

00:00:00

**Laura Browder:** The thing about this is you're probably gonna speak 10,000 words and I'll be using them about... let's see... I'll be using about 350 of them for the exhibition. So let me turn this guy on... Record... Sorry just give me a second of...

**Carol Wray:** It gives me time to...

**LB:** Yeah, yeah. Take your time. You know... I think I'll just use these two. Let me just make sure that this is all recording. Perfect. Okay. You know what? I am gonna not worry about that one. I'll do all the recording from this one. Let's see...

**CW:** Testing.

**LB:** Perfect. Fantastic. Okay. So Carol, here we are again. What is it? Five years later? Doesn't need to be super, super close. I can hear you just fine.

**CW:** Can you hear me?

**LB:** Yeah. Yeah. I can even put it down lower if you don't wanna deal with holding that thing the whole time. So you asked to do a re-do of your interview and I wanna know why.

**CW:** I think because there's so much that's gone on since the last time we talked. I... Can you hear me?

**LB:** Yeah.

**CW:** Okay.

**LB:** Yeah. Perfect.

**CW:** I just wasn't comfortable with the last interview. So I wanted to just do it again. A do-over.

**LB:** So let's think about your very beginnings. Tell me something about how and where you grew up. I'm getting all of this weird wind stuff. Maybe... here... try talking now.

**CW:** Can you hear me?

**LB:** Yeah that's good. I think you might've been a little bit too close even.

**CW:** Okay.

**LB:** So tell me something about your very beginnings, your family, how you grew up.

**CW:** I'm a preacher's kid. My dad was a Methodist preacher in Virginia. My grandfather was a Methodist preacher and actually my son is a Methodist preacher. I grew up moving around from place to place within Virginia. My first recollection of race, I think, happened when I was in

00:03:21

second grade. It was during massive resistance, the Byrd Machine, Harry Byrd, the Brown vs. Board of Education. I was born in '57, after that. But the massive resistance movement did not allow for blacks to...or Native Americans, or anyone other than whites...to attend school together. So when I was in second grade, approximately second grade, in 1964, my father, as a pastor of a small rural area in the Blue Ridge mountains, supported the integration of schools. And the KKK came after us and they tormented us. Their kids tormented me at school. They would even try to assault me. So my first recollection that there was a difference between races started then. I will never forget looking out my picture window and seeing something on fire. I was seven years old and I asked my brother to come and said, "What is that?" And he says, "It's a cross." I was like, "A cross? Why is a cross burning in our yard?" And he said, "Oh, it's the Klan." And I said, "Why are they doing that?" He says, "It's because what Dad is supporting. He wants to support the integration of schools." So that was, I think, the moment. It was probably the moment that propelled me forward in making my lifetime decisions that I made.

As I grew up we finally left that particular community. It was a small, rural community. We moved to right outside of Petersburg, Virginia. Then we moved to the Eastern Shore. On the Eastern Shore I met my first crush, my first boyfriend. He happened to be the star football player and basketball player of a little place in Cape Charles on the Eastern Shore and he was black. It caused a huge uproar within the community. I had no idea...and we were about two years apart...and in his senior year he suddenly left. I didn't know what happened to him. What I found out last year, after reconnecting with him, was that they expelled him from the school system without any justification. He could not come back. And he later then joined the Navy. I had no idea what happened to him, except I got pictures of him on a Navy ship, and then not long after that we moved to Richmond. That was when I felt like my life began. I went to George Wythe High School. I was in the minority. It was approximately 95... 98% black. And I absolutely adored it.

**LB:** What year was this?

**CW:** This was 1973.

**LB:** And you were a freshman? Or a junior by then?

**CW:** A junior. I was a junior by that time. I finished out my junior and senior year at George Wythe and had the most amazing experience ever. Talking to some of my friends I know that they had a different experience. They said they were cornered in the bathroom. They were afraid to walk down the hall. I just walked straight down the hall. They didn't really know who I was. Once they got to know me I made wonderful friends and had the most amazing experience ever.

**LB:** Tell me more about that.

**CW:** I was not intimidated whatsoever. Some of the people, some of the girls that I went to high school with, they thought I was a teacher. I would walk into a restroom. They'd go, "Quick, quick—put the cigarette out it's a teacher!" And I was like... I'd look around like, "Where?" I said, "I'm not a teacher. Why would you think I'm a teacher?" They said, "Well, you walk like a teacher." So I was like, "Well, I'm not a teacher, so we're okay." I had some great friends. I

00:08:34

remember standing up to a lot of people. One time in typing class... There was this guy who would always cut in line at the lunch line. And I, being 5'2", I would have to look up at him. He was about 6'...6'3". He would always cut, always cut. So I remember one day he tried to cut. I just stuck my hand up, looked up at him, and said, "Mnm. I don't think so." He just shook his head and got back at the end of the line. Everybody else was like...mouths were open like, "Who is this person?" I think it was because I was so happy to get away from what I experienced in Cape Charles—that this was just wonderful to me. I felt completely accepted. I would be asked to go to parties. Many of my friends would teach me how to dance. I had a blast. They took me under their wing. I was just one of the gang. I was just one of the group. I always felt included and it felt good to find my village. That's exactly what it felt like—that this was my village.

**LB:** Where were you living at this point in Richmond? What was your neighborhood like?

**CW:** I remember when we first moved there my father had a church. I'm trying to think... It was Memorial United Methodist and it's no longer there. We lived right next to a place called Fonticello Park which was very high crime. I remember the first few nights that we lived there hearing gunshot throughout the night. I was thinking, "Wow. This is different. Coming from the Eastern Shore where it was nothing." With exception to people not liking what I was doing, this was a brand-new thing. I had never been exposed to anything like that before. It was not a... It was a rough area. The school was a rough area by that time because white flight had taken off to the county. And since I was in the neighborhood I was not bussed. Because I was white they were not gonna bus me... 'cause they were tryin' to reach that racial equilibrium. So it was my neighborhood school. So I was not bussed to another school. I was very glad. But I loved the little house that we lived in. I loved the neighborhood. I loved all my friends surrounding me. I think that the parsonage was eventually moved out into the county. I remember trying to stop it. People would come to look at the house to buy it and I would say, "No, you don't want this house. This house is falling apart. You don't really want it." My parents took me aside and said, "You gotta stop this. The church is selling it and we're moving to the county." So that made me very unhappy. But by that time I had graduated and I was going to VCU at that time.

Fast forward a little bit—I went to Randolph Macon my first year. I also met a black man who I fell head over heels in love with. He was about twelve years older than I was. I thought at one point we might get married and then it just...it was so much racial discrimination at that time that whenever we would go out we would get comments and looks and it just was so unpleasant I just wasn't sure that that was something that I could do at that time. And then I ended up transferring to VCU. I lived in the Fan area. I feel like Richmond, Southside...and even now as I have moved away from Richmond...I only moved away for economic purposes and I am coming back. I am a teacher. May be the walk—I had that teacher walk. I'm a special education teacher in high school. I taught at Clover Hill High School in Chesterfield and now I'm up in Northern Virginia. I'll be teaching in Fairfax. But my love is Richmond. I would like to go back and teach at George Wythe High School. That's my goal. I will be up in Northern Virginia for at least two more years 'cause the interesting part is that, for teachers, the top three years of earnings is what you retire on. So I moved up there to boost my income significantly so that when I come back my children won't have to take care of me. I can take care of myself. So I have every intention. I've already told the school board 'cause I was very active. Before I left I lived across from the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. I was very, very active going to all of the school board meetings

00:14:02

in Richmond—all of them. They got to know me. I told the representative from my district that, when I come back, I expect a job in Richmond City Schools because that's what I want to do. Everybody thinks I'm crazy, but that's my calling. That's where I feel like I'm meant to be.

**LB:** So what calls you to Wythe specifically?

**CW:** I think coming to Richmond was... and then attending George Wythe High School... it felt like I was suddenly free. I was free to be who I was. I think that having that experience and reflecting on that, and yes, getting teased about that... I love the culture of George Wythe. I loved it then. I've gone and I have given a lot of supplies and books and materials and anything I can do to help. I want to be a part of that.

**LB:** What was it that you felt you couldn't express in your life before Wythe that you felt free to express when you were there?

**CW:** I think when I was on the Eastern Shore, and when I was in Bedford County, and when I was outside of Petersburg in Dinwiddie County, I think it was the fact that as a preacher's daughter I was expected to act a certain way. And as a white preacher's daughter I was expected to toe the line. That is not how I felt. I think I've always been a bit of a rebel. My granddaughter needs to know about that because she knows that I am a rebel. I have always felt a sense of kindred spirit with people who have not had a lot or people who have been oppressed or denied access. I think that experience goes all the way back to when the KKK terrorized us. I couldn't understand it then. And as an adult I understand racism exists, but I had never seen that much hatred in my entire life. They wanted us gone. They threatened to kill my father. He had to make a list of people he knew who was involved and he told them that if he was killed that my mother had a list that they were going to give to a magistrate in another county. Luckily they didn't follow through. They did block the driveway many times. They would pull up at a school board meeting, surround him with their trucks, with gun racks, and he was never afraid. At least he didn't appear to be afraid.

**LB:** He sounds like an amazing man.

**CW:** Yeah.

**LB:** How did the church react? Because from what I've heard the churches, the white churches, were not really at the forefront of Civil Rights in Virginia.

**CW:** I really don't know because I was so young at that time. But I know that on the Eastern Shore, when I started dating the black young man, the church...my father called us in and said, "The church is not happy with this relationship and it must stop." I knew that he was speaking as a leader, probably not personally, because he used the words "the church" is not happy with this situation. And then not long after that that's when he disappeared. I found out after years and years and years it was because he was expelled. He was not allowed to come back and there was no explanation.

**LB:** How was the church for your dad and you in Richmond? Because it sounds as though you were still very, very unconventional.

00:18:41

**CW:** I was. I felt very accepted there, even though it was not an integrated church. Although we were in a black community, I think that the doors were always open. Everyone was always welcome. Before I left Richmond I started attending St. Paul's Baptist Church. And I think I'm the only white person there. But I feel that same sense that I would get when I was at George Wythe—of acceptance. When I left and went up to northern Virginia, I came back and went back to church and I told them, I said, "I didn't just disappear on ya, I moved. But I want you to know I'm doing this. I'm coming back in at least three years." And they said, "No problem. We will be here waitin' for you." So I was like, "yes." I felt really, really good about that connection. I knew a lot of my students went there. I had some parents that I knew of my students as well that attended that church. It just felt good. It felt right.

**LB:** How do you think your experiences as a child, and as a teenager, shaped who you are today?

**CW:** Well, it could be my second husband was from Africa. I adored him. I think that the culture, the sense of community that I experienced in the black community, shaped me. I think moving around so much and not having any roots that... I consider Richmond my roots. I've been here since I was fifteen years old. This is my home. This is where I love to be whenever I can be. And it did shape me. It shaped me to be... I am very liberal, very liberal-minded. Any group of individuals who are persecuted, put down, who have injustices done to them in any form or fashion, then I am on their side. I started doing history and special ed. I would co-teach. So I did Government, U.S. History, and World History. Particularly in Government and U.S., I found my niche. I found that when I told my story I was living history for my students. And they were amazed at the things that I had lived through. I lived through a shooting in Richmond. My neighbor shot his wife four to five times in the back. She came to our kitchen floor and was bleeding all over our kitchen floor. This was back in 1993...might've been 1992...approximately '92, '93. And so I know what it feels like to have your hand on gunshots and wounds and the massive amount of blood. That shaped me.

**LB:** Did she live?

**CW:** She did live. He, in front of his children—his younger two, his younger child and his eighteen-year-old—he blew himself away with a shotgun in front of them. The middle child brought the mother to us in the middle of the night, specifically because she said, "Take me next door; they will open their doors to me." And we did. And we got her first aid. I applied pressure to the wounds until the ambulance came. And she did survive. I don't know where she is now. I would love to find her. So all of these things, I think, have shaped me. The burning of the cross, the KKK harassing us, the shooting, the marriage to my husband from Africa, and subsequently my divorce from him, still, all of that has shaped me. I moved to Northern Virginia, as I mentioned, because I needed to take care of myself financially, but it is not home and it is not Richmond. Although the people have been wonderful and nice, I moved to the most affluent county in the whole country and that was an eye opener, a shock. I'm now moving to a different place, a different school. The school is wonderful. It was just an experience that I had never understood before 'cause I came from humble beginnings.

00:24:14 **LB:** And it is very, very different.

**CW:** Yes. It was a wild situation.

**LB:** Let me take you back to George Wythe for a moment. Are there any interactions that you had with your fellow students or teachers or administrators then that really stick out in your mind?

**CW:** Well, I remember two track stars. They were twins. I remember getting to know them. I remember the teachers. All the teachers got along. All the students seemed to get along with the teachers. It was a mixed faculty, so there were white teachers and black teachers. I do remember after I left that our principal was shot, but not at school. Someone came to his door and shot him. He did survive. I don't know why they did. One thing I can remember is that the way I walked, the way I held myself, and the way I felt accepted and then reflected that acceptance back—gave me the opportunity to have an experience that I treasured. I was never picked on. I was bumped into once. The girl swung around, looked at me like, "It's on." I swung around, looked at her as if... sort of like puffed my chest up as if to say, "Bring it." And then we both walked away. But it was that moment... 'cause I've never fought in my life. I've never physically fought in my entire life. But I realized there was a huge power with self-confidence. When you had self-confidence then you could walk down the hall. You could walk down the street. With that type of confidence that most people would stay away—I think that was something that I learned from George Wythe. Where a lot of my friends would cower on the side of the hallway and put their head down as if not to be noticed... I just walked straight down the middle with my head held high and I think that helped me.

**LB:** What do you remember from those years as an example of really good leadership and as an example of leadership that maybe wasn't so good? And you can take that anywhere you want it.

**CW:** I admired all the teachers that I had, every single one of them. I remember one teacher's name. He was a history teacher named Mr. Binford. He was absolutely amazing. I remember my government teacher, Mr. Kyles [00:27:23 unc. name spelling]. He was a tall white man with a bowtie and everybody thought he was the funniest thing ever. I just remember that the faculty was just top notch, just top notch. I remember the pep rallies. I remember the basketball games. I remember the football games. I had quite a sense of pride in attending that school. I remember trying out for the pep team and when I got there I was the only white person there. I got these sort of looks with the tilting of the head and I was like... I did feel a little bit out of my comfort zone at that point. So I was like, "Well, let me try something else." So I went to the yearbook and I went to drama and choir and I just immersed myself. I loved doing the drama, putting on the plays. I just enjoyed high school life. I got as involved with it as I could and met so many people. I met people on the football team, the track team, the cheerleaders. Some of the cheerleaders... One of the... It was twins, the Hughes sisters. One of them ended up working with me again when I worked at Jacobs Road Elementary. So we met again. And then her son ended up working with me at Clover Hill.

**LB:** Tight community.

00:29:08

**CW:** Yes. I remember the Rossi twins. They were also cheerleaders. Everybody was just so nice. I don't remember, looking back, negativity. I just don't. At that time I was actually dating a guy from Clover Hill High School. So I would go to a lot of... I would go to all the track things there. I would go to the prom there. I would also do things with my school. It was like two worlds apart, you know, the county and the city.

**LB:** What was Clover Hill like then?

**CW:** It was not the Clover Hill that I taught at. It was definitely more of a upscale... I shouldn't say upscale, but it was more affluent than George Wythe. It was definitely. It was a whiter school and it was more affluent. I remember that my boyfriend kept saying, "I've gotta get you home on time and I've got it down to a science of how fast I can drive to get you home so your dad won't be mad at me." 'Cause he also attended our church. That's how I met him. So I remember those type of things. I remember hanging out in the county and hanging out in the city. I would go to Forest Hill Park and hang out with my friends there. I would go to a lot of parties with my friends from George Wythe.

**LB:** What were the parties like then?

**CW:** That was... Okay. You know country line dancing nowadays? They had... It was line dancing to stuff like Earth, Wind & Fire and so they taught me all of the steps of doing all the dances. And we would go to the parties and that's what we would do. Once they taught me the steps, a huge line of people would just be dancing in rhythm and step. So it was fun. It was a lot of fun.

**LB:** It really sounds like it. And there was a lot going on in the city then as well. How were the changes that were happening in Richmond at that time talked about in your home?

**CW:** I remember Doug Wilder. The year after I graduated he gave the commencement speech at what is now the Altria, used to be the Mosque. That's where everybody graduated then. So I remember seeing those changes. Later on I remember Marsh, Henry Marsh. And then I remember Southside Strangler. That was later. That was once I had gotten married and started having my kids. I remember when Mayor Marsh's brother was shot on the Southside. I remember having family conversations around the dinner table. That was our time. Every single night we would turn off the TV, we would sit around the table, and have dinner no matter what. And we would talk politics, philosophy, religion, the universe. Anything went. Anything and everything. It was a very open dialogue. Sometimes it could get heated at times because someone would have an opinion and someone would counter it, but it was a time of bonding. And I remember that everything that was going on in the city, we would talk about it...particularly when they moved the parsonage out to the county. I was so upset about that. I was so dead-set against that.

**LB:** How old were you then?

00:33:15 **CW:** I had graduated from high school. I was attending VCU. I had my first apartment in the Fan, but then I came home to save some money. And then I think they moved the parsonage out. It felt like a very sterile environment. I have disliked suburbs ever since. I just don't like suburbs.

**LB:** Who was there around your dinner table?

**CW:** It was my family, my immediate family. We also...

**LB:** So who are your siblings?

**CW:** My sister, Sharon and my brother, David. He was in the Navy at the time so he was over in Oakland [00:34:06 place spelling unclear]. It was during Vietnam, the very end of Vietnam, 'cause 75 was when all the troops finally came home. But he was over there before that. And when he was not home it was my sister and me. My sister had gone to college and she would come home, but before she left it would be all of us. And then my friends... I had a best friend, named Wanda. And she almost lived with us. She stayed. She went to the mountains with us for the first time ever. She had never seen the mountains before. She lived around the corner. She went everywhere with us, ate with us, spent the night. It was like she was one of us.

**LB:** Are you still in touch with Wanda?

**CW:** No. No, I've lost touch with her. I would love to find her again. I remember we used to call our house the Higgins Hotel—my maiden name is Higgins—because I was also involved in the youth of the conference, of the United Methodist Church for the Virginia conference. A lot of the meetings were in Richmond at the Methodist building. So they would all come and instead of having hotels or... We would always place them in our house. So it was like a revolving door. We constantly had people over, constantly. And I would say, "Hey! Can so-and-so spend the night? They've got a meeting."

"Sure, sure."

So it was a full house all the time. I loved that. I remember one time getting ready for a camping trip for our youth. My sister and I were in the back yard and we looked up because we heard this helicopter sort of sputtering and all of a sudden it went down. It went down right over our house and then we heard the explosion. My father was on the rescue squad at the time. So he ran. He didn't even have a shirt on. He just took off running. He was the first one to enter the house. It was like three doors down from Wanda's house, my best friend's house. He brought out the baby. The little boy who was feeding him had actually been decapitated. And so he did bring out the baby. That was rough.

**LB:** So much violence all around you.

**CW:** It was. I remember we stood and watched basically because the helicopter had crashed into the house. And we also heard...the fire department came...the rescue...and they said, you know, there was a lot of fumes. They made everybody back up because they were afraid the house was gonna explode, which it didn't thank goodness because my father was in there. But he did get an



00:37:25

award for that. And then years later... My mother loves babies. They were at this convenience store right on Hull Street and my mother was making little eyes at this two or three-year-old in the car next to us. She said, "Oh, she's so adorable." And the woman said, "Yes, this was the baby in that house." And she said, "My husband saved that baby." So it was amazing how that came to be that my mother was at the same place seeing the baby that my father had rescued. There was a lot going on at that time. Some of those memories I forget about.

**LB:** I know. I'm hearing so much stuff that you didn't talk about last time. 'Cause I still have such vivid memories of that interview even though I'm asking you all the same questions. But one thing that you didn't talk about... I mean you talked a little bit about the KKK, but you did not at all talk about all of the violence around you in Richmond. And that's a very striking part of what you're talking about today.

**CW:** Yes. I think, reflecting upon it, maybe being where I am now and keeping tabs of what's going on in Richmond and coming down for different marches and being actively involved in political process now... I think back to those days and I think that I have had a rich life. I think I've had an amazing experience. I think that it had helped me teach some of the students that I taught previously. I'm not sure how it's going to be when I move to Fairfax, back to high school in Fairfax, because I don't have the same history there as I did in Richmond. When they found out... When the kids at Clover Hill found out that I had graduated from George Wythe High School and that I did internship when I was getting my degree in social work from Gilpin Court, they backed off and they said, "Yeah. Don't mess with her."

**LB:** I didn't know that you had a social work degree.

**CW:** Yes. I have a social work degree. I have a masters of education, a post-graduate degree in administration and supervision. So I did my field placement at Gilpin Court.

**LB:** When was that? And how was that?

**CW:** That was in '79. It was amazing.

**LB:** So you had graduated high school in '74.

**CW:** Five.

**LB:** '75, okay.

**CW:** So the year the troops all came home from Vietnam, that was the year I graduated. Then I went... I was still seventeen at the time and turned eighteen in August and went to Randolph Macon...and then transferred to VCU.

**LB:** What was it like being in Gilpin Court in the late 70s?

**CW:** At that time it was when Richmond was the #1 crime per capita in the country.

00:40:59

**LB:** And it stayed that way a long time.

**CW:** It did. It stayed a long, long time. Gilpin Court was one of the roughest at that time. I think now pretty much all of them are. But I think at that time they were extremely notorious. I remember in the fall when it started getting dark early around five. And we would let out... I worked for FRIENDS Association for Children. And when I was done with the group work there I would tell the kids, "Hey! Get in the car. I'm taking you home with me to your house. I'm gonna go talk to your parents." So I would make home visits in the evening with them. I felt the best doing it that way. I was welcomed with open arms then. I had a really amazing experience. My daughter also has a degree in...a bachelor's of social work and a masters of rehab counseling. And she too did her internship in Gilpin Court at the same place, FRIENDS Association. I thought that was so phenomenal.

**LB:** That's fantastic.

**CW:** Mhm. So...

**LB:** What kind of marches do you go on now?

**CW:** Well, I recently went to one for Marcus Peters, the young man who, the teacher from Essex High School, who was shot. I connected with his sister on Facebook and told her I would come down and she was extremely grateful. I came for her...to show support to her...because I personally did not know the whole situation...and since I did not know the whole situation, it was difficult to 100%...'cause I didn't know what completely transpired.... One this is I met her and connected and I felt like the family needed some support. So that was the most recent one. I was at the March for our Lives after the Parkland shooting. I was in Washington. That was an amazing experience. I have never heard over a million people silent at one time. The silence was deafening. It was an amazing experience. I went with one of my colleagues from Northern Virginia. I went to the Women's March the year later because I had just had rotator cuff surgery because of rock climbing for the first Women's March so I was not allowed to go. I wanted to go so badly, but my doctor and my surgeon, said, "Absolutely not. You're not traveling that distance." So I watched on TV. I went to the March on Monument Avenue previously after the election and sat on top of Stonewa...no...it was Robert E. Lee's statue. I sat on top of that 'cause I still had my sling on from my surgery and he said, "As long as...you know...Don't get bumped." So I sat on the statue so I wouldn't get bumped and that was quite an experience.

I had networked with many organizations. One of the organizations there is 3,000-strong. It's called the LWCC, Liberal Women of Chesterfield County. I also belong to some other groups. One's called "Together We Will, RVA" and now I'm with the Together We Will Loudon. And then the Women of Action up in Northern Virginia. So there are quite a few. And then Support Richmond City Schools, I'm a member of that. So that's the pulse. That's the one that I stay in tune with to see what's going on in Richmond.

**LB:** 'Cause you've really stayed in touch with Richmond City Schools for a long time.

**CW:** I have.

00:45:15

**LB:** What do you think looking at them now and thinking back to your own experiences as a student?

**CW:** I think, now, I am so upset with the crumbling schools, the conditions of the schools, with what the teachers have to deal with, what the administration has to deal with. I am extremely upset and worked to put the referendum on the ballot to make sure that the schools are taken care of. We've got to find a way to give them top rate schools, top rate education, supplies, materials, take care of the teachers. The teachers are amazing. I don't know how they do what they do with what they have. They're extremely committed. And I think something has to be done. It breaks my heart. When I would have George Wythe play our school, they seemed to always do it for Homecoming, because our school honestly knew they could win. And that would always be a Homecoming victory. It always broke my heart and I would always go to the other side and talk to them and sit with them on the George Wythe side and tell them that I was alumni of George Wythe, and you know, "Go Bulldogs." So it does break my heart. It breaks my heart that there is inequity in education, even within the county I just left, even within Chesterfield County there is inequity of schools in more affluent areas versus non-affluent areas. And even though they try to level the playing field, it is not always that way. I see that in Richmond and I want something done. It has to get done. I'm very upset that right down the street from where I live now there is a beautiful facility for the Redskins, in Ashburn, Virginia. I have also heard from the people in Ashburn there's another camp up, I think, in Pennsylvania maybe? But yet they're using Richmond and we're paying them. I don't understand that. And I think with the school system the way it is and the need that they have... how anybody morally can think that that's okay. I just don't get that. So there's a lot more activism in me that I have some ideas.

**LB:** It's hard not to feel fired up. My daughter went to TJ, which was the subject of *Five Miles Apart...Five Miles Away, A World Apart*, if you ever read that book.

**CW:** Yes.

**LB:** Yeah.

**CW:** I haven't but I'd like to.

**LB:** Yeah, it's really good. And so you see it very, very close up.

**CW:** Yes, yes. It's heartbreaking. When I would go to some of the schools for some of the meetings. I remember having to decide to use the bathroom and I used one of the kids' bathrooms. I could not believe the condition. I just couldn't believe the condition of the bathrooms that they had to use. It was almost... It just is not fair. They should not have to do that. They should not have the conditions that they have. Something has got to be done.

**LB:** When you think back, right, I mean, you were kind of in the crucible in the 70s. How do you think everything that happened changed your family? And what do you talk about when you see friends from that time, and think back to it?

00:49:47

**CW:** It feels like we... It almost feels like it was a dream. It feels like all the people that my parents knew or that my family knew... It's almost like I seem to have internalized all of the experiences more than it seems like that the rest of my family has. And I'm not sure why that is. I'm not sure if it's because I'm my father's daughter and he was quite a rebel. I'm just not sure. It could be that my sister did not graduate from George Wythe. I was the only one that actually experienced that whole community. So that could probably be part of it. They didn't really understand the types of things that I went through, the types of friendships that I made. But they really, unless I bring it up, they really don't talk about it.

**LB:** Do you ever talk with people like Royal Robinson or Val Perkins or Mark Person or Elizabeth Celine [00:51:11 unc. name spellings]?

**CW:** No. I did run into one of my former classmates.

**LB:** You ran into Robin—didn't you?

**CW:** Robin Mines, I did. Yes.

**LB:** Yeah.

**CW:** Robin is the one that got me started going to St. Paul's Baptist.

**LB:** Oh, interesting.

**CW:** Yes, yes.

**LB:** I didn't know that.

**CW:** Yes. She went back to school to become a preacher. That was huge, because she had a high school diploma and then she was accepted into the program. It was huge and I'm so proud of her. I'm so proud of what she's done, because she was, you know, a veteran. She had a knee that was always bothering her. And she didn't let anything stop her. So, yes, I am very proud of that woman. She's done a lot with her life. I haven't kept up with many other people though. And I think that makes me sad. I do see them sometimes. There's a George Wythe Association. I think I'm more involved now in trying to make a difference with all the schools in Richmond and with all of education and with having the gun problems and the shootings and wondering if I actually will die at school...not that it scares me, but I often wonder if that's how I will meet my demise. But I've lived a long, full life. But I don't want her, I don't want her granddaughters, to experience that. I don't want my students to experience that. So I think I'm more focused...not on the George Wythe alumni as much as I am making sure that my students, my former students who I still keep in touch with, and that my granddaughters are gonna be okay.

**LB:** Are there things that you'd like this generation of kids growing up in Richmond today to know?

00:53:48

**CW:** I think that they need to know we're all in this together. And I think that there is... Actually, I see camaraderie developing. I see groups of people working together of all races, every ethnicity. And I see hope, I really do. I know there's some organizations, such as the Richmond Cycling Club, that is helping some of the inner-city students. I see a lot of things popping up and I see a lot of hope. I see the communities coming together. When the courts, during that snow, and when I say the courts like Gilpin Court, Mosby Court, Whitcomb Court... When the snow hit and they didn't have any heat. I saw a huge gathering of people, Richmonders...from surrounding counties too, but particularly Richmonders come together in one voice. That's going to be a growing focus as well...is fair housing, transportation, education. I think all of this is going to be addressed and I do see a lot of hope. I see a lot of momentum. And I don't think it's gonna stop until something's done. So whereas the last interview five years ago I did not see that...having, in my opinion, to go to take care of myself and then come back...I see that where I am now in the safety of that community...it's a very safe area. I see that, as a Richmonder, you are a unique species of people, because Richmond takes care of its own. If you're from Richmond, you take care of each other. There is a huge amount of pride now where it didn't used to be when I was coming through George Wythe, when I was going to college. There's just a humongous pride to be, to say, "I'm from RVA."

**LB:** What do you think happened in the intervening five years between interviews...that changed?

**CW:** The election. I think the election got us going. I think that complacency had set in and I started seeing a revitalization of Richmond. Not just... This was prior to the election. But with the restaurants and breweries and wineries and cultural events—I just saw this sense of pride and I saw an opening. It's almost like a lotus opening of Richmond and acceptance of other people moving into Richmond. I think that was... The biggest change is that it was not a governmental revitalization at all. I think it was an internal love of Richmond and love of the scene, love of entrepreneurs, the food industry, the attractions, and, actually, yes, in the history. The divisiveness, now, of that history—that's another part. I'm growing pretty much growing up in Richmond most of my life. It's been hard to see the division. I purposefully made myself stay away when the alt-right came to Richmond 'cause I was afraid of losing my job. Because I don't know if I could have witnessed the racism because it took me back to that dark place with the KKK. I could not trust myself to act responsibly and to act rationally because when you are a child and that happens to you—it's something that's ingrained in you, those experiences. And as an adult, although you understand that it would be worse for you to react, I could not trust myself. So I stayed away purposely and I cried the whole day as I listened to all the accounts on the TV. Luckily... 'cause I was afraid what happened in Charlottesville was gonna happen in Richmond. And it didn't. They, the police, handled it very, very well. So I was relieved at the end of the day when...because I knew so many people that were gonna be there. I'm a member of so many groups. I knew a lot of them were going to be there, so I was relieved.

**LB:** Is there anything that I haven't asked about that you wanna talk about.

**CW:** I think that we've discussed a lot of things. I think that the last five years I was working on myself, and I was working on my empowerment, and I was working on my independence, and I was working on all of the past demons that had haunted me. It was really, really hard to leave my

01:00:22

family, and to leave Richmond, and to leave the place that I loved being across the street from—the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts. Because in my youth I had lived one block away. During VCU I was facing the new section and in my mature years I was facing the old section. It was like coming full circle. It was really, really hard to make that decision but I'm glad I did make that decision because it helped me step back and look at my life and realize the important things, and to raise strong women, self-assured, and men, my son. He supports strong women.

**LB:** So you've got a daughter and a son?

**CW:** I have a daughter and a son. She's a very strong women and he's a very strong man. And then I have two granddaughters.

**LB:** Fantastic.

**CW:** Mhm.

**LB:** Well thank you, I'm so glad we re-did this.

**CW:** I'm so glad we did too. Thank you. I feel like I'm sweating up a storm. I'm sorry.

**LB:** Oh crap.

**CW:** What?

**LB:** Nothing. I just hope all of that was recording properly.

END TIME: 01:01:45