home state turned me down, denied me, probably eight or nine times, and finally, Washington just said, "Go on and do it. We're not askin' you. Go on and do it. You gotta give her—you gotta give her her full retirement." [Sobs] And it wasn't about, you know, "You gotta pay her this." It wasn't about the pay to me. It was about, "You don't tell me that I have that PTSD. They called it one thing when it's somethin' else. You know, you gotta put the name to it. You gotta tell why. You gotta tell—you got—if you hold me responsible, you gotta be responsible, too." I was so bitter. I hated every white man I saw. I was so bitter. One day I was walkin' across the tennis court, and I'm asking God, "Oh God, you know, just

help me get through it. All I ask you for is a reasonable portion of my mind. But please help me get through this because I hate them. I hate them for what they did." And then this little voice say, "How can you ask God for anything—who loves you, and you're sayin' you hate somebody?" From that day on, I learned that I don't have to love what you do, but I gotta love you. So my whole attitude changed. It really—so I think God ?build? me. He allowed things to happen in my life to make me who I am today. And the worst thing that I could ever thought happened to me was the sexual assault. [02:41:06] When I lost my daughter, I felt like, "Oh Lord, no! You know, how much more? How much? How much? You were—I lost my brother. I have been in a sexual assault. I have been in a wheelchair. I have been in an institution. And now you're taking my child. [*Sobs*] What else? What else?" And then it came back to me, "Why not? You're no different from anybody else." Here I was with three daughters. My three—there's three of us. We all served. My husband served. Here are my three daughters. My youngest daughter had come from Germany, got married, celebrate her birthday, and was dead in thirty days' time.

"How much more do you want me to—how much more do you

want me to take?" And there's still a small voice that say, "But it's all right. It's all right." So again I went into therapy, but I made up my mind that I wasn't any different from all the other people who had lost their children, who had lost a child, who had lost a brother, who had lost—by this time, my father's dead. I regretted that my father never got a chance to hear the navy admit fault—accept fault. But I'm still here. So God blessed me for some reason. He's kept me here for some reason. [02:43:23] In 2004 the Black Caucus Convention asked me to speak. They chose seven women who had been in service. All of us had different experiences. I was the only one that was a sexual assault victim, and I thought, "Out of all these women in the US, including the Virgin Islands, all those, and they chose me to speak on that," because at that time, my case was the oldest, continuous, active case for sexual assault on record. You know, once I fought, I never dropped it. Every year, I appealed it. For twenty-six years, I appealed their decision. How do you give somebody half justice? You—it's either all or none. [02:44:19] So in 2004 when I spoke in Washington, DC, at the Black Caucus Convention, was the first time that I ever said, "My name is Carolyn Ann Smith-Williams, and I am

a sexual assault victim." That's the first time I had ever allowed myself to say that aloud. And I told my story. And I had women who had suffered the same abuse and never came forward, who jumped out of the audience and ran, just picked me up, because I became their voice. I was their voice. And to this day—this past January, I was in Washington, DC, and I spoke to those people who were workin' with sexual assault victims, and they tell people my story today. Some people who are in mental institution will never come out. Some people who committed suicide who do all—who feel like, you know, they can't get beyond this. I can tell, "Yes, you can. Yes, you can. Yes, you can because—just because they don't have the right to take your self-respect, take your dignity, to take your self-confidence. You don't have the right to give it to them either." So out of all the counseling I've had down through the years, you know, and like I said, I mean, I hadn't spent any more time in a mental hospital, but I have spent two weeks, thirty days, in a hospital with therapists and doin' everything they possibly could to try to help me. And stayed on my knees a lot and say—askin' God, "Please don't take this. Don't let it slip away. Don't take this from me." That I can tell other people,

"Just because you're pushed down or you fall down don't mean that you have to stay down." And I believe, I truly believe, that somehow, somewhere, those who heard my story, who knows of it, know that you can get beyond. There is nothin' impossible. There's nothin' impossible. Nothin'. So here I am. What's left of my reasonable portion of my mind. [Laughter] Here I am. Here I am.

[02:47:15] KK: You certainly seem to have a very clear and reasonable mind to me.

CSW: Nothin' but the grace of God, I can tell you that. Nothin'. My faith. My faith. You can't shake my faith because I truly believe, as my ancestors, that God will make a way. He will. He'll do that. Yeah. Makes no difference what someone else thinks. Makes no difference what someone else say. So I don't feel like—it's not just a duty for me to treat people right. It's a charge for me to treat people right. It's a charge. And there is a greater power that watches over me. There's a greater power that watches over me. So my favorite song is: "I sing because I'm happy. I sing because I'm free. Because His eyes are on the sparrow, and I know He watches over me." That's my song. And when I feel bad or doubt, I can sing that, and it lifts me up.

[02:48:42] KK: No doubt. Well, and you spoke a lot earlier about the strength of your family, the strength of the history of your family, the strength that you get from the knowledge of what your family has endured from their trip to Africa to today. And it seems to me, hearing you today, that a lot of your strength also comes from that.

CSW: Yes. So we're—my great-great-greatest-grandmother was lured aboard a ship because of the bright colors. I'm lured to the bright colors because they lift me up. But I remember the story of the bright colors. When I think of Aunt Willie, who worked for this white family, and they took her in and kept her until she died, it lifts me up. When I think of my mom bakin' chocolate pies for a white family and they—lettin' her have money in advance to send me and my brother to—it lifts me up. It gives me that strength to believe that the same person created you, created me. And that he watches all of us. [02:50:05] And I don't have to—when I stand, when it's time for me to go, when it's time for me to cross over, he is not gonna be worried about, "What did Kris do to Carolyn?" He's only worried bout, "What did Carolyn do when Kris did that?" That's more than an incentive to do the best I can, everywhere I can, to anybody I can, just that knowledge

of knowing. And I'm quite sure that my ancestors realized the same thing. The man above is not gonna be worried about what some slave owner did to you. He's gonna worry, "What did you do? What did you do? What did you—did you acknowledge me even in your time of need, in your time of suffering?" He's only worried about—and that's why I still believe that. God is not gonna be concerned about, "What did those people do to Carolyn? What did they do to you over here? What did they—what happened to you in the military? What"—he is only worried about, "What did Carolyn do? What did Carolyn do?" So no, I can't sit back and have ill feelin's about some—what someone else because I still know that when it comes down to it, it's only "What did car—how did Carolyn react? What did Carolyn do?" So I can't stand—I can't be accountable for what people do. I can only be accountable for what Carolyn did, and that's me. That's me. I tell people all the time, you know, I'm just me. I'm just me. So what you see is [*laughs*] what you get. I'm just me. I'm just me. And I will never—I never—I've never forgotten those thing down through life, good or bad, you know. You learn to deal with it. You learn to accept it. You learn to change those things you can. You learn to accept those

things you can't. And when I cross over, I hope people remember. I may not have made a change, but hopefully someone will say, "She made a difference."

KK: Wonderful.

BP: Seventeen.

KK: That's amazing that you were willing to share that story with us today. I can only imagine how many people are gonna benefit from your willingness to share something that's so deeply personal but has such a universal message.

[02:52:48] CSW: Well, I mean, it's a story that made front-page news in El Dorado at one time. And the reason I've told it in Washington, DC, not only in front of this—the court of veterans' appeal, but in front of the Black Caucus, to people who needed to hear it at churches, whatever, you know, that I had to put my pride aside. And that's why I tell you I don't do well with secrets even if [*laughter*] but—because someone else needs to know that just because you were a victim once, you don't have to stay a victim. Someone needs to know that it may not happen to you, but it could happen to your sister, your—even your brother or your mom, your dad, or somebody. You know, it could happen. Now what do you say to them? Do you turn your back on them or whatever? You

know, do you do those things, you know? And I know it's not—in the Black culture, no, you don't talk about it, but I'm not a traditionalist and so [*laughter*—I am, and I am not.

[02:54:13] But you know, there are some things you have to say, and I never would've received justice—no, I can't—nobody could change what happened to me. They can't change that. But at least I know that the people who did it—who did that to me weren't prosecuted. But I know that it has crossed their minds, too. They have wondered, hopefully, they wondered, "Did that lady die?" or whatever. No. But that's not even important to me anymore. That's not important to me. It's that maybe someone will know that you can get—you can rise up. You can move beyond. And you can live up to who you say you are. You know, you can fight—there's all—as—what was it Geronimo said, "There will be another day." I quoted Geronimo. "There will be a—we'll live to see another day." And that's the way I feel. I've—he's let me live to see another day, and I'm glad about it. So yeah, hopefully, hopefully. And I don't tell people to listen—don't listen with—when you listen for things like that, if you listen with your head, you're bound to take it the wrong way. But if you listen with your heart, you'll understand. And you

may not be able to sympathize 'cause I take it as sympathize, that mean it happened to you or not. But you can empathize. You can imagine. You can imagine how I would feel if this was my child, if this was my sister, if this was my mother.

KK: Sure.

CSW: And that's how you live with it. That someone, somewhere, someday might hear it and know that there is life beyond that.

KK: Yeah.

CSW: [*Sighs*] And every time I talk about it, it helps me, too. It helps me. It helps me.

[02:56:15] KK: I can't imagine that Washington speech in front of the Black Caucus, how you were able to talk about that.

CSW: Because when you start the healin' process, you can't start to heal until you forgive. How am I ever gonna heal when I have this open wound?

KK: Mh-hmm.

CSW: So that's what the counseling—that's what all that did for me. That's what the reconciliation with myself. Acceptin', yes, it did happen to me. I didn't die from it. I'm still able to move and use my body. You know, I may have all things wrong with it, but I'm still able to move and use my body. My mom

still loves me. My mom loves me unconditionally. And I know, if I don't know anything else in my life, I know that Kathryn loves me. I know that Charles Phillip loves me. I know that Henry Rochell loves me. I know that Louise Smith loves me. And I know that those two daughters that I have livin', Sandy and Kym, and my son, Rogia, I know they love me. What else do I need? I don't have to have everybody in this world love me. I don't have to have it. I don't have to have it. But when you have—when you know that you know that you know, nobody else is gonna shake anything. Nobody else is gonna shake it. Nobody else can. No one. No. If I didn't lose it when I lost my daughter, I'm okay. I may not be all right, but I'm okay. That's all I—what else can I ask for? What else can I ask for? What else can I ask for?

[02:58:23] But those seven women—I was number seven, so there were six people goin' ahead of me. The first three, the first three lost it. They broke down then, and that was somethin' I had to ask God for.

KK: Yeah.

CSW: "Take the cryin' away from me. Let me be able to speak without breaking down in tears." And I wanted the anger taken away. He helped me get rid of the anger. Those first

three women lost it. They were so angry. They started to curse. They started to cry. They started to scream. So after the third one—so you can imagine the emotion of all these people. We were in the new Washington Convention Center, so this huge room with all these people. And these—they were veterans and stuff, you know. Over to the side—so I'm facin' the—I'm facin'—my back is this way [points in front of her], so the audience is this way [points behind her]. And to my immediate right were three naval officers. So you can imagine. I'm thinkin', "Aw nah now." You know, I had three officer—although only two participated in the act. But why would you put three officers over here in uniform? There were two men and one lady. And I thought, "Oh no, it's not the—it's not who's in the uniform, it's just the sight of the uniform. This, too, will pass. So they came to me. Now why they came to me—they came to me, said, "Miss Williams, will you go next?" And I'm thinkin', "I'm number seven. [Laughter] You know, you've had three. There's three more in be"—"no, we want you to go next." When I wa—I said, of course, I said, "Okay," you know. I walked up to the podium. I turned my back to the crowd, and I said, "Lord, use me. Use me. I'm gonna open my mouth, but you use me."

[03:00:30] And I turned around, and that's when I say, "My name is Carolyn Ann Smith-Williams, and I am a sexual assault victim." And I told you I had never said that before . . .

KK: Yeah.

CSW: . . . aloud. Then I told them who I was, not my name, but I told 'em that, you know, that my grandmother said that she was my greatest-grandmother so, "She was an African brought to America and sold to Americans. You're an American born on this land. You are by blood Indian related, and by human bondage, cousin to the white man." And I said, "Now what that—what does that make me? I'm just a human being." And I said, "But I wanna tell you today of my experience." I said, "But I hold no bitterness." I said, "'Cause I've been set free." And I told my story. And I tell you, when I walked away, there was a hush. You know, it was just a hush in the building. No one said anything. And so the man said, "Now that we've regained our composure, let us continue." And I told—those ladies ran out of the audience and picked me up. Now you can imagine what I'm thinkin' when someone is runnin' toward me, [*laughter*] thinkin' it's, "Oh, now you"—but picked me up, screaming and crying and

saying, "You told my story. You"—three ladies. And so, you know, if there were three in a congregation of maybe two hundred or more people, how many more who sat solemnly or who weren't there? After it was all over, these three naval officers came to me and said, "I want you to know that we would be proud to serve with you today in the United States Navy." So I may not have won the war, but I truly won a battle.

KK: You sure did.

[Tape stopped]

[03:03:14] KK: Let's talk a little bit about growing up in the Strong, Arkansas, area . . .

CSW: Okay.

KK: . . . because it sounded to me like you had a very solid community life, but which I assume was primarily African American.

CSW: It was all African American. [*Clears throat*] And I tell you we lived—at that time when I was growin' up, it was called Ebenezer community, but we lived on the Norris Road. Before I was born, that used to be all-white neighborhood. All—most of 'em were Norrises. And then later on—and the Blacks lived in New London area because in the New London

area—that was Harrison Township, basically, going all the way down to ?Kerryville?, which is at the river, and that's where the most of the slaves when they came in, they came into that area down there. [03:04:11] So all the African Americans lived down that way in the New London—after they changed it from Harrison Township to New London, they lived down there in that area. Even the Black church was on the New London Road. The cemetery's still there. [*Sighs*] So—and they—a lot of them still lived on the land that belonged to the whites. Well, as the older heads started to die out, the Norrises down on the—what was the Norris Road—Blacks started to buy land, and they share—you know, sharecroppers. They still bought the land—most of 'em bought—at—they would—Sam Turbeville married one of the Norris ladies, and her people owned a lot of land. So he married into that, and he started to sell off. So a lot of the old houses were still there. So when Blacks started to sharecrop and wanted to own their own home, most of those homeplaces had one of those houses on it. And I told you I was born in a dogtrot house, so the house with the two big rooms and one—a big hall down the middle, but it was all under the same roof. And it had like a little gangplank, and

you walked off of that to the—down to the kitchen. And they had it done like that so if the kitchen, where most of the fire was, if it burned, they could separate it, and the whole house wouldn't burn down. So we lived—my mom and dad—my grandparents moved there, and I tell you my mom, my dad, the three of us, and Kathryn's mom and her other two sisters, my two uncles, all of us lived in those two huge room. There was one little room that shot off to the—down to the side off of one of those room. My two uncles slept in that room. But you know, it was nothin' for each room—each big room to maybe have sometime three to four beds in it.

KK: Yeah.

[03:06:13] CSW: And when it came to me and my brothers, the boys slept at the head, and I slept at the foot. So that's the way we lived, you know. So we were in a house. Then there were the Wainwrights in a house, then there were the Holmes in a house, the Evans, the Greers—just keep goin' on and on. Oh, I'm tryin' to think else—who else was out there. The McHenrys, the Paynes—but all of us, all of us, were either by blood or by marriage related. So at one time, probably fifteen to twenty years ago, there were, like, thirty-two families that lived on a mile stretch. Now they didn't live in a

straight line just right out—some lived off the road and back in there because the way the Greers were—bought their land, sharecropped, they still lived all of 'em on that. The Williams like us—my grandmother and them were Williams. My mom's maiden name is Williams. They had sixteen acres. They lived on that. The O'Guinns, the McHenrys—so everybody—the leased land—the part that was sold to a sharecropper was, like, five acres. So like, the McHenrys had five acres. I think the O'Guinns had five acres and—but my grandfather had sixteen acres. Some of the others had twenty acres and on like that. But that's the way he sold it. Now why my grandfather had those five acres, I always say because either the—I meant, sixteen acres, because the McHenrys or the O'Guinns, who border them, probably bought the other four or five acres and—but all those old houses were left, so all those Black families moved in those old houses. And I know of one, two, three, four—I know there were four dogtrot houses on that road. Others were, like, little shotgun houses.

KK: Yeah.

CSW: You just goes straight—see straight through them. And there was one gentleman, Rodelle Gill, that was a carpenter. All he had was a little box about this long [uses hands to suggest

length], and he had a saw, a hammer, and a leveler. That's basically all [*laughs*] I saw in that little box. But he built most of those homes in that community.

KK: Wow.

CSW: And so a lot of the homes that have become brick homes and all that, but the original house that's in the inside that, he built 'em. And he walked. He walked what is called from—it's—he walked from Sorghum's Corners, New London, out of—below New London. Sorghum's Corners, they call it down in the ?Kerryville? area. It borders that down in there. All the way from there out to new—through New London down to the Ebenezer or the Norris community. Walked there every mornin', and every evenin' he walked back. Now he didn't go what we have as the roads today. He went on lots of wagon trails. [03:09:34] You cut through the woods and all because sometime—my grandfather still would walk from where we lived in Ebenezer, New London Road, all the way back down to Sorghum's Corner to go to church. And my mom was—it—'cause he didn't wait until you got ready to take him in the car. If he—when he—if my grandfather was gonna leave at nine, he was leavin' at nine. Now you could be ready or not. [*Laughter*] He was leavin' at nine. And she

would say, "You gotta catch him before he gets to the Ebenezer church up there," because he was gonna cut through the woods and go the wagon trails, not go around the road. So there would be times, "You gotta go," 'cause he was gonna leave walkin'. So on that road, after all the—a lot of the old—a storm came through and demolished a lot of 'em. One storm came through in [19]27, and it didn't so much tear that community up, Ebenezer and New London, but it destroyed Strong. [03:10:33] 'Cause [*unclear word*] prior to that, Strong was Victoria, and that's the unusual thing. I still have some of the mail that said Victoria Bank. But after—when they built it back, they named it Strong because there was another town somewhere else in Arkansas by the name Victoria. But—and so that's how they kept papers sometimes was the bank name was Victoria. And it says Strong—Victoria for Arkansas. But so they started tearin' down those big houses, those dogtrot houses, takin' those boards, and I'm talkin' about literally tearin' 'em down. While they were tearin' down our big house, my uncles lived in the crib. That's where you kept the corn. But they'd pile all the corn in one corner, and they had a bed in the other corner, and they slept in the crib. They didn't tear the kitchen part

down when they tore the other two big rooms there, so my grandmother and grandfather and her m—and Kathryn's mom and her sister, they lived in that. My mom and dad bought the—what they called the Hugh Goodwin house for seventy-five dollars. They tore it—they bought—now that's the whole house they bought for seventy-five dollars. They tore it down. And so when they tore the house down, you sat down, the kids and everybody—the people will come; the neighbors will come together, and they will pull every nail out of every board, put it in buckets, and there was somebody that was straightenin' those nails so you could reuse them and stackin' the lumber accordin' to the size and the length. And so that's what our first house was made out of, so when I tell people our first house cost seventy-five dollars, that's what it [KK *laughs*]*—they bought that house and moved it down to the Ebenezer community on the Norris Road and built our first house. But that's how those people got those houses. They would tear those big houses down as they started to get frail—get—started to run down, and you couldn't keep patchin' 'em and repairin', and they tore them down and built those houses. So a lot of those houses that are still there are made out of the old dogtrot houses. [03:12:50] My*

grandmother would have quiltin' parties, you know. Now—well, she didn't call it a quiltin' party. She didn't even—they didn't even say quiltin' bee. They would just have barn raising, house raisings and all stuff like that, where everybody in the community came together to help you do whatever it was you were doin'. Whether it was killin' hog, whether it was buildin' a barn, whether it was puttin' a roof on the house or whatever. Everybody came together to help. So that day all the women would be in the hou—somewhere quiltin'. The men would be outside workin', whether even clearin' a field, you know, gettin' the stumps out of there. And when I think about them takin' stumps from the trees and thing, it's amazing how they would dig around those stumps and chop and do this and then hook the mules or horses to them to pull those stumps up. But they would clear the land and—but the women would quilt. And so whoever's house that they were at helpin' that day, sometime those women could get three quilts out in a couple of days 'cause you had all these women quiltin'. I can also remember my auntie—my grandmother—there was an auntie that didn't quilt so good. [*Laughs*] And she would let her quilt all day with her, and so everybody had their area that they was quiltin', and my grandmother would

sit up at night, pull that out, requilt it, and never say anything. [Laughter] So—because my grandmother wanted it done just right. And she just wasn't a good quilter. And my grandmother would stay up at night, redo it, and the lady never knew the difference. But my grandmother, my mom, and my mom's sister, Lucille, usu—got together and quilted all the time. And usually everybody would get at least, you know, in the community, everybody would do at least three to four quilts every summer. And you kept addin' to that so, you know, some people had just stacks of quilts that—and the houses weren't sealed that good, so my mom would tell me that—and if it snowed—and if it rained, the rain didn't come in. But if it snowed, the snow would sift through the tin and whatever, and she said their covers would have snow on them. But because they had so much cover on them, you didn't feel that, you know. [03:15:15] My grandfather always got up and built a fire. They had one big heater in one side of that house 'cause all the houses didn't have fireplaces. Some of them just had wood heaters. And so he would—he always built a fire, always. He was gonna get up earlier than everybody else and build a fire. Even those on the other side in the other big room had to come to one side

to the fire. So—but thank God when they redid the house, it was different, and it had actual ceilings. So you had one wall and another wall. There was no insulation, but at least you had two walls, and you couldn't see. My mom said in some of the houses you could look through the floor and see the chickens underneath the house. And now, you'll wonder, "Well, there shoulda been snakes and everything else in the house," but they weren't worried about that. [03:16:13] So—and we always went to—you know, we walked to church, and I can remember doin' that.

KK: Yeah.

CSW: Every Sunday. It was not an option of if you were goin' to Sunday school. You were goin'. You were goin' to Sunday school. And [*laughs*] be there for church. We only had church, for a long time, one Sunday a month, and they moved to two Sundays, and finally they moved to every Sunday. But I can remember bein' at church, and we would've had Sunday school, waiting for the minister to come. And we have been at church all way to one, one thirty, and be walkin' out, just waited and waited. And they sing songs and say a prayer, and then they would be ready to go. And we'd be walkin' out of church sometime when a preacher

draw—drive up. We had to go back in the church. Listen to him preach. And so we were in church all day long. So of course, we kid hated to see him come, you know. [Laughter] You hated to see him drive up, but that's the way it was. So you went—not only did you go, listen to him, but that evenin'—later on that evenin' at six o'clock, they would have church youth services for kids. Then Wednesday night, you went back for prayer meetin' and all that. Then choir rehearsal. Then—it was, like, every time you turn around, you were in church. And I still say it wasn't—you didn't have an option. You were goin'. You were goin'. And the kids had to sit up on—we had to sit up on the front row. You weren't gonna sit back in the back. You were gonna sit in the row.

[03:17:56] There was one Methodist church inside Ebenezer community, and that's Christian Chapel. Christian Chapel had some of—some of our family members were in—my grandfather was Methodist. My mom was Baptist. My grandmother was Baptist. So most of my grand—their children were Baptists. Only one of the grandchildren became Methodist. But the metho—my grandfather's mother, Rebecca Williams-Powell—Powell-Williams—always said she wanted to be the first person buried at Christian Chapel

because they didn't have an established cemetery. Everybody used—although they were Methodist, they used Ebenezer Baptist Church Cemetery. And—but they wouldn't do it. My—they didn't want her to be the first one. She died in 1960 at age ninety-three. Now sh—you talkin' about lookin' like an Indian. And she wore her hair just like I wear mine, only she let her hair—her braids hang down in front. But her name was—she was a Rebecca also. So but Grandmother Rebecca made me think so much of a true Native American. That's the way—the skin color, everything. My grandfather looked very—he had the skin color like Native American, and his hair was straight, very fine hair. He used to tell me his hair was like cat hair. It was very fine. But like I said, my grandfather's side were all Methodist. All Methodist. And they're the ones who had their 'ttractor meetin' on third Sundays. So although they were Methodists, everybody, when it was their time, everybody went to that Methodist church. That church at one time also served as a school. So they used to call it the Christian Payne School or the Payne Christian School. So durin' the week, at one time, it was a school, and on Sundays it was the church. Ebenezer, per se, never had church—a school in their church. But they

shared the Gill Cemetery School, so they would walk. My mom's walked three miles out of the wood—from where they lived in the wood to the New London Road and then walked three miles on to the school.

KK: Wow.

[03:20:30] CSW: And she would—she told us that the—when they were—walked to school, that some evenin'—the whites had a school bus and that when—they would have to get over to the side of the road because the kids would spit on 'em out the window if they didn't get all the way over to the side of the road. Then when they got out of the reach where they couldn't spit on them, she said they would get on the bus and carry rocks with 'em and throw rocks to hit them. So you know, I think about that and also, you know, to walk six miles to school. My goodness! My goodness! You know, you ask somebody to walk six miles now anywhere [*laughter*], they tell you right up front, "No!" But we used to walk—it was—we probably walked four miles from our house to church every Sunday mornin'. Every Sunday mornin', that's how far we'd walk. And if we didn't—if someone didn't have a pickup truck or somethin', we walked back, you know. And you didn't wear your shoes. Now I've heard people talk about—older

people—my mom would say that if you didn't—you didn't put your shoes on and wear them to church. You went barefoot until you got to the church, and then you put your shoes on. And they did that so their shoes would last longer. So there are so many things. And the church didn't have wooden windows—didn't have glass windows at first. Had wooden windows—well, wooden shutters on there. Had one front door and one back door.

KK: Wow. Uh-huh.

CSW: And they had the outside toilets. And we grew up with the outside toilets, too. Lot of people got spider-bitten in the outside toilets growing up. And that's where we always gathered, you know. [03:22:37] All those home remedies. Miss Ethel Evans was the dentist. If you had a toothache, you went to Miss Ethel Evans. She's still livin'. She's bout ninety-five, ninety-six now. But that—she pulled teeth. So you know, anybody had a toothache, they went to her. Miss Zett was the midwife, so if they needed a midwife, someone would blow the—blow that horn—cow horn. You know, you sounded twice if there was a midwife. You sounded once if it was a death.

KK: Yeah.

[03:23:15] CSW: Yeah. So some communities—you know, Ebenezer had a church bell but they never—it never hung. They never hung it. So they would blow a horn, and my mom said, "If it was a midwife, you blew twice, and then the next person who heard it would keep goin' until it got to where it needed to be, the sound got to where it needed to be." That was for midwife. For one time if it was death.

[03:23:38] KK: So they were—it was in order to get a midwife to come to a birth or . . .

CSW: Uh-huh.

KK: . . . it was to announce a birth?

CSW: Uhn-uhn, to come to . . .

KK: To get a midwife to come to a birth.

CSW: Uh-huh.

KK: Okay.

CSW: Yeah.

KK: Wow.

CSW: So you know, they had their way of communicating. They had their way of communicating. And I tell you, every morning when my grandfather would do this holler to see if my—his brother was okay, and he'd wait there for a little while, and the brother would answer back, and they would

know all is well. But you know, there were just so many ways and things and to—and I tell you the—about catchin' a baby. They didn't say to give birth. They, you know, they needed the—her to come catch the baby. And that's what—that was the term that they use. They needed someone to come catch the baby. So . . .

KK: I guess that's pretty true.

[03:24:28] CSW: Yeah. [Laughter] And not only—the midwife just didn't serve to deliver Black babies. The midwife went to anybody, white or Black. Now that was a diff—yes, white or Black.

KK: But it was a Black midwife.

CSW: Yeah. Uh-huh.

KK: That's interesting.

CSW: Yes. And the one that delivered me and all of us was named Miss Zett. They would call Miss Zett. And I think of her—when she wrote a story—someone interviewed her and did her story—she said—I think it was close to a thousand babies she delivered.

KK: Wow.

CSW: Yeah. There was a lady named Miss Dora Hunn that was in the Wards Chapel com—Howell. Dora Howell, but they called

her Dora Hunn, though, but that Dora Howell that delivered 'em in another community. But yeah, so—but midwife went both ways. She went to white or Black. It just whoever needed her.

[03:25:23] KK: So there weren't any white midwives?

CSW: It probably was, but I don't know any.

KK: But you know the . . .

CSW: But I knew . . .

KK: Yeah.

CSW: . . . that the Black one delivered both . . .

KK: Yeah.

CSW: . . . baby, white and Black.

KK: Interesting.

CSW: Uh-huh.

KK: Interesting.

[03:25:33] CSW: You wanna know what's the difference, right?

When I went—I have gone to—did I tell you I went to Lake Village to that plantation house—the one that's on—the livable plantation house in Arkansas, I think. [*Sniffs*] And they were have—they were havin' a class from Arkansas State University and—an extension of Arkansas State Univers—so they had some pictures from that plantation in

Lake Village, some old pictures that someone had turned in. And they had two ladies standin' there, and they said, "We know that—we are told that they had—they lived at this plantation. We don't know what their function was." And I looked at the picture, and I said, "I do." And they—"What?" One of the mid—one of the ladies standin' there had a bonnet that was tied in front. The bows hung down, and she had on long sleeves. Her breasts hung to here. I said, "This is a wet nurse," because all the—she took care of the babies and nursed them. That was the other thing that Black women could do. They could nurse white babies because the white women didn't want their breasts to hang down, so the Black women nursed. And I said, "She has on long sleeve. Although she took care of the baby, they didn't want the skin to be next to her, so she has on long sleeve and her bonnet is tied in front." The other lady had on, like, the nightcap. No string. And she had her sleeves rolled up. I said, "This lady's a cook. She wears no strings because it doesn't—they don't want to catch on fire. Her sleeves are rolled up to keep from causin' a fire." I said, "And that's the way you tell." "How do you know that?" "I know." [KK laughs] You know, I've been around enough. [03:27:25] My Great-Grandmother Laura,

Irene's mother, had on the long skirt around a washpot. It caught fire, and she burned and it—from her wounds, it got infected, and she died. So the women would take their long skirts, and I've seen my mom to take the long skirt—bring—take the tail and bring it up through their leg and tuck it in the waistband, so it created like a pair of pants to keep from gettin' caught—catchin' on fire around the washpot. So when I saw that, and I saw it on TV one time, I said, "Wow! I can—my mom would do that, my grandmother." [03:28:05] And the other thing is that—I don't know if I can tell this.

[*Laughs*] That—habits that my grandmother and my aunties did have a habit of—you know, they never wore underclothes. Never. Well, on Sundays. One of them—my grandmother and my mom and auntie would but her—my grandmother's sister never wore underclothes. Never. And it was an insult if you gave her a pair for Christmas, you know. That was an insult to her.

[03:28:49] KK: Why was that?

CSW: [*Laughs*] She said, "Why do you need to put on somethin'?" And she would forget and wet in 'em because she was so used to not wearin' them. And she would just pull 'em off and throw 'em in the bushes. [*Laughter*] She said, "You don't

need that." So when I got to—when I was growin' up, I thought, "That's neat. You don't have to—you can be free." I thought that was the neatest habit. "Why put on all this stuff if you don't need it?" So my mom used to would check me—"Carolyn Ann, come here. Let me see if you have on your underclothes" [*laughs*] because my auntie did that up until the time she died. They just—that was just somethin' they didn't do because that was somethin' you would—to them, you wore on Sundays. You know, one size fit all. You know, that's nothin' new because they made them out of flour sacks. So you had a drawstring in them. So whoever—that—you just drew it up to fit you, and that was it. Our slips were made out of flour sacks. Everything was made out of flour sacks, and you wore certain things durin' the week. You had certain clothes for Sunday. Other clothes to play in. And I have one picture with all of us in the background. We're all barefoot, and in the background, you can see the washpot and the wagon in the background. And it's me and my two brothers and my cousins and two other family members. But it was fun, you know. I don't remember it as bein' as hot then as it is now, but everybody, everybody in that community was—they were either Uncle This or Aunt That or

Cousin This. You didn't have to know why, but if they said it, that was it. You just said it because they said so. [03:31:15] So it was just—there was no store. There was used to be—in New London, there was a store, but that was too far. So there was a—called a rollin' store, which is a truck, like the Budget Rent A Truck, that came round, and he had everything in there, you know. From the flavor to you name it. Threads, whatever, he had it in there. And he came around once a month, once a month. So whatever you needed, you bought it when he came around.

KK: Yeah.

[03:31:53] CSW: Then there was a guy that came around in a car, the candy man. The candy man would let Black women sell boxes of candy, and I don't know what the box of candy was worth, but my grandmother used to sell it for a nickel a bar or whatever was in there. It'd be a variety of candy in it, and from that candy, he would give them so much credit. And my grandmother would buy fabric to make dresses out of. Whatever it was she needed 'cause he would have so much stuff in that cart. [KK laughs] And he came around once a month. So either it was a rollin' store—everybody knew when he was comin'. Everybody knew when the candy man was

coming. And that—but that's how they traded is basically through those places. You know, sometime they did go to Strong. But that was a basic trading, those people comin' around. And you know, everybody loved the Watkin man and the Rawleigh man. You know, you can't tell a Black person, a older, Black person, that the best flavor you can buy is from Watkins, is Watkin flavor. There's a ointment that you buy, it smell like Mentholatum or somethin' like that, that he sold in cans, Watkins and Rawleigh liniment. You know, just stuff that—everybody had a time to come. Nobody—I don't ever remember anybody ever showin' up on the same day. [*KK laughs*] Everybody had their time to come, and that's when they came, and that's when people bought things. And he would go from house to house to house, whatever.

KK: Yeah.

[03:33:46] CSW: And the same thing with the insurance. Life of Georgia was the first insurance company that I remember comin' through there. And I can remember my mom buyin' ten-cent policies.

KK: Wow.

CSW: Ten-cent policies.

KK: Ten cents.

CSW: So it was a—it was just a very tight-knit community, and it still is. And the same families that were on—the white family's name that's on the plaque, historical marker, up in New London church now, some of the fam—we still carry the same name. You know, the—we are the Williams because our ancestor came and—the Gills, they—they're one that—they brought their slaves in. So we—the white—lot of the whites—or a lot of Blacks carry the same name as the whites. So when the reversal came, when the Blacks moved out of New London and came down into Ebenezer, the whites moved out of Ebenezer community on the Norris Road and went to New London. So now that's why they all Black. Ebenezer has one white family in it. The road has been changed from Norris Road to Ebenezer because we—when we rebuilt our church, we built a church down in the Black community. The cemetery still is on New London Road, and there's only one Norris. There's a—one of the great-grandsons of Webb Norris, Chris, his name is Chris, [KK laughs] and lives on—in that Black community now. So they named his drive—that's called Norris roa—Norris Drive. But the mile-long road is called Ebenezer now after the church.

[03:35:24] KK: So why did the white community move down to

New London and the Black community move from New London up to Ebenezer?

CSW: I don't know what made that reversal go other than—because that's where—at—when you're—when you think about in 1839 when they settled—came in . . .

KK: Yeah.

CSW: . . . to settle—well, and that's where New London's church—new—the white church is in New London up there. So that may have been why—and all of them belonged to New London Church. There is a Methodist church. It's called Ebenezer Presbyterian Methodist Church. It's down in what they call the bottom or—it's—well, they call it the bottom. It's on Lake Jone—I think Jones Lake Road or some—Phelps Road. One of those down there. [03:36:14] And—oh, we've been told down through the years by older Blacks that they have lots of headstones up toward the front of their cemetery. But all the way in the back, it's just a gap. There are no graves. There are no head markers there and—but it's just a blank area. And someone told us that Blacks were buried in the back because some of the cemeteries were like that. The whites were either buried on—in the Clark/Wallace Cemetery. If you asked a white person, they'll say Wallace

Cemetery. You asked a Black person, they'll say Clark Cemetery. It's the same cemetery. When you go in the gate, the whites were buried on the right—left side. The Blacks are on the right side. But I'm quite sure at one time it was reversed, and the Blacks were to the back, and the whites were to the front. They no longer use that cemetery, for years and years and years. The last person, white, that I knew—know of that was there they—it was a William. I think her name is Elizabeth Williams. That was a white lady who our family came out of. They came and got the slab that was on her grave and moved it somewhere else.

KK: Really?

CSW: Now I didn't understand that. The grave is still there. Whether—the ashes or whatever, her body, it's still there, but they moved the slab somewhere else. I don't know where they moved, but they moved it somewhere else.

KK: That's kinda peculiar.

CSW: The [*laughter*] Spencers, the older Spencers, are buried in there out of El Dorado. Now—and Laurie Spencer used to come every year. She's deceased now, I think. And—but every year, she would come down to that cemetery. Every year, she would come down. And they had vaults in that

cemetery that were just brick walls open where you could see through the center of it. You never could see anything 'cause they was so old, even when I was growin' up. But it was just two brick walls down this way and that way [uses hands to show the placement of the walls], and the end was bricked in. But you could see there was a hall. I guess maybe at one time you could see somethin' in there. I don't know. But there were about three or four of those, and those were the Spencers' graves. So the same Spencers that are in here in El Dorado were down in Strong, and they're—some of their ancestors are buried in that cemetery. So the Blacks still use it, but no whites use it anymore.

[03:38:44] KK: What was school like when you went to school, grade school?

CSW: I went to a segregated school, and I enjoyed school. I enjoyed school because that was our only outlet. I rode a bus, and Mr. R. D. Evans was my bus driver from the time I started school until I finished school.

KK: Wow.

CSW: [*Laughs*] And I—we left—we went to school from can to can't. From the time you could see till the time you

couldn't—can't see. [*Laughs*] Because when we rode the bus, it wa—the ride was so long that when we came to—my grandfather has stood at the road with us 'cause it would be dark.

KK: Yeah.

CSW: And we'd catch the bus and ride all up Pigeon Hill Road, all down through where the Shireys live. I don't know if that's Phelps Road or whatever that connects Pigeon Hill Road all the way back over to New London. Go up New London Road, come back down New London Road, go down Jones Lake Road, and come back. So we had—you know, the bus would be filled. Kids would be standing on the bus. But that's what we did. And I, like I said, I enjoyed school. I remember my teachers were—names—Miss Cassie Melvin, Miss A. K. Clark, Mr. Wiley, Miss O'Guinn. Miss O'Guinn still lives in the community. She's seventy-five now. She's there. Miss Senome Henry, who's deceased now. She died a couple years ago. She was ninety-somethin'. Just didn't have—I didn't have a foreign language. Neither did we have chemistry. [03:40:39] And when I was in tenth grade, we got—the county gave us new typewriters. The first time we were gonna get electric typewriters. We got eleven

typewriters. They came—they delivered 'em to our school. We got them one day, and everybody was jumpin' up and down 'cause I learned to type on a blind typewriter. So I definitely don't have to see the keys to know where they at. The old big, black, blocky typewriters, that's what we—I learned to type on. And when we got eleven new electric typewriters, you know, as they say, we were in high cotton.

KK: Yeah.

CSW: Only to come back the next day, and the white principal had come and gotten the electric typewriters from the Black school and brought us their old—still—only difference was the letters were on the keys. And we got their old typewriters. And you know, you're thinkin', "My goodness!" And I used to wonder why Mr. Henry, who was our principal, "Why would he do that? Why would he allow them to do that?" But it was not in his power.

KK: Right.

CSW: And it's—but we didn't have a foreign language. We didn't have chemistry. So when I got to college after graduating and—but I tell you that—I can say this, that I truly had a fantastic English teacher. I had a fantastic math teacher.

KK: Yeah.

CSW: I had a fantastic history teacher. Now you know, we could stand up to anybody for math, history, and English. And you know, I—today, in what I know about math, I don't think that—that might—I don't know. But I learned math.

KK: Yeah.

[03:42:35] CSW: I learned math, and I learned English, and I learned history.

KK: Yeah.

CSW: And it—again, it wasn't an option of if you were gonna do your best. You were gonna do your best because if that teacher came home and told your parents, then you were into it. You were in for it. So but when I got to college and I chose the field of dietetics and I found out that my, after I have completed a year in it, that my model was chemistry, and I thought, "Oh my goodness!" So I had to go and be tutored in the evenin's in order to catch on to chemistry.

KK: Right.

CSW: And I'm just thankful that the foreign language wasn't a part of . . .

KK: Yeah.

CSW: . . . my curriculum for dietetics, but chemistry was.

KK: Yeah.

CSW: And—but once I learned it, I learned it. But it was hard, and I just wondered—now the white school had chemistry. The white school had a foreign language, but we didn't. And . . .

[03:43:38] KK: What year about was that that you were in high school?

CSW: I graduated from high school in [19]65.

KK: Uh-huh. Right. Yes, you said that.

CSW: Mh-hmm. So my grad—my brother graduated in [19]64, my oldest brother, and I graduated in [19]65. My youngest brother graduated in [19]67. Now Kathryn was—my cousin was in the last class that graduated from Gardner before they integrated. And I still, like I said, I still didn't understand that, that most of the whites who had maids had Black maids.

KK: Yeah.

CSW: They all—both had kids because—just because—you know, all the—a lot of the maids were the same ages as the women they were workin' for. And most of the jobs were Crossett Paper Mill, haulin' pulpwood. My dad was a pulpwood hauler. Most of the Black men, prominent—who were thought to be prominent Black men, owned pulpwood contracts. And so—and they contracted under whites. But when they integrated school, a lot of Black women stopped workin' in the kitchens

and things for the whites because the whites were—white women were so upset that their kids were gonna have to go to school with the Black kids. And yet, the Blacks are cookin' for you every day and washin' and ironin' for you. So that caused a—the integration caused a lot of stores to close in Strong because you're talkin' about truly organized. A lot of those women, Black women, organized themselves and started carryin' the older Blacks to El Dorado to shop, so a lot of stores closed down in Strong after that. Strong formed their private schools and all because they really didn't want to be integrated.

KK: Yeah.

[03:45:34] CSW: And you know, now, the change has come about that the older heads, you know, really don't have a say—so now in tellin' the young ones . . .

KK: Right.

CSW: . . . who they can talk to, or they're gonna do it anyway.

KK: Yeah.

CSW: So you know, thing—as much as things have changed, they remain the same. And as thing—much as things have remained the same, yet there's change. So . . .

KK: Yeah. No, I'm with you. It's a—there's a certain amount of

change that's gonna go on no matter what.

CSW: Yeah.

KK: And eventually things will change . . .

CSW: Mh-hmm.

KK: . . . and they do change. And sometimes . . .

CSW: Right.

[03:46:11] KK: . . . it takes a long time, but they definitely do. So what—did you feel—or as a kid growin' up and comin' up through the school, did you ever feel that integration was close durin' the time you were in school?

CSW: No, it never . . .

KK: Or it never crossed your mind [*unclear words*].

CSW: It never crossed my mind because . . .

KK: Yeah.

CSW: . . . it wasn't talked about at that time. No.

[03:46:30] KK: Right, right. [*CSW sniffs*] Yeah, and you graduated in [19]65, so that was after the [19]57 crisis at Central.

CSW: Mh-hmm.

KK: It was after Little Rock closed schools for a year. It was after a new white school had been built in Little Rock. It was after—and then there was some integration going on.

CSW: But see, when you're talkin' about, like, [19]50-something, you know, I would've been in elementary school. So . . .

KK: Right.

CSW: . . . then.

KK: That's right. And usually that's what changed first was the small—the young grades first.

CSW: So . . .

KK: My first year to go to elementary school in 1969 [*unclear words*]*—*1959*—*1967 or [196]8 was the first year that Jacksonville Elementary was integrated—was the first year I went—when I went to first grade. Look, I didn't know—I didn't—I just assumed everybody . . .

CSW: And that's me.

KK: . . . I just assumed all the races went to school together 'cause I didn't know any better. [*Laughter*] I didn't know it was the first year.

CSW: Right.

KK: But—so yeah, that was about that, you know, that—that's later than your graduation date . . .

CSW: Right.

KK: . . . so it hadn't happened yet.

[03:47:33] CSW: Well, and you said, you—when you're talkin'

about in the [19]50s, in 1952, see, I was just six years old.

KK: Yeah.

CSW: And when—just startin' school, so you're talkin' about when you get to [19]57, I'm still not even . . .

KK: Right.

CSW: . . . way up in junior high yet so . . .

KK: And nobody . . .

CSW: And . . .

KK: . . . and almost no one was integrated at . . .

CSW: Right.

KK: . . . that point anyway.

CSW: So . . .

KK: Yeah.

CSW: . . . the fifty—anything that happened in [19]57 and whatever, you know, it was, like, it was far removed from Strong. And—but as I've read the records . . .

KK: Yeah.

[03:48:02] CSW: . . . I've read the records from years back that—in the [19]40s when—you know, in the [19]40s there was Ward Chapel School; there was Gill's School; there was Piney Grove School, you know; Pleasant Grove School, so all the communities had their own little schools.

KK: Right, right.

CSW: And so in, like, the [19]40s, when they—when the WPA built Gardner School down there, which was a Black school, all the schools came to Gardner exce—Ward's Chapel was the last one that came to—that joined in at—to come to Gardner. And you know, to have a brick building . . .

KK: Oh yeah. [*Laughs*]

CSW: Now they were just excited to have . . .

KK: Yeah.

CSW: . . . this big, brick building. But all those schools, all those little, country schools—because some schools had even closed in because there was one called White School; there was one called Williams School. They were no longer. The Williams School is where my dad older brothers went, which is on the—it's off the New London Road, back sittin' in the wood. They had a Williams School, and they had told us that the—some brothers called the Barton—Barter—Barton brothers burned that school down. But it had been burned twice before, and that was the third time . . .

KK: Wow.

CSW: . . . and so they just didn't build it back.

[03:49:25] KK: You're sayin' that white kids burned down a Black

school?

CSW: I don't know. I won't call them kids. They were young men.

KK: Oh.

CSW: Uh-huh. [*KK sniffs*] So . . .

KK: So it was just vandalism?

CSW: Well, they didn't call it vandalism.

KK: No, I guess they didn't.

CSW: No.

KK: 'Cause no one was gonna get in trouble for it.

CSW: [*Laughs*] So—but it was, like, there was this feud between the Black Smiths who—there were the Smiths, and then there was the Bartons. And there was this conflict. There was a lady, her last name was White, and she looked—her last name was White, but she looked like she was white. And that started a feud because she was down there with the Smith brothers, and they thought there was a white lady with the Smith brothers, and there came—and so—then that was the last time that the house—some of the houses and schools were burned.

KK: Whew!

CSW: And they just didn't build them back.

KK: Man.

CSW: And when I . . .

KK: Dangerous times.

[03:50:23] CSW: Yeah. Yeah. So there was always—you know, you always had differences.

KK: Yeah.

CSW: Always. And you know, I don't think—that time, they didn't even call it—they weren't sayin' segregated, whatever. It was just a difference between the races.

KK: Yeah.

CSW: A Black/white issue. And so, you know, it—the school burned. Then they had the Gill's School, and when Gardner built—the WPA built Gardner, then everybody just went there . . .

KK: Yeah. Yeah.

CSW: . . . and closed down. The Payne School was the last school that was torn down oth—'cause it stood for years and years and years because they also had church in that school.

KK: Oh, okay. This Payne—is that *P-A-Y-N-E*?

CSW: Uh-huh.

KK: Okay.

CSW: And there are still Paynes livin' down in that . . .

KK: Ah.

[03:51:15] CSW: . . . community. There were stories told about that—well, in that area down there—now I'm gonna tell you about the ghost things [*laughter*]. In that area down there of what they call the bottom, that from the Payne School, and it served as Christian Chapel Church also for a spell until—when the—once a storm blew Christian Chapel Church over. That used to be close to the Clark/Wallace Cemetery over in there, named Christian Chapel, member, the Methodist people started havin' church in Payne School, just a one-room, little place. There were bodies—there were graves between that and the house. There's an older house down there that's probably close to a hundred years old that's still stand—people still live in it.

KK: Wow.

CSW: Aunt Birdie, the one I told you—talked about earlier, Birdie. It was her house. And their daughter is still there, and she's ninety-two. She still lives in that house. But—and they still have the original smokehouse with the logs. It's still back there. But in between where her house is and the school, the church, Payne Wilder School Church, there are graves in there, and we were always taught that there were graves in there. Whites have found graves even in the woods still.

One of 'em had . . .

KK: Yeah.

CSW: I have a picture of it. It's a—last name is Payne—that—there were two graves, but only one had a marker and one—the one that had the marker name is Payne. That's off into those wood now. So you know, there are graves all through those wood because that was the heart of the slave area down in there. That—but when they stopped havin' anything in that church, in that school/church, they would—people talked about in the evenin' sometime, you could hear people singin' and piano playin'.

KK: Really?

CSW: [*Laughs*] So that's just one of the tales that . . .

KK: Yeah.

CSW: . . . they tell that.

KK: Yeah.

CSW: Even people today that are in their late seventies, eighties, ninety, will tell you that, that you could hear singin' in there. Yes, we've had lots of ghost stories. Yeah.

[03:53:44] KK: Why do you think that there are a lot of ghost stories that emanate?

CSW: Because we've been told them. We've been told some of the

stories.

KK: Right, so those get repeated.

CSW: Yes.

KK: Yeah, yeah. Gotcha.

CSW: Yes.

KK: Those are fun.

CSW: Well . . .

KK: Kinda.

CSW: [*Laughs*] Kinda, sorta. They're scary.

KK: Oh, okay. [*CSW laughs*] Wanna tell one?

CSW: The best one I know is the one that had—at the cemetery. And that's one that I had firsthand experience with, you know. Others would be things that people have told me.

[03:54:23] KK: Right. Well, you wanna talk about the cemetery story?

CSW: We have a few hours before nightfall. [*Laughter*]

KK: You can tell the shorter version if you want to.

CSW: No, I know how [*laughs*] to tell it. It's just on a—I was passin'—we were passin' by this church. The cemetery—they call it the King Cemetery down in Louisiana outside of Minden, between Haynesville and Minden, on a road. And with a trail ride. And when I passed by, I saw this old cemetery, and it

had—the King Cemetery had wrought iron fence and all that around it. And when you look to the outside, you could see some little mounds, and I immediately knew that—because you could look at the age of the rocks and things and some of the head marker, that it had to be quite old. And I just thought, I said, "Those are slaves' graves outside that cemetery, and most of the white families inside." And there were Kings. That was the name of the cemetery, King. Not a big cemetery. So I said, "If we get to our campsite before night, we gotta come back up here. I wanna come back up here and look." Because of the rocks the—and because I'm a history buff . . .

KK: Yeah.

CSW: . . . I wanted to know. So a gentleman and I came back, Charles, Cletis Charles. He's from Spearsville. We came back up, drove my truck back up, and I had my camera, and the gate was kinda hard to get in. We finally got in the gate. And I went to the left; he went to the right. I went to the left because there were old—what they call dirt rocks and things like that, the brown rocks. I wanted to see those. At first, you can't—couldn't see any markers on 'em, but once you got all the way up to them, you could see little plaques that were

stuck in the rock. There was a—like, a four- or seven-month-old, then, like, a young, like, three- or four-year-old, and then there was one grave that had no name on it, but you knew they were all infants. Then on to there, you saw the mother, the father, and on to the right. So I take my camera out to take pictures of these graves. And when I looked down, there was a man standin' in my camera that—there was a man already focused in my camera. And I'm thinkin', "Maybe I didn't clear something," you know, so I moved my camera off the gravesite and looked in, and there's—it's clear. I put it—aimed it back, and I look. There's this man standin' back in my camera.

[03:57:17] KK: But did you see an actual man when you looked up with your regular eyes or . . .

CSW: No. No. That was it.

KK: So you couldn't see anybody except through the camera.

CSW: Right. That's what I'm thinkin'. Maybe I didn't clear something out.

KK: Yeah.

CSW: So I moved it to try to clear it, but there was nothin' there. It is clear. But when I aimed it back at the grave, the little grave, there's a man standin'. This man had a top hat on.

Now all I could see was silhouette. No face or anything. But I knew he had a top hat on, and I knew he had a coat with a cape around it. He had a cape. And so now I'm getting nervous because I can't get him out of my focus. I can move it when I'm not tryin' to take a picture . . .

KK: Right.

CSW: . . . and he's not there. But the minute I aim to focus to— he's there. [*KK laughs*] And so I don't want to run because I knew the gentleman with me would go off and leave me. So I called him. I said, "Mr. Charles, come here." And he's tryin' to tell me somethin' about, "Oh, look at the age on there." I said, "Mr. Charles, come here." He said—I said, "Mr. Charles, please come here." So I raised my voice. He came over, and he looks over, but he leans his head up and a shadow come. I said, "No, don't lean over, just look in there." He looked down. He said, "Who is that, Miss Carolyn?"

KK: Yeah.

CSW: And I said, "I don't know." So I moved the camera to show him there's nobody in it, and I said, "Look in there now." He said, "There's nobody." I put it back. He said, "Who is that, Miss Carolyn?" [*KK laughs*] And I said, "I don't know." So the next time, he said, "You don't know who that is, Miss

Carolyn?" And I said, "No, I don't." So by this time, he's nervous, too.

KK: Wow.

[03:59:11] CSW: And so we are both thinkin' the same thing. "Are we gonna run or what?" By this time, it cleared [*snaps fingers*] just like that.

KK: Wow.

CSW: And so I told him, I said, "It's gone." And I went on to take the picture, and I took the picture of that grave. I took the—of the next three graves, and then I took the picture of the mother and the father. And I looked, and either all of them had the same name—either maiden name of the mother or the—and the last name of King—all of 'em in there. So I knew it was a family cemetery. So we go outside. We go out, we close the gate, and we walk around to the side where the graves are on the outside, the slaves' graves. The slaves have the same name as the mother's maiden name. I said, "Wow!" I told—I explained to Mr. Charles. I said, "You know, these slaves were given to her when she married. That's why they have her maiden name and not"—so we never said anything else. We never discussed [*KK laughs*] what we had just experienced. We didn't say anything. So we get in the—

in my truck, and we go back to the campsite. So when we get to the campsite and stop, well, I know I'm safe. He can't run off and leave me or anything. [*Laughter*] I said, "Mr. Charles, did you see that?" He said, "Yes, I did." That was all we said to each other. So I get out, and I start explainin' to people, "You know, we just had this experience up here."

KK: Yeah.

CSW: I said, "There was somethin' in my camera that I could not take those pictures." I said, "I tried three or four different times by myself. Then I—Mr. Charles came over, and we try—I tried three times or three or four times with him." I said, "Mr. Charles, did you not see"—he said, "Yes, I saw it." That was all he said. So then the other group says, "Let's go back up there." I said, "I was blessed to get out once. I am not [*KK laughs*] going back. I'm not going back." I tried to show them the pictures.

KK: Yeah.

CSW: They couldn't see it. I met you-all in—at the university in Magnolia. I tried to show Scott. He never could bring it up. Remember?

KK: Mh-hmm.

CSW: Couldn't bring these picture—you-all could not see what I had

taken.

KK: Yeah.

[04:01:31] CSW: And I decided then that this was more than just a human experience. If this was ever a ghost, supernatural experience, it was. That was my first one. I hope it's my last one. [*KK laughs*] I have not been back. I can't explain it. I can't show it to anybody 'cause they can't see it. But when I tried to focus, when I look at it, I can see it. Now I don't know what it is. I don't know what you call it. I do not know.

KK: Yeah.

CSW: I don't know what you call it, but I know it happened.

KK: Yeah.

CSW: But you know, you try to explain that to somebody, and they look at you like, "Wow!"

KK: [*Laughs*] They think you went off the deep end, don't they?

CSW: Yes, yes. But that was my first time havin' that experience of to actually see somethin'. And—but only through the camera. You know, it was like whatever it was, I took it that he was protectin' his children. And he didn't know my intention or whatever, but I don't know if ghosts really—I don't know, but I just know that after a while when—whatever happened, it just went away. Went away. But as to whether I believe in

ghosts, I'd have to say yes. [*Laughter*] Yes. Havin' strange experiences that I don't—haven't seen anything else, but things I've heard, yes. Yes. When I first got the two masks, before I brought them in my house, I said a prayer. I said, "Lord, let them know that they are home," because these were masks that belonged to slaves. And they were gettin' ready to tear this barn down, and someone decided to look in it one more time, and they stumbled over these two masks.

[04:03:35] KK: And slaves used to wear masks . . .

CSW: Well, doin' ceremonial things.

KK: Ah, right. Yes.

CSW: And you know, people would say, "Well, how were they able to bring slaves over, and they brought personal item?" Well, if you had a group of slaves and one person—you know, there could've been a group who spoke the same language. If that one person could calm them down, you didn't care what he had on. You—if he could calm them down and keep peace aboard a ship, you didn't care. And so—and—that's the way I assume that these masks were able to make it over. And this person, that mask, because of the cowrie shells on it, he was somebody because at one time cowrie shells was used as a form of money in Africa. So—but before I brought them in

my house, it was just something—a feeling that you felt. And the gentleman that brought them to me—well, he told his wife to give them to me—would—did not want them around him because he said that there was somethin' wrong with them. It's not so much with both masks. It's just one mask. So at one time, I had it over my hallway. But I prayed over them before I came—brought them in the house. I said, "Lord, let them know that they're home, that they're safe. That they're safe."

BP: Two minutes.

CSW: "And that they're free." So that one mask has the most awesome expression on his face.

KK: Yeah.

CSW: And I put it over my hallway door, but I couldn't, for whatever reason, I couldn't stand it there. So I moved it. I had it over my fireplace for a time, and then I wound up puttin' it on my piano. I've had people—I was doin' an exhibit in Ruston, Louisiana, at the library.

KK: Hold on a minute. One second. Let's go ahead and change tapes, and we'll get the rest of that.

CSW: Kay.

[Tape stopped]

[04:05:42] KK: So you had the mask on the piano, but not everyone reacts to it the same way.

CSW: No. No. I tell you, I was in—down in Ruston at a library speakin', and I had that mask. And I was explainin' how—the feelin' that I had from the mask and that I never left it. You know, wherever I travel, if I set up an exhibit—if I'm gonna do a exhibit one day and I get there that evenin', I set up. I don't leave that mask. I always take it with me. And—but after it was over, after the exhibit was over, there was a young lady in the audience from Africa. She got up, and she told me this. She said, "If you were not genuine, if this was not comin' from your heart, you would be dead." And I'm thinkin' to myself, "Oh!" And even the audience is lookin' like, "What?" [*KK laughs*] She said, "You would be dead." She said, "That mask is a ceremonial mask of death. And if you were not genuine, I'm gonna tell you that you would be dead." She said, "Because it does have power." And then I'm reminded of when I was in Arcadia and I was standin' by the mask, and a lady would not walk to me. She told me she . . .

[04:07:15] KK: Where is Arcadia?

CSW: Arcadia, Louisiana.

KK: Okay.

CSW: It's between Minden and Ruston.

KK: Kay.

CSW: And I—she said, "Could you come here?" And I said, "No, you can come to me." She said, "I can't." I tell you, for two weeks later, she called me, wanted to know—she said, "I know that you have—you can tell me what I need to know." I said, "Ma'am, I don't know anything to tell you." She said, "Yes, you do." She said, "Yes, you do." That was a—that was one of the major experiences in my life that I used to wonder why people would say, "You have a gift. You have a gift." And I thought, "I don't understand what you're sayin'. 'You have a gift. You have a gift. You have a prophet streak. You're this, and you're that.'" And I thought, "I don't understand this." And I've been told this, you know, even as a young person, I've been told this. And I just—I didn't understand it.

KK: Right.

[04:08:14] CSW: And I'm not gonna say I even understand it now. But some of the experiences that I've had would make me think that maybe not me, but it. When I say it, I'm talkin' about the mask. And I don't know if I'm supposed to say

this. Am I supposed to say what I feel on tape?

KK: Well, that—if you feel comfortable doing it, I think you should.

CSW: That it's like I don't do what I do because I chose to do it. I feel like I was chosen to do what I do, and I've always felt like that. That it's not—it's my calling. It's my duty. It's my responsibility to tell the story. And because there is no way that my head should hold all of the things that's been passed down through the years and that when I need to know, I know. But it's like I'm walkin' in the footsteps of someone before me, but it doesn't seem like I'm walkin' in their footstep. It's like I'm walkin' in my footsteps. And you know, people may think I'm strange after this [*laughs*], but it's like I know the story. I know the story. The other thing that lady told me in Ruston that night, never put the mask over my face and look through the eyes. And I took her at word. I haven't.

[04:10:08] KK: Yeah. And so how does that—how do those types of experiences and your innate feeling that you have a story to tell tie with the kind of trainings that you do and the exhibits that you do and the history that you study?

CSW: Because . . .

KK: 'Cause you have something of a career of this—not that you get paid a lot, but . . .

CSW: Right.

KK: . . . by career, I mean that you do this as an avocation all the time.

CSW: I do it in spite of thing, not because of anything. And that's what I mean when I say it's my duty. It's my job. I didn't choose this. I was chosen for this. And that the life experiences that I've dealt with, that I've had to go through, prepared me for what I do now because I had to be genuine in order to be chosen. I had to be tried in order to be chosen. I had to go through it, to live it, to not—you know, no one can tell you about an experience. You gotta live it. You know, and if you haven't been through trials and tribulation, you don't have a testimony because that's what a testimony is. It's a test. It's a test of your character. It's a test of how good your faith is. It's a test of are you who you say you are. Or it's a test to see if you're gonna bend under pressure. It's a test to see if you can withstand whatever's thrown at you. And I thought, "I've had—you name it, I've had it, experienced it." And if there was something that was gonna deter me, it would have by now, I feel like. You know, I've

had things done to me that truly hurt. I've lost things that truly hurt, and I've lived things, through things, even now, that still hurt. And I still stand. And I don't—I'm not standin' by myself, and there's a reason for my standin'. And everybody—you know, I'm truly afraid to live by myself. I truly am. But yet I do it because I do feel protected. I do feel protected. And when I tell you that what I need to know—I've had people ask me questions, and I don't know where the answer came from.

KK: Oh.

CSW: But I know. I know what I know. And so that's why I feel like—I'm not—yes, I'm, in a way, I'm walkin' in the footsteps of my ancestor. But at the same time, it's my own journey.

[04:12:54] KK: Uh-huh. And what is it that you want people to learn from your exhibits and your talks about history and your life? What would you like people to take away from that?

CSW: That life is truly a journey, and all of us are gonna travel our own. You know, I can't travel your journey. You can't travel my journey. And that history is just what it is. It's in the past. There's nothing you're gonna do to change it. It's history. You can't rewrite it. You either learn to—first thing you gotta do is learn to forgive because I wasn't a slave. You

weren't a slave. You weren't my master. I wasn't your servant. What was, was, and it was that. If my ancestors endured it and learned to live and let live, then why can't the other race do the same? Look at it. You forgive the past. You didn't do it. Forgive the past. That begins the healin'. And not until we can sit down and talk openly and freely about it, you can't ever move past it, you know. So I can't tell my history unless I include you. You can't tell your history unless you include me. So why can't we sit down together and discuss it, if that's what you wanna do. If you have questions, ask me. Don't assume. Ask me. 'Cause if I have a question, I'm gonna ask you. I'm gonna ask you. But until you forgive, you will never heal. You'll always be bitter. You'll always be angry. Everything will agitate you, irritate you, upset you. But the minute that you let go, then that sayin' is, "You let go, you let God." Because God can't heal you until you forgive. And I'll tell anybody. I forgave, I'm healed, and I've moved on. I will openly discuss a topic. I've talked to the Sons of the Confederate. I've talked to them. They asked me to come. I've been there. I don't fear. If I lose my life for what I do, then God's gonna give me everlastin' life. And like I said, I don't—I didn't choose what I

do. I feel like I was chosen for what I do. And I plan to do it the best of my ability every time I get the opportunity, and I'm not motivated, stimulated, by anything other than I'm happy to be here today. I'm pleased to be Carolyn Ann Smith-Williams, and I truly believe, if nothing else, you've got to remember that when you cross over, when your life is ended, God is not gonna be concerned about what someone else did to you. He's only concerned—what did you do? What did you do? And that's what you gotta answer to. All the other stuff is just stuff. So like I said, I feel like Hezekiah. I got a good heart. I got a good heart, and you gotta turn your face against all that other stuff and move on and know that the same man created me, created you. And he didn't say that you do it this way and you do it that way. He said you're all goin' the same way, and that's all that I believe. That's all that matters to me. So I'm free. I'm free from the inside out.

[04:16:55] KK: You've talked quite a bit about how adults have reacted to your stories, the history you've collected, the objects you've collected. How do kids react to your talks and your exhibits?

CSW: The little ones will ask more questions than the older ones

because I think the older ones are some kind—sometimes embarrassed. But [*sniffs*] I've spoken to all-white groups. You know where Mountain Home is, don't you?

KK: Where?

CSW: Mountain Home, Arkansas.

KK: Yes. Uh-huh. Yes.

CSW: Yes. [*Laughs*] I've spoken to . . .

KK: Not a lot of Black people up in that . . .

CSW: Right.

KK: . . . those counties.

CSW: Well, when I spoke up there, there was not any . . .

KK: Yeah.

[04:17:36] CSW: . . . there. And I still tell you, I'm tellin' my story, you know. I'm not tryin' to tell somebody else's story. I'm tellin' my story. My story just happens to include others. And it doesn't bother me. I can't write anything down. You haven't seen me use a paper, have you? I can't write it down and tell it because if I do that, I'm not being for real. But it comes from here. [*Points to heart*] It comes from here. You know, everything I told you today are—that I've said, anyway, and I can say the same thing over and over and over and over and over again. I might include something else

that—because I have so many stories in my head. So it doesn't make any difference who I'm talkin' to, who I'm talkin' to. The first thing I tell them, "I want you to know that anything that I say to you today is not meant to aggravate, upset, irritate, or annoy you. But everything I say is meant to educate, uplift, inspire, and educate you 'cause I didn't come here to train—change your mind; I came here to train it." And that's truly the way I feel, you know, that I didn't come to change it. I came to train it. And if you're not willin' to listen—and don't listen with your head 'cause if you listen with your head, you know, you're gonna misunderstand. But if you listen with your heart, if you listen with your heart, you'll understand because what comes from the heart touches the heart. And this truly comes from the heart.

[04:19:22] KK: So how did your presentation in Mountain Home go?

CSW: Fine. I've been invited to come next year again. [*Laughter*]
So fine, fine.

[04:19:30] KK: Well, what's been your—can you think of a particular event that was really the most exciting one for you so far?

CSW: Most exciting.

KK: Maybe most interesting would be a better question. Which one—which has been the most interesting?

CSW: When—any time there's an audience with older people in it, and I can say somethin', they'll say, "You're right. You're right. I know what you're talkin' about." Then I know, "Wow, wow, they understand." And when they understand, then the younger people know that, "You know, this really happened. You know, I've heard that or I—that really happened." And so I've had—when I was at—it's on College Street. I'm tryin' to think of the name of the school that's on College Street—Yocum.

KK: Kay.

[04:20:18] CSW: I was at Yocum several years ago, speakin' to—I think it was third graders. Second, third graders. And you know, you're thinkin', "Well, they don't understand a lot of this," but I have to break my thoughts and things down to where they understand me. And I involve them in what I'm doin'. After I finished, a young girl, a little girl, walked up to me, and she grabbed me around my leg. She said, "Oh, I'm so sorry that you were a slave. I am so"—I said, "Oh, honey, that was then. This is now. I'm not a slave now." So—but it made a connection . . .

KK: Yeah.

CSW: . . . with her, and if she got nothing else out of it, she understood that that was then. This is now. I'm not a slave anymore. You don't have to worry about that stuff. Just remember it happened. It had happened, but it's not anymore.

KK: Yeah, yeah.

CSW: And you know, for her to be so—she was emotional over it.

KK: Yeah.

[04:21:15] CSW: I was in—at the Masur Museum in Monroe, Louisiana. They had a group of fifth graders that come in, and I was so honored to be asked to be there because they had—I can't even remember her name now. But they had a—the famous artist that came out of the Cane River area, had her exhibit there. And so they asked me to bring my live exhibit in. And they had fifth graders comin' through. Oh my goodness, some fifth grade. And most—it was predominantly Black. So there was this young man that—he said, "Why do," and he was angry, "why do they always say Black folks are on the bottom?" And there was a gentleman in a suit. I don't know if it was the principal from the school that they came from, but he was standin' to the side. And he was ready to

say, "Young man"—you know. I said, "No, uhn-uhn." So I put my hand on his shoulder. I said, "Young man," I said, "have you ever seen anything that's torn up—that start at the top and come down?" He said, "No." I said, "Well, they take this big boom, and they start from the top, and they start tearin' it down, right?" He said, "Yes." And I said, "But," I said, "when they're buildin' it," I said, "they gotta level the ground up." I said, "They gotta go pour concrete. They put wire—rebar wire in it. They do all this thing, buildin' that foundation." I said, "That's what you are." I said, "And it's the bottom that holds up hundred story buildings. It's the bottom. The bottom." I said, "So you're worried about bein' on the bottom." I said, "When you think about it—on your ancestors' shoulder, all these things will build up, and they held things up and made things move, made things prosper." I says, "That was on your shoulders now." I said, "When I say ancestor, that's on your shoulders, too." I said, "But when they tear it down, what did I tell you? They take a boom, and they start tearin' it down from the top." I said, "That's the only time you see someone start from the top and come down is when they tearin' it down." I said, "But you remember from this day, it's okay to be on the bottom 'cause

it's the bottom that holds up the top." The expression in his face changed.

[04:23:36] KK: What did he mean when he said he was on the bottom?

CSW: Because that's what he felt like, or he's seen . . .

KK: Yeah.

CSW: . . . that Blacks are always on the bottom. You're always bein' mistreated. You're always turned away. You had to go in the back door. And he's thinkin' about, you know—the only people that the young people know anything about is Dr. King and people like that. They teach 'em about Dr. King, Malcolm X, Harriet Tubman, and the—Daisy Bates and all that. That's who they teach about. They don't go back—that that—this was goin' on, and there were people who made it possible for them to be able to do what they did. [04:24:10] So that's what he was talkin' about—that he remembers—you know, they show them some excerpts of the civil rights or things like that. So that's what they see now. They don't see the picture that was long time ago. And you know, today, that's who they show. When they show, they show Harriet Tubman and Frederick Douglass, Dr. King, and our Daisy Bates and all like that. That's where—it's basically like that's where history

started. But history was goin' on long before, long before. And you know, that's the one thing that I dislike, and that's what motivates me to do what I do because our kids need to know there was—before there was Nike, there was history. [KK laughs] Before there was Coke, there was history. Before there was all the other sportsmen and star like that, there was history. History made it possible for all these people to come about. All that history is lost, and you're not gonna read it in a book anymore. You're not gonna read it. So if it wasn't for people like me and others who are doin' the same thing, that history would be lost. That's why I see you. I say, "I don't want my story to be changed. I don't want you to paint it to make it look one way when it's not." You know, don't—you can't—don't embellish the truth. Truth needs no embellishment. So it bothers me that I can't pick up a book and read about myself. And when I say myself, I'm not talkin' about Carolyn today.

KK: Right.

CSW: It bothers me. It bothers me when they don't wanna say the slave trade. They wanna say, "Oh, it was a transatlantic this." You know, they wanna—you play with words. You're changin' it. It is what it is. It is what it is. And if you can—

how do you forget all those people who lost their lives on their way? All those people lost their life after they got here, you know. At one time Arkansas had more slaves than it did free people. How do you forget that? How do you not write about it? So that's my job. And I can tell it in a way that I'm not gonna insult you, and I'm not gonna disgrace myself because I'm proud to have been Negro, colored, Black, and now I'm African American. I'm proud to be it. I'm proud because I'm a part of whatever else is out there. [04:26:45] You know, I embrace my Native American heritage. When I go to Houston, the day that we go downtown, I dress Native American, and I sign to them because I have to embrace that. I—my hair is not as straight as white, but it's straight enough that I can wear my hair whatever way I want to because I have to embrace that part that someone— somethin' else, that's white. So if I don't embrace it, how can I tell you about it? If I don't appreciate it, how can I want you to accept it? If I don't know about it, how am I gonna teach you? So that's what I want people to do. I want people to be able to accept who you are, know where you came from, and be able to pick it up, pick a book up, and read about history. Don't change it. Don't leave it out.

'Cause if it wasn't for this today, if I hadn't asked you, "What are you gonna do with this?" [04:27:48] And I asked you that. "What are you gonna do with it?" I would not be doin' this today.

KK: I believe you.

CSW: 'Cause I'm definitely not in it to make money. 'Cause I would've quit long time ago, [*laughter*] long time ago, if that was my purpose. It's not. It's not. It's not. I'm proud to be from Strong, Harrison Township, New London, Ebenezer. I'm proud to be from there. If I wasn't, I wouldn't be back here now. I could've gone other places to live, but I chose to come back home. And I'm here because I wanted to be able to put all this stuff you see here. I wanted to be where people could come and see. Oh, and I have both Black and white all the time come back. "Oh, I remember this. I—this"—and people give me things. They give me things. You know, "I know you're gonna take care of it. I want you to have this." And you know, if you think I'm living—you know, I don't know what standards are [*laughter*] but whatever. I'm just—I'm proud to live in this log house. I was elated. I was jumpin' up and down when I found this log house. I really was. And I was proud to get rid of everything. The

only thing you see modern here is this sofa and stuff. All the rest of this stuff is much older than I am. But I love it. I wouldn't exchange it for anything. I wouldn't exchange it for anything. I don't just talk about history; I live it. So I hope that when someone looks at this and they say, "Well, that lady's strange, but she's tellin' the truth because I remember this." And those young ones say, "Oh, they really lived like that? I didn't know that." But now they do. That's it. I didn't mean to preach to you but anyway [*laughs*] . . .

KK: No, you're 100 percent fine by me. I've enjoyed every minute of this. [04:29:57] Is there anything that we're leaving out that you wanna talk about?

CSW: No, no, no, no. I'm fine. I'm just happy that you did this.

KK: We're very happy that . . .

CSW: Yeah.

KK: . . . you allowed us to do it. It's always an honor for us to sit on the other side and listen to these great stories. We're thrilled that so many people wanted us to do this story, and that says a lot about how much of an impact that you're having.

CSW: Oh, I didn't know that. But anyway . . .

KK: Yeah, you're—you got right up to the top of the list here for

the El Dorado area.

CSW: Oh my goodness.

KK: That's why we're doin' this interview.

CSW: Oh.

KK: There you go.

CSW: Well, at least I'm doing my job.

KK: Yes, you are.

CSW: So it . . .

KK: You're getting your word out there.

CSW: [*Laughs*] Say gettin' the word out there.

KK: You're educating people about history. That's wonderful.

Well, thank you so much for spending time with us today.

CSW: Oh, you're quite welcome.

KK: We really appreciate it. And now we'll get out of here so you can relax.

CSW: I think—as they say, now the ball is in your hand.

KK: Well, [*CSW laughs*] and it'll come back to you for review.

CSW: Okay.

KK: So you'll get a chance to play with it one more time.

CSW: Oh my goodness! Oh my goodness! I don't know.

[*Laughter*] I don't know. I don't know.

KK: Thank you so much.

[04:31:05 End of Interview]

[Transcribed and edited by Pryor Center staff]

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