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2001

## **Interview #7 Abstract and Transcript, 2001**

Carrie Noble Kline

Anonymous

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Interviewer: Carrie Kline.  
Transcriber: Tracy Rosencrance

CK: Hi. I wondered if you would talk about some of what you were talking about before: The community and your relationship to it and your people here.

#7: To start out, my name is .... I was a ..., which is German. We came over and settled in New Jersey to begin with and then came down into West Virginia, like in the 14<sup>th</sup> Century. The part that we're on right now is a farm owned originally by ... who was one of the first settlers in ... County of West Virginia. It's in the west side of ... County towards ... and ... in the area there.

In 1992, I went back and bought 27 acres of the original homestead. Which has been sold four times and now, I live here. So back into the wilderness. Back where they all started from. That's how I got here.

CK: Did you know --. Who were the oldest relatives that you knew, or heard stories about even?

#7: I don't know, they was talking about my grandpa and so on. When we'd come up the holler where we turned at the church they would part the old horse and buggies down along the bridge there that we crossed. As the people went into the church, the women would go on into the church and he sold moonshine [laughs] off the trailer, off to the side where they parked the horses. That was pretty interesting.

CK: Did you know him?

#7: No, they were gone. I don't even remember my grandfather on that side. They had died evidently before I was born.

CK: Tell me about this community and your relationship to it. Who's here? What--?

#7: Right now, I live four miles from where I was raised. The community is a small community. I don't know, maybe a hundred people, something like this. I live on one of the back wings of--. One of the back forks. It's like one of the communities--. Like you may never see each other a lot, other than wave at each other. But I know, at the head of the holler where we came up this ... -. Went up here tonight there was a family whose house burnt. And the guy had lived here like 30 years. And he said that he had never seen people come like they did and helped and stuff and the compassion that they showed. It was really surprising. He said that he never realized how much people really, really cared.

So, it's in the back woods. It's really down to earth, I feel, and very personal. It's a slower paced life from the community. Because of just the life style is still the tradition of what West Virginia was probably was clear back in the beginning. So we still stay with that a lot. I think it's just all your small town communities, really.

CK: What do you mean the tradition?

#7: Well, I think we're people who still have compassion and the personal part of people caring about each other. Each recognizes--. I think everyone's really private, as far as house to house, there's not a lot of things. But if there is a need--. You know, like I've been up in here--. The first time I moved in--. The first winter we had some of the two foot snows, and it was really touching for me to have people from the community to come up and make sure I had gas and that everything was ok. I wasn't stranded up here. And it makes you feel like what the settlers would have felt and responded to back when they first came. That's the personal touch that I really like and appreciate.

CK: What do you think they would have felt?

#7: The first settlers? I think they were like frontiersmen. I think they were adventures. I think that as they lived, they had respect for each other, for who they were and inner strength that they were, who they were trying to be and survive and become. I think no different that any of us today. It's just--. As they earned the respect of each other--. I think they went through the same emotions we do, except I just really think the people today talk about those emotions more than they did back then. It was unspoken back then as when now, we are able to say things to each other. So, I think it was about that.

CK: So is this community different that other places, you think?

#7: No, I think you would find this anywhere. I really do. I don't think it's any different, I think it's just West Virginia. You know, and if you're in Virginia, it would be people in Virginia too. I think it's still the basic old-time spirit of what it was all about that people hadn't really totally lost. And I think that's what it is about. I know I'm going to hold onto it until the day I die. And I'm teaching my grandkids that now too, about who they are and who they've got to live up to be and for who they are and to keep that respect and integrity in them. Be proud of who they are.

CK: Who do you want them to know that they are?

#7: Just themselves. For who they can be and not fall short of who they can--. And sell out to the system of--. To always be honest and stay with the integrity. They hear my speeches all the time [laughs]. Like I tell them, "It's from the soul." It's from who they are, and we work on that a lot.

CK: So when you want them to know that they're West Virginians, they're from West Virginia, what sorts of images are in your mind when you try to teach them that?

#7: That when they make a commitment, they stay with it. When they say that they'll do something, that they're a man of their word. To always be honest and always to be true to themselves and to hold with integrity, and to be someone that everyone would be proud just to know who they are. Plus, to--. When that someone mentions their name, it's always a good name. That they're just good, wholesome kids.

Many speeches, ever since they've been little [laughs]. Everyone says, "You can't tell them this." And I'm going like, "Yes, I am." And they hold pretty true to it. Now, the older they've gotten, the more they feel it, and you can tell it's working for them. I'm not saying they're always not going to stay with where life--. Where I would want them to be, but they will always come back to what--. I do believe that much. Because of just who we are.

CK: Who said those things to you?

#7: Oh, I don't know. Probably Abe Lincoln and a few others, probably Booker T. Washington. I just read a lot of books when I was a kid. You just learn to admire the people. And I don't know, it just became a tradition after a while. And it was probably that strength that I used to have an English teacher that probably knew more about me as a kid than I even knew about myself. She would always make me read books like, I remember, It's Good to Be Alive by Roy Campanella. It was always books of courage and books of overcoming and--. Death Be Not Proud was one of the books she had me read.

I probably owe a lot of my stuff to that English teacher. That taught me how to survive within myself, even though I didn't realize at the time they were survival books. The people that overcame, and became, and still existed, and it was through all of that

that it all started probably. Good old English teacher. But it's like taking a hero and admiring them and then trying to live up to their integrity. I work hard at it, even today. No matter who I've become, I still work hard at it.

CK: What was your teacher like? What kind of person was she?

#7: Probably a very wise one, I think. I think about her a lot. She's dead and everything now, but I think she was probably a teacher who knew a lot of the students whether we knew ourselves or not. She probably--. I think when she stood up there and taught, she knew the ones who would make it and the ones that wouldn't. I think the ones that she thought probably wouldn't she handed these books to [laughs]. "Here. Read this." She planted some seeds about just how to get tough and how to survive and how to go on, and I think about that a lot.

It was probably in all the literature of it all that made a difference and sparked who I became. Because I don't know that the tools of all that was taught in my household. I'm not really sure that my parents had that ability to do all that. But, I remember this teacher. I kind of give her the credit a lot of the time.

CK: Was she a West Virginian?

#7: Oh, I'm sure she was [laughs]. She had to have been. Because there's just--. You know, when the talk about the coal miners and how it's a tradition about how they live, and you just get the roots from it, and I'm sure that there were times when I was young, and I'd get real struggling through my young age and --. As we came up the holler here, and I talked about the feelings, the trees and how it just sort of like comes in on you and stuff like this.

Even though I started my company, it was struggling and feel like giving up and stuff. I used to go for a ride and come back in here and sit by a tree, and it would be like an inner strength or something. Because you knew if you were just in the same hollow that your grandpa was and he survived it, that you would too. I used to go up to the cemetery where he was buried and just talk to him and say, "If you can do it, I can do it." It was just things like that that were sort of like, gets you down the road. And after a while, it became easier as life got on.

CK: Were you just a child when you would talk to him that way?

#7: Oh no! [laughs] No, no, no. I was probably--. Wasn't yesterday [laughs].

Probably--. See I started my company probably about 1980, so it would have been 20-25 years ago.

CK: Tell me your date of birth just to put it all in perspective.

#7: I was born in .... Dad made it home from the War [laughs]. And we know what he thought about while he was in the War. My brother was born in 1946, and I was born 10 months later in 1947.

CK: Who else was in your family? Tell me about your immediate family.

#7: My dad and mother were both raised in the community here. I don't even know how old my dad was when he went to war. He spent four years in North Africa and Italy, and my brother was born while my dad was off to war. So my brother was like four years old when Dad came back. Then the two of us were born. So it was like--. Well I just describe it as a "Hell Hole."

Dad had shell shock from the war. He came home and ... was it, one child, and two years later there were two more kids. So there was three kids, and there was never an

adjustment or anything. It was extremely unpleasant. There was a lot of violence because of my dad. It was pretty traumatic. I don't have a lot of memory of it. I've been in therapy and stuff like this to--. I wanted to go back and relive it, or at least understand it. But nothing really came. I still have no memories of it.

Then when I was nine years old, my brother died. He drowned. And after that, life got really, really bad. My mother spent a lot of time in the mental institution . . . . She was in ... [mental hospital]. It was just--. We were raised by people that came into the home and took care of us kids at the time. It would be like a housemaid or whatever. They would come in and cook for my dad and stuff and help raise us until my mother would come home at times, and it would be bad and --. So, it was just different than the average family. A lot of the things--. I see a lot of families have gifts in education, gifts of laughter, and gifts of interaction. There's a lot of things I see in a lot of families and are really, really lucky, and they don't even realize they have all of that. It's nice to see though.

CK: What was your sustenance then during those years?

#7: I don't know that I--. I don't have a lot of memory of those years. Played a lot of basketball. Never won a lot of games, but I could sure play a lot of basketball. I was like Captain of the basketball team since--. I just remember always the agony of defeat. I just hated losing more than anything in the whole world. I can taste it in my mouth. It was so pathetic. I figured that when I grew up, I was never going to lose.

I've had a lot of defeats, but I've never lost. It came through them ok. But, when I was 18, I married a guy who was a newspaper editor. From there, we--. He worked at The Washington Post when Martin Luther King was killed. We came back to West

Virginia, and when I was 21 I had a daughter though. We started a . . . company, and then in 1975 I got my divorce. We lost the ... company, because it was under a small business loan.

So then in 1976 I started my own company, which is . . . . This is my 25<sup>th</sup> year now. I don't know, there was a lot of struggling days, a lot of just youth, and I sat back, and I think about it now, and it was just growing times, many roads and many philosophies of trying this and trying that. This wasn't right, and that wasn't right. I learned to have a best friend, and she sort of like would grab me by the ear and take me to church and kept me there a lot. I really learned to appreciate her a lot. I always stayed where she wanted me to be whether I knew it or not.

She sort of guided my life when all those years were real confusing. Then in 1990, she got sick and became a vegetable for 22 months, and it was a lot of changes in my life then. In fact, she taught me as much in her death as I'd ever learned in her life of living and trying to grow and be--. Every time I get discouraged, she'd always encourage me, and she was just a really nice lady. It was great.

CK: Did you grow up around her?

#7: Yes, because I was a wet nosed kid. Man, I was green behind the ears [laughs]. I'd give up, and she'd tell me I couldn't, until one day I realized I couldn't give up, I still had to go on. It all worked and makes a good package, good package.

CK: Yes, this is great. Tell me about the development of gender roles as you conceived of them over different parts of your life.

#7: Well, I started out, I was married for 10 years. During my divorce I was 27 when I had my first lesbian experience. At that time, I knew I would never go back. But I was

bisexual then from struggling with a lot of my own emotions inside myself for probably about 10 years or so. I think a lot of it could have been the pressure of society and everything. But then, as I got stronger within myself, then I just like really turned pure woman [laughs]. Let's put it that way.

I know what I want and I know what I like and I know who I am. So--. And that's been pretty strong for about 10 or 12 years now. Mighty we are.

CK: Mighty we are?

#7: Mighty we are, yes. It's really not about sexuality as much as it's--. I think it's a lot about spirituality and finding yourself and becoming who you need to be. The rest of it's just--. That's the part of where, I think, that's just where I found love at. And that's where I found myself at, and that's where I found life at. So, I don't really look at it all as much as the sexuality as much as the spiritual side of just a human life becoming. That's the way I look at it.

It's like going one step above it all and to what needs to be. So, I'm pretty glad about that too. But, a lot of memories. I see all these young kids, and they come and talk to me and stuff, and I just sit back, and I think of all those days and all those memories and all them steps and journeys and--. You just pray for them a lot and know that they're going to make it too. They will, they honestly will. They just have to grow through it the same way that everybody else does.

CK: Do young lesbian kids come to you?

#7: Oh yes, I have a lot of kids that come--. When I say kids, they're 18, 20, 25--. A lot of--. I consider them young now. But they're just struggling about who they are and

what they want out of life. Just a lot of the restlessness I probably felt myself at that age too.

CK: You had your first relationship with a woman at 27? Was that a surprise to you?

#7: [laughs] Yes, kind of. I think--. I've always admired women. I mean I grew up--. I just, even to this day and I'm turning 54. If you show me a strong will minded woman that just has her own mind within herself, I just like love them. I mean, just the strength that they have and they know what their life's about and where they're going with it and it's just--. I'm like a magnet.

I can just like look at them, picture them, and sort of like growing with them. I like that. I like that a lot. Always have, even as kids when I think that I admired schoolteachers or whoever, people in the neighborhood and--. And I really admired good women. Not really good women, I'm not--. Just good people too. You know, because I have a lot of male friends that I really respect a lot. But, I don't know whether it's because I visualize my mother as being a weak woman or--. Because I sit now, and as I see her in a nursing home, and she definitely wasn't a weak woman. Maybe a confused woman and maybe not where she needed to be, but not--. I don't see her weak anymore.

It's just the times back in the '50s with all this stuff that went on. Not having the emotional support or the education to learn how to step out of the battered woman's syndrome. And having kids raised with incest and to emotionally understand all those things in order to help save her kids. I don't know if my mother had that ability. And then after my brother's death, then the grief just took over, and she just never overcame the grief and the sadness of his death.

I think--. I just feel within myself lucky. To be free and--. I just--. To know the difference and to go back into my life now and to take my daughter and my grandkids and to put focus on education and on manners and respect. To teach them the tools of what they need today. To just be who they need to be. I think that's just the greatest gift that anyone can have. Seriously.

I'll never be an English teacher but I sure know [laughs] what she was talking about now. As you read the stories of other people, they knew too. They made it through, and that's how you just learn to walk the journey. It's all good. It's just great. I'm a lucky person too. That makes a difference.

CK: When you were in highschool, did you wish you could be around women some more?

#7: Oh, I was a tomboy. I dressed like a boy. They was like--. I could out spit them, out cuss them, out run them, out shoot them in basketball. I could out work them. Even--. Probably since I've turned 50, I mean--. I could probably go out there on the farm and just outwork anyone. I'm just like a workaholic. I have this high tendency to competitiveness and I can just whoop them [laughs]. Of course, I've gotten older and I've sort of toned down a lot, and my ego's under control now a lot more, and I don't have as much to prove, on a good day. I just try using my head with the wisdom that I have now, a lot more than to fall short of all the other--. That's kind of what I work on now.

CK: Did you catch flack for hanging around with the guys and being better than them?

#7: No, I never even thought about it that much. I just--. Actually, even today, I am probably in a more male role than--. In the world of the men, because of town and the

business and everything. I interact with men and--. I've been working on the emotional side of interacting with women. Later on now in my life I joined a country club and that's helped a lot.

It's really--. To be accepted and everything is really awesome to me. I don't know, I think there's both sides of everybody. It's kind of like--. I tried experiencing the male, the female, and I think I have, while I've been here. Because it's--. I don't know--. I was just raised a tomboy and now that I'm older, I'm turning a lot femmer. It's nice. I can see both sides.

CK: So you're femme at the Country Club?

#7: Oh, yes [laughs]. I don't spit on the golf course. [laughs] I just had to throw that one in.

CK: Do you hang out with the ladies there?

#7: Yes. I get to hang out with the ladies now and enjoy myself. Live in a different side of the world than I did growing up. That's been nice to see that. Those changes and to have all the feelings of it all and acceptance. I like that really well. It's good.

CK: Are you out with them?

#7: Oh yes. I mean, my license plate says, "I am. Are you?" I mean everyone in that town knows. I've been out for like 15 years now. They don't care. If someone wants to talk to me about it and I feel they're being respectful, I'll talk about it. If someone's wanting to be like trashy about it, I just look at them and say, "Pardon me, you must have mistaken who I am [laughs]". And they just sort of like back off.

But, I think a lot of it depends who the person is and how they want to talk about it. How I answer them back. But it's--. I never let the issue--. I don't really want--. If I

died today, I don't want my sexuality to be an issue, as much as who I am as a person. And I'd rather die with integrity and have my name mean a lot about who I am than the fact that if I slept with a woman, or I grew up as a tomboy, or anything like this. I just don't really think that's an issue I want to deal with and that's not the important issue in my life. Respect is something that I work on a lot. The word with my friends as far as the lifestyle that I live is very respectful. And they show me respect back.

We're remote here, I don't--. It is really, really lonely.... County is not a one that's really open. There's a lot of the younger kids that are coming out and stuff like this, but for us older ones, it's--. There's a few of us, but they're very few, and you get pretty lonely with it all.

I haven't had a problem. It must be my male macho ego. Because everyone tells me I'm so tough looking on the outside and such a wimp on the inside. So I just don't let people know that I'm a wimp [laughs]. So--.

CK: So you decided to just come out as who you were 15 years ago?

#7: As I was explaining before, I just--. There was a time that I was like bisexual, and I think a lot of that was not being strong enough within myself to be who I was. And as I became stronger and got older--. Then after a while, I just--. Like one day decided, I'm not living two worlds. If someone doesn't like me then it's their problem and not mine. I became very open and --. Like I say, I just really don't have a problem. I've had some other people in the community talk about it and it seems like they do. But to me, it's how you look at it in your own mind.

If I wanted to take this issue and --. Or that issue and maybe blame it on it all, I could do that, but it's not an issue.

CK: What do you mean?

#7: Some of the kids come up and say, "Well I got fired because I'm gay," or something like this and--. There's been a time or two that I've gone to their place of business, because I needed to know for myself. And asked the people: "Well so and so came up and said that they were fired because of this." And they'll say, "Well they can say whatever they want, but if you look at their record, they don't go to work." I think if the kids really became within themselves who they need to be, I don't think the issue would even affect anybody. And that's the way I feel about my life.

It's never been an issue. I don't allow it to be an issue, and I never will. Because it's not an issue. Because it's about more who I am as a person and what I stand for than who I sleep with. That's kind of where I stay with it all.

CK: There were maybe like 11 years when you were trying to kind of live two lives and not let people know what was going on?

#7: Yes, it was real hard. I had a daughter, and I think living, knowing back then that if it came up, I might lose her or something--. So you did this front, and did all these things. It was like a mask. So that no one really know--. Like I thought they would know. But after a while, it never became important to live all that charade. I--. Like I say, as I got stronger within myself, it all sort of mellowed out and just went away.

CK: What was the charade like?

#7: You know, if someone asked you if you were gay, you would say, "No." You'd say, "Well those are just stories that people make up." And it was just like living in different worlds. So--. Then after a while, it just came to the point if they'd ask if I was gay, I could say, "Yes." And you just got strength in it, and it was ok. And after a while I

realized that it was just more important to be who I needed to be than to worry about all those things.

I have a more important job to do for myself than worry about that.

CK: Did your daughter know at that point?

#7: Oh, no [laughs]. I'm pretty open--. Well--. She came one time when I think that she was about 12 and asked me. And I told her no. I told her that I just loved the lady that we were living with and that that's all it was. And then when she was in college--.

CK: All it was was a friendship, you mean?

#7: Right. And then when she went to college, we spoke of it for the first time. And then when my grandkids--. When my grandkids were like 10, 12, and 7 now--. And I've been totally open with them clear through. Because I'm not living in two worlds. So I've been real open with my grandkids. In fact, my grandson--. I'll tell you a funny story about my grandson. He really likes the arts and he's really--. If any of them are gay, he might be.

Because he--. He liked Barbie Dolls, and he was in school, and it was kindergarten, and all the kids were saying, "You're gay." He looks up at the whole class and says, "No I'm not. My grandma is, but I'm not." [laughs]. You know, the teachers come and tell you what the kids say and all this stuff, so it's really just a spoken community thing now. It's--. A lot of people just acknowledge it and--. Like I say, I don't have a problem.

CK: Was it a constant they were familiar with when you started bringing him up?

#7: I'm probably one of the--. I'm not the oldest lesbian in the village, but I'm probably one of the better ones now [laughs].

CK: Better ones?

#7: Yes, better ones. I've just always tried to hold myself with a lot of integrity. There's just a lot of--. Even the business people that we talk about it and stuff.

CK: You do?

#7: Yes. They'll tell me jokes and stuff and they'll say, "You can appreciate this." Or if it's on TV or something, or if they watch a movie they'll come and say, "Have you seen the movie?" And I'll say no and they'll say, "You got to go watch it." So you know--. I think it's just really ease. I feel by being a forerunner into the community and everything, I hopefully, it'll make it a lot nicer for the ones, the young ones who are coming out.

I always tell them, hold themselves up. Don't let the community take them down or anything. And it's all about you and who you are, and the respect will come. And it will for them, the same way it did for me. I know that for them.

CK: God, they're lucky to have you.

#7: [laughs] Oh, I don't know about that, but we have some good talks. Sometimes they--. They'll call me on the phone, and they're just like in desperation, and they're going through their times of loving someone and being suicidal, and I just like talk them through it. And it's about raising them. It's about encouraging them, telling them not to give up. And sometimes you talk to them and try to get into them and ask them questions and try to stir them or plant a seed and hope that within themselves they will learn who they are and who love is. If they can learn that and what's real to them, then the rest of it will take its place, and it will fall into place for them and getting them down the road.

They come, they go. Some of them are out of town and they'll come back and call you, or be in for Christmas or something and stop by the shop. It's nice, I have to admit.

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It's nice. Just making it through. A lot of them have so much pain. I see the pain in their lives and I think that if they can go back and just deal with some of that pain, then everything else will be ok with them. Because they're just searching and trying to find what's real to them. Like I say, it brings a lot of memories back to the beginning of who I was and trying to find those roots too. It always feels good. I guess I had the advantages of having my Grandpa's place here and stuff to feel all that. To you know, as you go back and try to find yourself. From generation to generation and bring it all together and just know that you're going on and you're growing. And you're carrying that tradition of that strength and that survivorship. To know that you're not going to let them give up.

I think of the toughness and the discipline that still has been a great asset. At the time I used to think it was abuse and everything else, but after time changed, I don't agree with any of that now. I think the discipline of the life and--. Kept a lot of the wondering away that I see a lot of the young kids have now, not knowing what they want for their life and not knowing how to get it or to work for it, that softness that they have. Learning to hang in there and not giving up.

If anything irritates me, with any of them, it's when they want to give up. I just want to grab them by the ear like my best friend did me and just pull it and say, "You can't," and, "Just go on." They get a lot of speeches from me [laughs]. To say the least.

CK: You say there was a lot of discipline in your own childhood?

#7: We were taught to work a lot. We worked all the time. Even when we weren't working, we were taught while we were resting, do something. So, I became a workaholic really, really--. So, when I started my print shop it was good, because I was a

loner type person. I didn't really interact with anyone. In fact when I went to therapy, I learned to talk. You probably think I'm talking good [laugh]. Believe me, it's been a lot of years of practice just to learn how to express feelings and to understand them and to put them into text to where they need to be. So, we just worked a lot, and I love work. It's just good for the soul now. It's who I was, but--. All those hours that I worked took a lot of the pain that I had and worked when I was constructive with it. As I look back now I built old houses, buy them and fix them up and I'd build them and I still own about five of them.

I just had to build. I didn't know what I was doing, but I had to build something. I'm through with all that now. I don't have to build anything anymore. I just kind of outgrew it or burnt out on it all. Like mellowed out. Where I think the kids just get wandering in circles and they don't know how to go forward. I think they get kind of lost in all that. I feel I was probably pretty lucky with it all.

CK: Because you were taught to work hard?

#7: Well no, I think I was lucky because I probably had a friend pull me by the ear and say, "Here, let's go this way." And I think she guided me down the road all those years. But never let me--. She just really kept me focused when I didn't know what I wanted or what I was doing. She loved me when I didn't even know how to love myself. There was many, many days of just like the words, acceptance that I think she gave me. I remember one night--. A very moving night in our friendship and a very big turning point in our life.

I remember we were talking and like these dark secrets you have about life, you know.

And we had been friends like 10 or 12 years, and I remember I was in a rocking chair and all this stuff--. Just one night, just started coming out. We were talking, and she just got down on the floor, and she just put her hand on my knee, and she looked up and she said, "And you thought all these years I didn't know anything didn't you?" And I was like really surprised. I think it was her love and acceptance of who I was and where I had been in my life. It just turned so healing.

The fact that I'd loved her so much, and when she loved me back, and it all didn't matter, after that, nothing really mattered. I felt like I was on top of the world. A lot of it is just a lot of growing. And I'm not saying about growing today or growing yesterday, I mean years of just mountains of just growing. And coming and learning to be. As I --. Emotionally now, I put it together and think of this person or that person or this incident or that incident, it just kind of all pulls it together. You can just tell that you're on the right road and the right book and the right place.

It's just like turning--. And my life turns extremely beautiful now. It--.

CK: What was your friend's name?

#7: .... I called her the chief. I couldn't remember one time, so I called her the chief and she was just like mastermind of my life. I'm very lucky to have her, and then she's been dead since 1990. And about two and one-half years ago, I met another lady by the name of ... that's South Korean that's my spiritual teacher now. We spend a lot of time, hours, really talking, and in that emotional growth I think is really when it all started falling into place. It all is coming together faster for me now.

The understanding and the--. Where it's all going through it all. But it's just--. God sends you people, and you've just got to grab a hold and take that journey, and it's good. So, be it in the name of teacher whoever, there's always people out there, I think.

CK: Sounds like ... was really the love of your life.

#7: Oh man. When she died, I cried like two years. We weren't sexual or anything like that. It was just a spiritual friend. But I think she gave me the beginning of--. It didn't matter who I was or where I'd been, she unconditionally loved me. And I think that was the beginning, and that was the first time I had ever experienced that of that true feeling. And I think it was in that love that I learned a lot about life. I think that was the real gift of her whole friendship.

Then after she died, the transitional part of healing--. I went to this cabin, which I told you earlier about, and I'll go ahead and tell you now if you want to.

CK: Yes.

#7: One night I was really, really scared, and I think all the fears of my life were just there. There was this storm coming, and I was in this cabin up on this point, and it whistled. And I thought, "Man, if I can just get to sleep I won't be afraid." So I remember getting under the covers and hiding and all this stuff. The next thing that I know--. I'll use the word kind to myself, because somewhere in all this emotional distress that was happening in my life, a lot of things happened within a two-year period here. That was so struggling that I lost myself. I don't really know how to explain it totally, but all the pain in my life, all that control in my life, and all that person that I was that I felt that had to stay in tune to myself, that night left.

When I came to myself, I was on the floor. My shirt was saturated like I just walked out of a shower. I was so wet when I came back into reality that--. Just from tears. From that time on, my whole life has just changed. I really believe that at that moment God walked into my life. He just eliminated everything that was always there, that cloud over your shoulder that keeps you from growing or keeps you stagnant or keeps you there. Through it all, a new person developed. I'm super sensitive now, too much a little bit sometimes. I have to really watch myself and keep on guard with that. It's seeing the other side of the coin, I consider it--. Or living out the dark side and walking into the light side of life.

It's a side of learning to be tender and compassion and caring and knowing it's all ok. I don't have to worry about the mask. I don't have to worry about the charade. I don't have to worry about anything other than what's real within myself and knowing that truth to be true. I don't have to question it even, because I know that I've lived and done what I was suppose to here. I think the hardest part of all of this is sometimes like telling it and having other people understand it, because a lot of people don't. They just like look at you, and you shake your head a little bit. It's just all real. It's what it is all about. I know that myself.

We do a lot of community service now. I took my life and I take my ... shop and we play Robin Hood with it now. I--. Financially, I'm very comfortable with some things that's happened in my life, and we give a lot of it back to the people who need it: cancer patients or whatever, kids who are having problems and--. We just do a lot to give back to the people. I'm really glad about that. I'm glad that I'm able to do that. I'm able to do that. I can't imagine not doing it now. So there's a big need.

CK: Beautiful story.

#7: [laughs] It's a beautiful life.

CK: Will you tell me more about ...? Who she was and how she--.

#7: She had--. She walked a different type life. I consider myself growing up on--.

When I'm around my friends and stuff--. I mean we walked different patterns, and a lot of my friends have never been victims of society the way I was. Never victims of child abuse, never victims of the mental, the sexual, the emotional. You know, they lived a softer life, an educated life, a more cultured life. And we sat back, and they look at me, and we laugh about it sometimes and everything, and we talk about it. I just came on the rough side of the street.

... was raised by an old time preacher that met her when she was like 12 or 13 years old. I think that preacher touched her soul pretty good. Then when she was growing up her brother died. He was killed in a car wreck drinking and stuff. Then she just became strong from that, and that's how she learned to survive. In her surviving she taught me--. Even though I didn't realize it at the time of our friendship until I was a lot older, what she totally gave me. But she was definitely the roots. She was definitely the person that came and maybe mothered me, nurtured me, and stood beside me. This was definitely very strong in my life.

CK: How did you meet her?

#7: I met her one night--. My sister had tried to commit suicide, and she was in a coma in the hospital, and she was--. My sister was friends with her. I couldn't go home that night. I was at the hospital, so I sat down on the outside of the room on the floor, in the hallway. And I was just sitting there on the floor, and this woman came in. I recognized

her as being my sister's friend. She sat down on the floor that night, and we talked in the hallway, and then we talked for 18 years.

When we were together, it was just ok. We just talked. But I don't know how truly honest with her it was a lot of years before I could just really confront her [about] being gay and a lot of incest and all the problems I had and be open. We sat down and talked about it then. Her unconditional love for me made all the difference. I think about where my life would have been had she have closed the door on me and walked away. Where would it have really have been? I told you I was lucky.

CK: Did her church allow gayness?

#7: Her church? No, we're Baptist [laughs]. In fact, I don't even belong to the church now. I did for a lot of years. I used to be the youth director at the church. No--. I still go and things like this but, I just--. I'm pretty quiet. I have nothing to prove to any of them. I think the spiritual side of life--. I feel that I'm luckier than--. I shouldn't say even--. I found God on a different side than even what the church did. I found love on a different side than what a lot of people did. And when I come back in my next life I tell all my friends I'm coming back gay. I don't care if they are straight. If they want to be still friends with me and have a relationship, they got to be gay with me.

CK: How come you're coming back gay again?

#7: Oh, I won this time, why not? It would be easier next time. I've already done the fore work; I've already done this and this and this. I didn't like being straight [laughs].

CK: Didn't suit you?

#7: It just isn't me. You know, it just comes down to the fact that it just isn't who I am. I really believe God made me this way. He loves me this way. I'll die this way, and I

don't have a problem between God and I. Sometimes it's hard, because I really like Gospel music. A lot of my gay friends think I'm weird. They don't believe in the churches and all this stuff, and they ask how I can go and take all the criticism and stuff. But I don't even know that I feel the criticism, because it's just not an issue.

Because I think in my head I walk above all of that. So it just doesn't touch me. If the other people want to make it an issue, it's their issue and not mine. That's kind of the way I feel about it and all.

CK: And do they?

#7: If they do they're very private about it. They don't do it to my face [laughs]. No, I -  
-. Like I say, I don't--. The community is extremely respectful. I mean, when I go into Kroger's shopping and stuff all these people come and talk to me and call me by name, and I have no idea who they even are. I don't really know. Kids come ride their bikes and yell at me and stuff and--. I could probably run for Sheriff and win. I'd almost bet I could. Except it's not my thing.

I don't know, helping other people get through now is what I like doing. Within it's own way of however it is. I just always try not to fall short of doing what I need to do. And I truly believe that, totally. So--. And there are other things beyond the issues that need to be addressed. I say, if you stay with just the positive thinking, the unconditional love and the compassion for the people and they learn that and then it will all happen. I sit and I think about that was what ... [friend's name] gave me. In that gift, I learned to understand it and feel it and then live it myself. Then it goes back into the system.

CK: They can't help but liking you.

#7: [laughs] Oh, I can't even believe they like me, but everybody likes me. I don't have a problem with being liked.

CK: Do you ever feel you're like an ambassador for gayness?

#7: [laughs] Oh, let's put it this way, I'm probably one of the forerunners for a long time, because I'm an old timer now--. It's been what, about 25 years? I feel that I owe it to ourselves to stand with who we should be.

CK: What's that?

#7: I think we just owe it to ourselves to stand for who we should be. As long as it's not trashy, it has to be respected. As long as it's not demeaned and you don't lower yourself into the standards of Gospel or falling short, then they have to respect you, eventually. I think that's what really has happened, just eventually, because everyone knows, nobody cares, it's not an issue. And I'm probably one of the few people that can really say that.

Buying into my own company--. Because I see some of my friends that are scared to come out and stuff like this and--. I have a freedom about it all. But I think that freedom came with being financially secure too. I didn't have to worry about whether I lost an account or anything like that. It's not an issue, at least not with me.

CK: How do you advise people who are working for other people in terms of coming out?

#7: I'd probably advise them to deal with caution. I mean, you have--. If principle was fine, but you still have to feed your families, and you still have to do the things you have to do. I think you win one person at a time. I don't think I accomplished today what is if I would have gone out there and been pushy. I don't think if I would have gone out there and --. I think I did it through the back door privately. One person at a time, or one issue

or one thing at a time. As I showed who I was with what I wanted to be and represent, I think as I won one person, another person came.

I mean, I've had friends that are really--. Five years or ten years ago would say, "Oh, she's gay." I can spend time or go out to dinner with the same people now, and they'll eat at the same table, and we have a good friendship. I think it takes time to prove yourself, and like I tell them, I don't tell them how to make love to their wives or who they are. I think it's just who you are and what you enjoy. I keep my life very private. I don't even live in town, I live clear out here. Not that I have a relationship now, but if I did, then that would be more private, away from the community. I don't visualize myself as being someone who's going to go down Main Street and hold hands or kiss and this stuff publicly. I'll never be that person.

I'm not against anyone who is, because I have some of my friends that go out in restaurants who are very comfortable with it, and I have to admire them.

CK: Around here?

#7: Yes, up in ... more than .... And I admire them for that. And they're accepted and -- . But they're accepted just as much too. I still think it comes down to the who the individual person is. If you have integrity, if you have honor, you're honest and you really work at it all then it is bound to win, it has to win. It has to come through. I don't think it's an issue of being straight or gay or whatever, bisexual or however.

I think one of the things mean a lot and have helped a lot, believe it or not, and I've even been told this: Because I am a woman now. If I was a male, I don't know if it would have been as easy, had it been a male person here.

CK: Really?

#7: Yes.

CK: How do you account for that?

#7: Just maybe the men fancies too [laughs].

CK: What's that?

#7: Just many the men's fancies too. You know, most men have wives and stuff like this, and they wouldn't care if their wives had girlfriends as long as they get to be there too, or something like this. I think its--. I think it's the women--. I haven't had a problem with the women even. In fact a lot of the married women have told me that they admire me, my courage and everything, and they wish that they would have been able to--. Just even had the freedom of being free in a marriage. But I just know that it would have been harder had I been a male. I definitely know that.

CK: Have you known gay men trying to live around here?

#7: Yes, I do. And they have a more harder time.

CK: Easier for a woman to be macho than a man to be femme? Or is that--. Is it deeper than that even?

#7: I think it's even deeper than that. I think we--. I think the women--. Well, there's a lot of what I would consider women who are very tomboyish that aren't gay here. A lot of farmwomen, they're like real butch and everything and you think, "Man!" when they lift that bail of hay up in there, you're like, "Wow!" But, I don't know that they even think about it or not, you know, there within themselves. This is still a laid back community where, women are still a lot raised on farms. I was raised on a farm. I think it's just the inner person of who they are. A lot---. I don't know, I consider myself really really lucky, because I've--. Whether it was therapy, or whether it was my Christian

education that I still was raised in, or just that inner strength of growing that I'll never--.

I have to be free, and I have to be above it all.

I have to not live in the guilt, live in the shame, live in the pain that I have to be free of all of that. That a lot of women just don't even get beyond that and to accept it.

Marriages are just, "I'm married and that's it," where they don't keep on the dream of being free and going on. I think it limits all the people with that. I'm a seeker. I don't care what mountain, I got to go over it and climb into another one and--. I don't know how good the conversation gets, I still got to go to the toenails and get involved in it all. It's just who I am.

CK: Where's it all coming from?

#7: I don't know [laughs]. It's like, I've got to know. You know, it's got to be real. It's like the first eighteen years of my life I spent believing that home was the way it was and that was life. To wake up and realize that it wasn't--. I was married 10 years and I thought man, this isn't what I want either.

CK: Talk about those years a little bit. Take me through the journey of it all.

#7: What do you mean by that?

CK: Well through getting married and you know, just getting to know yourself over the years. What kind of marriage was it?

#7: It was a mixed role. He was like the femme lady. He did the cooking and the housekeeping, and I mowed the yards and washed the cars. I'm physical, I got to get out there and get with it. We did some reverse roles. It just didn't last, because he didn't deal with it, I didn't deal with it. We were probably very young.

CK: Deal with the reverse roles?

#7: Yes, I think we did. We were ok with it, I don't think society--. I know he had a lot of pressure with it. About me being so butch and out there a lot. He couldn't deal with it. He was an alcoholic and --. So the alcoholism took over more. So I just got my divorce, because I didn't want to live that. But--. And then I got into--. You know, I had been in dual relationships, triangles, you name it. I've walked every road and every path. I've been through a recovery program for alcoholism in which I realized at the end of all these things this was all just circling around the real truth of it all. Once I really got into the healing part of my life and the spiritual part of my life, all of that sort of mellowed out and went away. I didn't have to do all that stuff anymore.

That was really good. It's just knowing yourself about what's real. I have to know every day what's real. If I meet someone, I want to know who they are. I tell them up front, if we're going to do this, we going to get down here and get into it and we're just going to get involved. As far as talking--. When these kids come, it's--. I tell them, if they want my time they're going to have to talk until they can't talk anymore. Then talk more. Because to me, if they can get it out of there they can get healed and they can get focused what they need. If they want to play games, then they're just playing. So, now i like---. Just putting paint all over you and painting a room.

CK: Well did you know you were butch during those marriage years then?

#7: No, I was just considered tomboy. We just grew up, and I had the short hair cuts and the old piece of wire that went into your pants to make them slick, and you wore your jeans on you hips and you, all this--. Like I say, I grew up with my brothers and they and all their friends. We sleigh rided and played baseball and basketball, and we were just out there. I was probably 25 or 26 before I became totally aware of it all, of my feelings

and where it was all at and what I really wanted. Then after my first sexual experience, then I really knew. In fact, right now since this is private, I raise my ex-girlfriend's son who's 12 right now. We haven't been together for probably 10 years, but I spent 17 years with her. And we're still friends. My daughter lived with her. She raised my daughter; I raise her son now. My daughter and grandkids live with her. We're just family and everything even though--. It's a lot of growth in that too. Because I've had other relationships, and she's ok with all of that. It's just changing in different ways. I have no hard feelings with anyone I've ever been with. I think all of it has been a good experience and a growing experience.

I think about what they put into my life and the changes and the effects it made. Like I say, I'm a seeker. I'm still not satisfied. I'm sure that in my next 50 years [laughs] I'll be roller-skating with some new ones. For whatever it is the growth part of it all. It's all about learned lessons. It's all about the experiences and just really being happy and knowing what happiness means inside. There is nothing more to me ever than to see one of these kids change. Or they'll call you up and say, "You were right. I don't want to die," or, "I don't want to do this," or--. To make an effect, for one of them to call you up and say, "Hey, I've got a job. I've got my life on the way." I mean, I can just have tears in my soul. I'm serious. And it's just beautiful to experience it. They make it. They'll make it through. I made it through; they'll make it through too.

CK: Did you go through those traumas yourself in coming to terms with what you were?

#7: Oh, many times. I can't believe anyone wouldn't say that they haven't, seriously.

CK: What about the whole reconciling being gay and in the context of the values around you? Did it fit?

#7: Well, I think a lot--. In the beginning I was real private about it all and stuff. Then when--.

CK: What got in your head though?

#7: I just figured I was weird [laughs]. I figured I was marked for hell. I figured no way, but I wouldn't quit. It was like one of those fancies if I'm going to do anyway. So, I remember being gay for a lot of years, and one day I was talking to my dad, and I thought, this is the time to tell my dad. I remember telling my Dad and his words were, "I always heard you were." That was it. That was all that was ever said.

"I always heard that you were." I thought, why did I even go confess to him? I didn't have to do that. I had nothing to prove. I don't know, it's--. I don't know, there's just a lot of stuff that goes on. A lot of--. And I see these young kids have it too about them that--. It's like wanting to know what's real or wanting to know. And they have those dreams and hopes. They just don't know how to get there. You just tell them to stay calm and take it one day at a time. Let life sort of work for them. Don't make life--. As long as you don't push life and make it happen and you let it come to you, then you know it's real. Because it takes each--. It's like a piece of puzzle and it falls into place.

CK: Do they call you because they're scared? Their folks are mad at them for coming out?

#7: Sometimes even the parents come to me. It's not even the kids. Then they'll ask me, "My daughter's gay. Will you talk to her?" And I'm like, "Yes, I'll take the time." And she said, "You've got to convince her that she's not." I just within myself laugh, and I'll say, "Oh, well I'll talk to her". We'll bring them in and act like I'm going to do a job application form or something, and then after they're there for a while I'll just--. I don't

know, after you talk to them an hour or two and stuff and you feel like it's going to go somewhere, I'll tell them that we're set up, that it really wasn't about--. I'm pretty honest with them.

CK: Tell them what?

#7: That it wasn't really about a job application, that their mother came to me, and I'm suppose to convince them that they're not gay. "You walk out and tell your mother in the car that you're a good little girl, and you got a job and that you're not gay and that you're going to get married and all this stuff." We'll sit and laugh, and then we'll sit down and really talk then. It's like breaking the ice.

We talk about the kids having the adjustment of being gay. I think sometimes it's even about their parents and other people around people having the adjustments to those kids. I remember my brother. He's the biggest redneck male West Virginian there ever was, and he had a hard time when I first came out, my brother did. Now, he's one of the sweetest guys you ever want to know about. He's just like, "Who you got with you?" [laughs] He's come a long way.

The whole bottom-line's about love. No matter what you say about any of it, it's just all about people loving each other and working it through. Families working it through and learning people to be who they are. It's about all that. So, there's times that I see situations that I want to get involved with and spend time with, and there's others that I'll start and I decide no, it's not where I'm suppose to be. If I don't feel spiritually that it's where I'm suppose to be then I don't take the time. I spend a lot of time even now with -- . Even through the night people call me--. This one girl's 35 years old or I should say

lady, that would like to be gay who isn't, that just came down with MS. It's not a gay issue with her, it's a survivorship of learning to adjust to MS and each day cope with it.

CK: What do you mean, she would like to be gay?

#7: She's straight, but I think she would like to be gay.

CK: She thinks she is, and you don't think she is?

#7: I think she is [laughs]. She just would never cross over or be able to have the courage to cross over. Social state and the marriage that she's at and that's who she is. She may, I don't know.

CK: You must see that quite a bit.

#7: Yes, yes. It's about their courage and nerve. What they really want. It's not--. I just don't really--. Those are issues I never play with or even encourage it or discourage. They are who they are, where they're at, and they're going to take it wherever life takes them. I don't go there. I don't really think of a lot of the people that really call me. My thing is for them to learn to be happy, to learn what love's about and not let the pain of whatever it was back here in their life destroy them. I always encourage them to take all this stuff and don't go into the drugs, don't go into the prostitution that they do. Don't go loving all these people trying to prove that it's in every face you see that you're going to find it. Go back. Love yourself.

Take all this stuff that you think isn't important, and take care of your own life, and put your life together, and make it happen for you. As you can do that, and as they can learn to do this and--. From one step from a job to having whatever they want, be it their cars or whatever, as they grow, they will find their way. They just have to have that faith and stay within that faith of knowing that God's there for them. The answers will be

there. I really believe that. As they happen for me. Even at the time that all of this was happening in my life, I didn't realize it was all going on. I can sit back now and look back and see each decision I made or each person I was with, what I learned from that person and all these personalities that went into who I am today, make me who I am today. That's the good part.

CK: Do you ever wonder where it comes from? Who's going to love women and who's going to love men and --?

#7: Oh, as long as they find love, it doesn't really matter. I think coming here and finding out who you are yourself--. And once you learn the utmost about yourself, the stronger you get. That's where the inner strength's really at. It's not in this or that or this issue or that issue as much as it's just--. As each issue happens and you handle yourself in a very self-esteem way that makes you proud of yourself--. You learn to get happy within yourself about who you are and all these issues are what it's really all about. As you step up here into each upper level, and life keeps opening up for you, and you keep growing and maturing, and as that later happens, then the good stuff happens.

I remember times in my life that the pain was there so strong that I couldn't feel the wind. I can go up on the point and the sadness would be there and I couldn't do it. Then one day, I just went up--. And it was when I turned 50 really is when it started. I told myself, you're just too much within yourself, you've got to open up. It's like feeling the wind hit your face or seeing the rain drops on a tree or watching the sunset, and just feeling that warmth inside yourself. As you totally learn to --. I practice with my grandkids here. We go for walks, and we take all this stuff in our lives, these resentments and these self-pity parties. As we walk through the trees on the trails, I tell them to take--

. If someone hurt them and they get upset about it to go talk to this tree and tell this tree what it is, and then I want them to shove that tree over. Then I tell them to go find a beautiful tree and hug that tree. Hey, they got the whole woods cleared up back in here [laughs]. They do. I'm sure when they grow up they're going to tell their grandkids the same story, about how to get rid of all this stuff, how to let go of it.

I spend hours within my own brain and meditating and praying and trying to reprogram who I am. I take time to think about the things I've done with people or talked to people and said to people and how I wish I said it a little bit different or done it a little bit different, or even said more. And there's times that I came home--. I swear some of the stories that I hear, and I can go to sleep crying and just--. I sit and think of the things. I thought my life was horrible. Some of this stuff is really even worse. As even as much as I felt mine was, it was worse.

Sometimes I don't see the people having the ability to over step that freedom into themselves, to get free of it all. That's really sad. I mean, I just--. I could cry just thinking about it. Not having the ability to be free. That's a good word for me. I like being free. But I don't--. I tell myself always to be humble and always to be grateful and always to appreciate each individuality of who they are or wherever they're at and to accept the people for that. I think that just really started coming to a real compassion and I think as all that happens then it just--. I don't know.

But--. I mean when the kids come--. If it's a kid that's got an issue of a report card, or a parent that won't talk to them or something, I don't think their gender issues as much as spiritual issues. From life out they're on the streets and who they are.