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Singleton-Prather, Anita and Charles Singleton

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Anita Singleton Prather, Charles Dennis Singleton

July 23, 2012

St. Helena Island

AP: July 23, 2012, Anita Joy Singleton Prather.

CS: And my name is Charles Dennis Singleton, and I am Anita Prather's brother.

Unknown: [Off Camera] Can you tell us how long you've lived here in the Beaufort area, please?

AP: 55 years for me. 57 for [points to Charles]...

CD: 57 on me, I'm 57 years old, so. But I didn't always live here. After I finished high school my heart had a desire to be a boxer. And so, I moved to Atlanta, Georgia, and that's where I started making that happen, being a boxer in Atlanta, Georgia. And from there, I was in Atlanta from '73 to '75. While I was there I went to--what's the name of that school? DeVry Tech?

AP: Mhm.

CD: Yeah, okay, so I was at DeVry Tech, and after I graduated, in the spring of 1975, my uncle came from Philadelphia to Atlanta for his daughter's graduation, from college, and I told Uncle Charlie then, I said, "Uncle Charlie, you know, I'm a boxer." And so he listened to my story and then when he left, shortly after he left, I was in the newspaper for the first time, got excited, cut that news section out and put it in an envelope and mailed it to him. To let him know, "Hey, Uncle Charlie, I'm really boxing." And he wrote me a long letter, told me that he knew how to get me into Joe Frazier's gym in Philadelphia, and if I was serious about boxing, he could get me into that gym. And so he made it happen, and that was a dream for me.

[Off camera] Yeah, that's where you had that great career. Tell us about growing up together, tell us something about being siblings, and share some stories with Beaufort, and you have both grown into celebrities here. So tell us the story before becoming celebrities here.

AP: We're a close knit family. Always had a house full of kids. My mom was a school teacher, my dad was a house painter, worked silver service for the military, and he had his own painting business on the side, as well. My father I guess was more of the disciplinarian. If Daddy said it, that was it, there was no questions asked. And one of the things I could remember my parents teaching is that we had to share. If it was one slice of bread, five pieces at least, everybody had to get a piece. I could remember one Christmas getting a brand new bicycle, but five of us had to share my bike. Or, a cassette player--everybody had to share it. And we didn't, I guess the whippings that we got wasn't so much the things we did out in the streets, because that wasn't the issue. But when we got to fighting among ourselves, my daddy couldn't stand that. He could not stand that. And my sister, who's about 17 months younger than I am, but she's always been the bossiest one, we used to call her PeeWee growing up because she was so small, but that's not the issue now, but [laughs, laughter off camera] but PeeWee was always bossy and had to be in charge. And I guess I was a little laid back, so she and I would get into it most of the times. And Dad would come and give us a whipping and then she'd go "Eeeh, eeeh" by the this time it was time to go to sleep, and so I'd say "Girl, why don't you be quiet?" [indecipherable] and he'd say "You want me to come back in there again?" And we'd say "No, daddy." So, you know, things like that. And then Dennis, I guess Dennis and I would get into it. Dennis and Julius. But the end would always be the same: if Daddy found out then that was a whipping for all of us. He could not stand that at all. And we basically lived in Beaufort proper, I guess in this area of Beaufort, until I was in, right after, I think, third grade. And then between third grade, the summer of third grade and fourth grade we moved, my mother [indecipherable] built a house on what we call the island, which is across the bridge on Lady's Island. And we thought we was going way back in the woods. My daddy didn't like being there because he liked the city and he liked being able to say hello to the neighbors, he was more of a social butterfly than my mother was. My mother was real quiet and laid back and it was so funny, this house right here [gestures down] is the house, this is my grandmother's house. We started out in this house. And then my mother nue's bought the house where I live in now, and we moved there. But, my grandmother's house was the social hub for our family, our extended families. Even cousins who lived out in Burton, or lived near Charleston, or wherever--everybody came to Cousin Rosa's house. And this house used to be a boarding house. She had boarders who would come from McClellanville and other parts of South Carolina. She always had teachers that would come, that lived elsewhere, that would come and stay in her house. Ms. Manigold--I remember her being here. Somebody was Mr. Mingo, he came, he lived here. And, I don't know, when you're small it seems like this place was huge. You know, I'm thinking, I'm trying to wonder how in the world my grandmother got everybody in this house? And she fed everybody family style. She always had, she had a beautiful dining room set table and the buffet, and the China cabinet. And everything she served had to be pretty. If she was giving you a peanut butter and jelly sandwich, she was going to make it pretty on the plate. And she'd say, "Child, you can serve someone chicken doodoo if it looks good." [Laughs, Dennis laughs, laughter off camera] But she was an excellent cook. She was an

excellent cook. Everybody wanted Ms. Rosa's food. We called her Ronnie, and my cousins across the street [points], her nieces and nephews, called her Mama. Everybody always came here. She baked the best chocolate chip cookies, with pecans in it. And lemon pound cake. You saw us do decoration day--decoration day time she would always do homemade ice cream, and she would be making the ham sandwiches for the parade participants. Just, everything. She had a chair that would sit right there [pointing] and she'd have this door open [points again] and the back door open [points again] and she'd be sitting there, drenched down in sweat, and just fanning [fans herself]. She had a little electric fan, and I'd say "Why aren't you gonna turn on the fan?" and she'd say, "Girl, I'm not running up my electricity." [Laughs, Dennis laughs, laughter off camera]. I'd be like, "Oh lordy, it's so hot out there," and she'd say "Feel fine to me, feel fine to me." [All laugh again] And she'd be fanning and I can remember sometimes I'd be in here--and the couch was always along this wall right here [points], and right where you are there used to be a potbelly stove [points towards interviewers off camera] and in the wintertime she'd be roasting sweet potatoes on it, or peanuts on it. You know, she was just something else. I tell folks all the time, "If you really wanted to meet the real Madea, you know Tyler Perry plays a Madea, but my grandmother was *the* Madea." [Laughter off camera] She was... I mean she... When she would finish with feeding her boarders and everything here, she'd get the kitchen cleaned up. But like I said, she'd serve meals family style, with real silverware--I mean, she'd just turnover in her grave if she knew how often we use paper plates and stuff [All laugh]. Because everything was always really nice. I mean she'd have little doilies and scarves on her furniture in here, and everything was starched and pressed--I mean she would just die if she saw this [unclear, gestures down at shirt]--everything was starched and pressed. She cleaned house every week--every Saturday was a full house cleaning. And you had to dust everything. And any time she was going to use her silver, it was a polishing party, you had to polish that. And I can remember old english furniture wax, because that was my job, to dust and polish everything. She always had M&Ms for us. So if you came around here to Ronnie's house, you were going to get some M&Ms. I don't know how she found anything in that room. She had this huge trunk in her room that she kept all her fine linens, she had a lot of Irish linens. She was a domestic worker that had a Queen Elizabeth taste. She was a very proud woman, and, even though she worked for some 30 something years for the Christian family--they were abolitionists that originally came from Boston, before the Civil War. And their house is at the end of Washington Street--big, huge Antebellum house. Beautiful house. And my grandmother never called them Ms. Anybody. She always called them Helen and Winnie. And she was truly head negro in charge [all laugh]. And when she told Ms. Helen get out of her kitchen, Ms. Helen knows moved. She told them to jump, they wanted to know how high. So I didn't grow up with that fair of white folks, like folks I guess my age would have been that, but I didn't see that. My grandmother, and my father, and my mother, in her quiet sort of way, were very proud people, and they weren't afraid of anybody. And they gave us that confidence. My grandmother was a busty woman, a very full-figured woman, but very comfortable in her skin. So I didn't grow up with any complexes, you know,

even when folks call me, “hey big fat Nita,” [shakes her head]--not a problem. I’ll still outrun you [all laughing]. Imma still shoot the basketball and make the basket. Because my grandmother, she would dance! I could remember, she always had parties. So, she’d be dancing in here, and she’d be so light on her feet, you know, so I grew up with a love of dancing. My parents loved to dance. So I could remember learning how to jitterbug with my dad at 6. Stuff like that. And if there wasn’t a party going on here, at my grandmother’s house, there was a party going on at our house, because our house became the social hub, everybody came to Inez and Julie’s house, or, came to my grandmother’s house. I can remember when Marshall and Lester and Frank and all of them across the street, and Jimmy Brown and them around the corner--I mean, this yard, we just, it just stayed loaded with people. And I don’t remember us buying vegetables, or my grandmother buying vegetables out of a store until I guess I was grown and back home, had been to college and back home. She grew everything in the back yard. I mean back there, she had a huge garden back there. And her front porch, you had enough space to walk inside--that was it because the front porch was covered with flowers. And she grew all her peppers and herbs and stuff was in flower pots. Or chamber pots. Whatever she found to grow something in. That whole porch was covered, that yard was covered, it looked like a little jungle because she had a garden out there in the front. And most of her backyard was a garden. I mean she grew asparagus, she grew eggplants. She did spinach, she did collard greens, green beans, okra, butter beans, all of that was growing in her backyard right back there. And she had some chickens. And she had a pomegranate tree. And I can remember sitting out on those steps, spitting. This time of the year we’d be spitting seeds all over the place, see who could spit it the furthest. Played “the red-headed devil” and “hide the switch.”

Unknown: [Off camera] What was “the red-headed devil”?

AP: Red-headed devil? Um. [Turns to Charles] What... how do you play that? I forgot how to play red-headed devil.

Unknown: [Off camera] C’mon Charles, what do you know?

CS: [Shakes head] I don’t remember that one, I’m sorry.

AP: I think you had to have a certain color and whatever your color, if the person who was it called your color then you got up and you ran, and you ran from the red-headed devil. You had to run around this house, and you had to come back on these steps and that would be the safe place. Or hide the switch. The person would go hide the switch and whoever find it would come try to beat everybody. And, um, and all that was played right here. And right in front of the house was a huge oak tree. [Turns to Dennis] You remember that oak tree?

CS: Yeah, I remember that oak tree.

Unknown: [Off camera] Why do you remember that oak tree so well?

CS: Well, it was one of the--to me--the largest oak tree on this corner, on this block, this street. It was huge. It was so, you know when I saw the tree, it was so wide. Then I also remember--

AP: We used to play around it all the time.

CS: --Yeah we used to play around it.

AP: It was almost like a gym set for us.

[Both nod]

AP: It had, at the roots, I guess one of the roots came up, so it almost looked like we had two arms that was on the chair. So I can remember climbing up, and then you get down in the hole, and you'd climb back up, and get down in the hole. I mean it just, it was [unclear].

CS: What I remember about it was so wide. And it looked so powerful. It was a big, big tree.

AP: [nodding] Big old tree. I guess the diameter would have been, oh gosh, I guess about two-thirds of that couch.

Unknown: (Off camera) That is huge. That is huge. The trees are beautiful.

Unknown: (Off camera) So Dennis kind of knew he wanted to be a boxer. At what point did you decide you wanted to be an entertainer?

AP: Um... About 20 years ago.

Unknown: (Off camera) But you weren't one of those kids that always put on plays or stuff like that?

AP: I did... but I didn't think that's what I wanted to do. I was supposed to go to law school. But I started out at Howard... well, I started out at USCB here, because the day of my graduation from high school my dad came here. He was at work, and he got dizzy on the ladder and he came here, and when he went to the doctor from here, they sent him straight to the hospital and found out he had a bleeding ulcer, which was cancerous -- ended up being stomach cancer. And he

never made it to my graduation that evening. And so that whole summer, in between my freshman year and graduating, he was in the hospital in Savannah, so I decided instead of going away to school I just decided to go to USCB, which is right down the street here from my grandmother's house. And he died that first week of my freshman year. And like I said, up to that point, you know, the last thing I told him I was going to go to law school--of course, I said one thing, but God said something else. By the time I got to Howard, I wanted to watch the soap operas [laughs]. So I said I have to at least keep a B average to keep mama happy. So I switched to psychology which was easy, it was something that was easy for me. Something I could watch the soap operas all day, write a paper, and still keep at least a B average to keep mama happy, so... And that's what I did. I didn't have any idea what I was going to do with a psychology degree, and by the time I started seeing they would let folks out on the weekends from the mental hospitals in D.C. I said "Oh, no, this ain't for me" [shakes her head and laughs]. So my sophomore year they said "You got two more years left, what are you going to do?" And so I said, "Mm." So I started taking educational courses, and I said I'll let Early Childhood Education be my minor. And so by the time I graduated--about 3 weeks before I graduated--one of my advisor said "Anita, I've got just the job for you." And I said, "Really?" And he said, "Yeah, they're looking for somebody with a Early Childhood Education degree and a minor in psychology. Yours is just the opposite, but I think you'll still work out." I said, "Ok, well where is it?" He said, "Boston." And I said "Oh, no, I'm not going to Boston." [Shakes her head and laughs]. He said, "Why are you not going to go?" I said, "It's too cold." Because I transferred my Sophomore year and my roommate came from Boston and 24 inches of snow. So I knew that Boston was not going to be for me. I said "I'm not going to Boston." And he said, "But I got a job for you." I said, "You don't understand, I don't deal well with cold." He said, "Well where are you going?" I said, "I'm going home." He said, "You got a job?" I said, "No. But I got a mama, I got a place to sleep, and I know I'll have three square meals a day, and that'll do for right now. So I came home. I was working part-time during the summer at a daycare center. After I got back, mama said, "Why don't you teach for a little while?" Because my mother had taught for 37 years. My grandfather on my dad's side. My uncle. My aunt. So I was like "Oh, ok." It was just like, "Ok, something I can do." And so when I looked at what I needed to get certified here, to get my teaching credentials, it was almost a Master's degree. So I said, "Shoot, I may as well start working on my Master's." So everything I did was like [shrugging] "Well, I'll just do this," not knowing it was part of God's plan. And so I started working on my Master's, and I came in at a good time because they needed math and science teachers. They ended up paying, Beaufort County ended up paying for most of my courses, because I ended up getting most of my, all of my, I guess, electives for my Master's was in math. So by the time I finished I was certified in early childhood and elementary ed, up through high school, as long as I was teaching anything remedial. And so basically I focused on math, and so I ended up teaching middle school math, for about 10 years, 10, 15 years. But I came out of the school system, I came out to do the storytelling full time because I was teaching full time, and then I was

traveling. And so I was traveling more than I was at school, and I just didn't think that was fair to my students. I didn't stop teaching because I didn't like teaching. I loved teaching. It was easy for me. Because a lot of what I do onstage is what I did in the classroom.

Unknown: [Off camera] I was just going to say because you are teaching history.

AP: [Nods] Mmhhh. It drove my poor principal crazy [laughs]. Drove him crazy. But he didn't bother me because he knew I could handle my kids. And so I ended up teaching the students that nobody else wanted to teach. I had students that came in at the 25th percentile and they would test out of my program at the 75th percentile. Kids that just, you know, folks just had missed it, you know, just not motivated. And I soon realized if you motivate kids, they teach themselves. Your job is if you motivate them, the rest is, you know, you just sit back. I mean I had, you know, all of the so-called little gang leaders. One year I had 22 little black males. Mmhhh. You know, everybody didn't, nobody wanted that. Shoot. I said "now fellas, I got headache for days, now Ms. Prather, I'm going to be sitting in my closet, I'm going to take a little nap. I get the worst, the biggest bully to be in charge [imitating student] "Y'all be quiet now, Ms. Prather got a headache now!" [Laughing and nodding] Thank you very much. But, I mean they kept law and order up in there. I mean those kids just thrived. Especially with boys, you recognize that if you make it a competition, that's the motivator. So I say, "you know, um, that guy over there, he decided he wanted to do 3 pages of homework." [imitating student] "You're doing 3 pages? I'm going to do 4." [Shrugs] I said, "You know so-and-so said he was going to do 4." "Well I'm gonna do 5!" [Laughs] So I mean it became a competition, so it worked out well.

Unknown: [Off camera] And how long did you teach?

AP: This would have been, let me see, this year... I started in '78... [nods] '78. So I taught 15 years, full-time. Then I came back out, then they would call me back in, to take over a class for a little while, and it ended up being a whole year. And I'd say, I ain't coming back no more, I'm not even renewing my certificate--it didn't make any difference, they called me back [laughter]. So this last year I just finished up half of a social, an eighth grade social studies class. I came in in January.

Unknown: [Off camera] Did you ever have an opportunity to see your brother box?

AP: Oh yeah. Oh gosh, girl all I could do was close my eyes. Couldn't stand it. Because when I was in Howard, he was in Philadelphia, so I would go up to Philadelphia and see him box. And my best friend, we grew up in the same neighborhood, I can look out the front door of my house and see the back of her house. We just ended up back in this community in the last five years together, because we've been separated all these years because she ended up going to Pittsburgh.

But she was at school at the University of Pennsylvania, so I'd go up to see her and then we'd go to Dennis' boxing matches. She'd have my arm [grabs Dennis' arm] like this, and I'd have her arm, and I'd say "Your eyes open?" And she'd say "No, my eyes are closed" [laughter]. So, we would only open our eyes once we heard the "Ding! Ding! Ding! Ding! Ding! And the Winner is..." and we'd look and his hand would be up in the air [waves her hands and screams in celebration] Oh man, girl, ooh, child, I could hardly stand it to see him get hit. Yeah, no, but he'd always, every one I went to he won them all.

Unknown: [Off-camera] He's also... You were part of education, Charles, tell us about your career in education.

CS: Well, my career in education... Wait a minute now, how do you know that?

Unknown: [Off-camera] Your wife told me that you worked in schools, and anyone who works in a school is a part of education.

CS: Okay.

Unknown: [Off-camera] Tell me what you did in education, and how did you get involved in schools?

CS: Well, you know, in fact, speaking of education, I had a thought that just ran through my mind, but it was about two months ago. I said, you know, man, all the time I spent in the schools--because I was a substitute school teacher for many years... I said, man, I could have gone on to be a... and then I thought about all of the education I had acquired, but all of the places I went to be educated, everything dealt with boxing. I said, man, I went to school again, six years after highschool, and if I had put all that together, I could have had a master's degree and I could have been a school teacher. But, anyway.

AP: [To Dennis] You started out at the Genesis Home after you... [unclear]

CS: Yeah, after I moved, what happened after I had moved back here from Philadelphia, the first job I got was working at a place called Genesis Home for Boys. It was a group home for boys with behavior problems. And the boys that came to us they came from different parts of South Carolina. Some came from Charleston, and you know, Columbia, and our job was to take that behavior and turn it around. And if we could turn around 50% of the guys that we worked with, that was considered a successful turn-around. Of course we did that.

Unknown: [Off-camera] Of course.

CS: Yeah. My job at the group home was “Alternate Teaching Parent,” because the Teaching Parent was a married couple. You have to have a married couple in the home. And two of the two couples that I remember working with that was very successful was Marcus and Maria Humphrey. They were very good teaching parents, and we worked together for quite a while. Then, eventually some years later, I got a job working in the school system, and my work title changed--it was Behavioral Management Specialist. But I didn’t do that long, I only did that about four years. A little over four years. But, you know, I enjoyed doing that when I did that. But, I guess, everything... I always kind of had that love for boxing. That was always a part of me. Once I got into it, that was a part of my thoughts. And I remembered, I remember one day I was rolling down... You know something, I had several friends that told me that I need to stay into boxing once I got out of boxing. And I rolled down the street one day, and I saw this picture of this building, and I said “I wonder who owns this building?” And I found out that this building that I just saw, it was owned by a group of men in the community that I knew. I started asking questions, and I said I want to turn that into a boxing gym, and they was for it. So they rented it out to me for, I think I was paying \$50 a month. It wasn’t really, because you know I could charge, I think I charged the guys \$5 a month to come in to train. And I had enough money where it was really fairly easy to keep the gym open and running. And of course, now, one day my mother... When they decided they wanted to sell the building, they gave me the first choice to buy it. But I just didn’t have the money right then, but my mother came, and she found out about it, I told her, and she came by and she gave them \$10,000. She said, well, you take your time and you pay the other half. And that’s what I did. And now I own that building, and I’ve been owning that for about 25 years.

AS: Our mother has always been the biggest supporter of anything that we wanted to do. [Points to Dennis] Gym. Even when I, well, I guess Dennis and I were always the ones that came up with the bright ideas [laughter]. He’s born in December and I’m born in January, I don’t know if it’s [unclear] Capricorn personality [laughter], but anyway... My other sisters and brothers [unclear] “Y’all always coming up, we need some bright ideas,” but they’d fall on in, as well. But my mother has always been someone who supported our dreams financially, as well as emotionally, and spiritually. I guess she was a quiet sort of person. And even my grandmother... I remember right after I got married, that first year of marriage I think I went from a size 14 to a size 18 because my husband was a bread lover, so I was cooking hot breads every day, and rice and stuff like that. And so we both blew up, even though he went from a 32 to a 40. You know, he said something to me, and I said “Mmm, I’ll show you.” So I decided I was going to do a modeling group for plus-sized women, nobody’d never heard of that. They just thought, they just thought that was, oh man, they just laughed at me, so I said, “Okay, I’ll show you.” So I told my mother, and she said go for it. And of course my grandmother, [imitating] “Oh, baby, you just go ahead!” [Laughter]. And so, you couldn’t find stylish clothing for big women, so I would design

and I had this lady that was making them for us. And people used to buy tickets, just to think that it would [unclear]. And we did, ended up doing it for almost 10 years. My group was called "Not for Slim Only." And I mean stylish clothing. And so, my grandmother, I remember one time we had this show planned, and somehow the PR gave the wrong dates, so we were there, and there was nobody there--except for my grandmother and my mother, right? So I just said "Well we'll just use it for rehearsal, we'll use it for a dress rehearsal. Everybody's here, the clothing is here, we'll use it." You'd think we had 2,000 people there. My grandmother [imitating] "You strut it, baby! Oh girl, you just go on ahead! Oh look at granny-baby doing her thing! Oh, girl now you [unclear]!" [Laughter]. So my grandmother would make your head this big [gestures stretching arms to emphasize] and my mother would be the quiet cheerleader in the corner. And so anything we decided we wanted to do, we said "Mama, do we, da da da da da..." You know, she'd get out the checkbook, or... half the times you wouldn't even know. You know, I can remember at her home-going service people were saying, "Your mother came to the rescue of so many people," and never said anything to anybody. You'd never hear about because she never wanted any accolades, just whatever she could do. She did that with the Marlin Group, and I was one of the co-founders of. Another group I used to perform with, the Hallowese[?] Singers, and I can remember we were getting ready to go to sing for the Clinton's, when they were in office. And somehow the moneys had gotten embezzled or whatever, and we were waiting at the place where the bus was ready to pick us up, and my business partner at the time, she was just crying because she didn't know what we were going to do. My mother got out her checkbook, wrote the check, and we were on the bus and on our way. I mean just things like that. And when I decided I was going to start my own group, the same thing, I said "Mama, I want to do a video of storytelling." Up to this point, I had basically just done CD work with the other group I was with, but when I branched off and decided I wanted to go on my own, I said "Mama, I want to do a video of my stories," And I said, um, "but the producer says I'm gonna need \$50,000." She says, "okay." Next thing I know, I call Ron back and I say, "Ron, what's the first installment you need?" And he says, "Well I need \$12,500." I said, "Okay." Because when I told him, I told him what I wanted, "this is what I want, and I ain't got no money, so how we gonna do this?" And he's sitting there writing, "This girl is crazy, I'll never see her again" [laughter.]

[End of Clip 1]

AP: So when I told her I wanted to do this video, and I was talking to the producer at the time, and telling them what I wanted, and that I didn't want them jacked up, that I wanted top da da da da, and I don't have any money, and how we gonna do this, you can ride this gravy-train with me because God has already ordained it, or I'll leave you as I pass you by, what is it going to be? So he said he was sitting down there writing, "This is a crazy lady, I will never see her again," blah blah blah... He said "Well I'll tell you what, in a week I can give you a proposal and I'll let you know." And I said, "Okay." And he came back with the proposal and he said \$50,000, and I said,

“Okay, that’s all you need?” And he said, “Yeah.” And I said “You sure now? Because once I go and ask God for this \$50,000, don’t be coming back to me if you need some more.” And he said, “Well I might need about \$8,000 more for marking.” And I said, “Ok, now, are you sure?” I said, “Because when I finish, that’s all I ask God, of and that’s what he’s going to give me.” Jewish guy, and of course, you know, he thought I was so crazy. And I said, “Okay, no problem.” So I came back and I told my mama, I told my siblings, and a couple of friends of mine, and I said, “How soon do you need something?” He said, “in two weeks.” I said, “Okay.” And in two weeks, I had his \$12,500 check, cashier’s check. I said, “Let’s get it on.” And that was--it’s 2013? So that was 14 years ago. So *Tales from the Land of Gullah* and *Tales from the Land of Gullah* kids has been shown all over the world. And so, God is awesome. And again, my mother, she’s that quiet support in the background, and my grandmother would just keep pushing, and keep pushing you. And when you asked about the Aunt Pearl Sue character, that’s my grandmother. It’s a conglomeration of--I guess it’d be a mixture of my mother, because my mother was quiet, and her mother was, you know, my grandmother... everybody thought that my, because my mother was a Singleton and she married a Singleton, so everybody assumed because my grandmother and my father, who was my grandmother’s son-in-law, were so much alike--both of their birthdays are in June. My dad’s birthday is June 13th and hers was June 27th, but they were so close and so tight, and they were so much alike in character, you know, social butterflies, that they really thought that my grandmother was my father’s mother, because my mother was so quiet and laidback [laughs]. And my dad came by here every day. Every day he stopped in to see, to check on my grandmother. Every day. And they were, it was never the bad mother-in-law jokes, it was never that between them because his mother died at childbirth with him, and my grandmother, and my mother was an only child, to my grandmother, so he was the son that she never had. They were very, very close. He’d come, he’d take a nap here at my grandmother’s house before he’d come home. Every day. And so.

Unknown: [Off camera] Dennis, so I asked Anita if she saw you box -- what do you think of Aunt Pearl Sue?

CS: I’ve always had a love for my sisters, and what she accomplished being on the stage was something I knew she could do. Just like she was telling you the connection we had with our parents, they always made us feel special, that we could do whatever we thought we could do. I’m going to say this is probably the year, this is probably the summer after I had just finished first grade. I went to, me and my brother Julius, went to Seabrook for the weekend. Spend some time Uncle Aunt and Aunt Mary. Uncle Jack is my daddy’s older brother, and my older brother, Lynn, Uncle Jack and Aunt Mary reared my brother, Lynn. So while I was there that weekend, that wasn’t the only, they had some other relatives there, too, that they were rearing. One of the cousins, Mary Alice, I saw her, she was looking at a magazine or a book or something, and she was just acting crazy, [imitating] “Oh he’s so this, he’s so that!” And I wanted to find out who

this was, so I went over there and looked and realized she was, it was this boxer that she was excited about. At the time his name was Cassius Clay. Later to be Mohammed Ali. And I said, "Wow... she? Whatever it was..." When I got home, the first thing I told daddy, I said, "Daddy, when I finish school, when I grow up, I want to be a boxer. Because, if a boxer can make people act like that, whatever it is, I want to do that." [Laughter.] So, daddy told me, he said, "Son, you can be anything you want to be." Now, listen, I had four different what I call "brushes with boxing" before I ended up being a boxer--that was the first brush. The second brush I had with boxing was right after I finished the fourth grade. My mother came to me and she said... Now here's something else I need to tell you all. At this time in my life I wasn't Charles, everybody called me by my middle name, which was Dennis. I didn't start using Charles until I had finished high school. But anyway, my mother said, "Dennis, do you want to go to school with the white kids next year?" I said, "Mama, I don't care." So there was a program, at um, what was it called? They call it Technical College of the Lowcountry, but they used to call it Mather School, and it was a program to get us prepared to integrate the school. So, that summer, now I had just finished fourth grade now, and so that summer while I was in the classroom, one of the guys in the classroom he told me that his name was Joe Frazier. But he wasn't the boxer Joe Frazier, his uncle was a boxer. He was named after his uncle. And so he told me that he had an uncle that had fought in the Olympics and had won the Olympics in boxing. Now at that point in my life I had just finished fourth grade but I knew that the Olympics were an important tournament. I said, "Oh yeah?" And that was what I called my second brush with boxing. So, after we had that summer program we started integrating the schools. I was going into the fifth grade, and that Joe Frazier, he also entered--him and several kid sisters and brothers, you know, entered the school with us. In school, I don't consider myself to be a bully or anything like that. But, one thing I remember my daddy telling me, you know, even before I went to school, he told me that, he told me and my brother Julius, that it was our responsibility to look out for our sisters. And I can remember many times I would be in back at school and somebody would come to me and say, "Dennis, somebody getting ready to beat up your sister, Anita." And I would kick off! [Laughter]. And I'd run in, and I'd say, "Yeah, you put your hand on her," or something like that, "and you got to fight me, too." Now I don't know if I could beat these guys, because sometimes I'm in the fifth grade, this guy that's threatening is in the sixth grade, he might be bigger than me. But, when I got through talking, he decided he didn't want to do it, whatever he was going to do to my sister. Anyway, my second brush with boxing was, like I'm saying, was then. But I went from elementary school, a year later I would be in the seventh, and then the eighth grade at Beaufort Junior High. I remember when I was in the seventh grade, one year, you know when you go to gym class, usually when you go to gym you play basketball, football, or baseball or something depending on the season. But for some reason, we walk into the gym and there's a mat in the middle of the basketball court. And then on that mat is two boxing gloves. It was Coach Thompson -- [turns to Anita] Do you remember him?

AS: Mmhhh. Called him Teddy Bear.

CS: Yeah. Well Coach Thompson, he said, "I want two guys to pick up the gloves and start boxing." Well, this guy named Burl something, he picked up the gloves, I mean he snapped those gloves right up, and he started like bragging, you know like, "Nobody want to box me," because nobody else was volunteering to pick up the gloves. But I just kind of felt like everybody was looking at me, like "Dennis, you scared of him, too?" You know I kind of felt that, you know? [Laughter]. So I finally got around and I said, "Okay, Burl, I'll box you." And so we got onto this mat, and I remembered I wasn't -- Burl was what I'd consider bigger, stronger, more muscular or whatever. But I remembered Mohammed Ali--or Cassius Clay at that time--he used to stick and jab. So that's what I did. I went around and I just started sticking and jabbing, and when I got through with that little session, Coach Thompson called me and he said, "Mr. Singleton, come here. Who taught you how to box?" And I said, "I ain't never had no boxing lesson." So he said, "You look good, man. You look good." So I said, "Okay." So that was what I consider my third brush with boxing. The fourth and final brush with boxing came after I had went on to high school. Now I had just finished eleventh grade, and the summer after I'd finished eleventh grade, I spent the summer in Lafayette, Indiana with a friend named Mr. Ferguson and his family. Mr. Ferguson and my father went to school together in Alabama. [Turns to Anita] What's that? Tuskegee Institute? [Murmurs of recognition off-camera; Anita nods in agreement.] Mr. Ferguson ended up being a carpenter, and my daddy ended up being a painter. But anyway, while I had spent that summer up with him, you know he also got me a job. I was working for the same company he was working for, building houses. I remember... and on weekends we would go to parties. Now he had two sons. They were twins. But they were like in middle school age, you know, but he had daughters my age, you know, and they would take me to parties. And so one night I saw this guy, he walked by and I saw the back of his t-shirt. His t-shirt said "CCC Boxing Team." And when I saw that, I jumped up and I went over there, and I tapped him on the back, and I said, "Hey man," I said, "are you a boxer?" He said, "yeah." I said, "you know, man, i always wanted to be a boxer. But where I'm from, Beaufort, South Carolina, we ain't got no boxing gym." I said, "Will you take me to the gym?" He said, "Sure." So the next day he came to the house, picked me up, and took me to the gym. The gym was in somebody's basement. But it was big enough, you know, we had a ring down there. We got down there, this guy had already had some amateur fights, I assume. Or at least he had told me he had had some fights. But, anyway, we got in the ring and we started boxing, and the guy who owned the gym, when I finished he asked me, he said, "Who taught you how to box?" I said, "I ain't never had no boxing lessons." He said, "man you look good," he said, "Man, I bet you could make the Olympic team." I said, "What?" Now my head done blowed up to here [raises his hands to demonstrate] my head was the size of an elephant now [laughter]. So when I got home from Lafayette, Indiana that summer I told Mama, I said, "Mama, when I finish high school, I want to be a boxer." She said, "Well, son, you can be anything you want to be." She said almost the same thing daddy said

when I was in first grade. She said, "You can be anything you want to be. You just got to find a way to make it happen." One thing I remembered--see, when I went to Lafayette, Indiana that summer, Mama put me on a bus. But I made enough money that summer, I drove a car back to Beaufort. They didn't even know when I was coming. When I pulled up I [unclear] I said, I'm back here [gestures beeping horn] "Bum! bum! bump! bump!" [Laughter]. I left on a bus, and now I come back in a car. So anyway, when I went through Atlanta, Georgia, I realized that was a big city. So now I'm a senior at Beaufort High School, they made an announcement over the loudspeaker one day: Any student interested in being an electronic technician, there's a school in Atlanta, Georgia, DeVry Tech. If you're interested in hearing a presentation, it will be in the cafeteria in a half an hour... or whatever, something like that. So, I went, I said, "Woah, Atlanta, Georgia. I remember coming through Atlanta last summer. And I bet they got a boxing gym there..." [laughter]. So I'm putting this together now, and so when I went to the presentation, I didn't know nothing about no electronic technician [laughter], all I know is that the school was in Atlanta, Georgia, and they probably got a boxing gym there [laughter]. So that's what I did, I went and I heard the presentation, and when they got through I signed right up--Yeah, I'm going to DeVry Tech. And so, what happened, I had three other guys from the school that also signed up to go. One was my cousin, Wilbur, and one of my best friends, Merritt. But I guess at that time, you know, you just finished high school and you don't know exactly what you're going to do but you're going to do something. So, Wilbur and Merritt, they went to school, too. I had another friend from off the island, his name is Elijah Haywood. And Elijah, he was going to come, but he was in an accident right after high school, so he had to miss the first period. And he came the second period. Well, when Elijah came the second period, to Atlanta, Georgia, after he went through the school--and Elijah was smart--he went through the school and he decided real fast that, "Lord, I don't think I want to go here..." It wasn't for him. But he decided he wanted to go into the military. And so what happened when Elijah decided he wanted to go into the military, my best friend, Merritt, and my cousin, Wilbur, decide that they wanted to go into the military, too [laughter]. So Wilbur and Merritt end up going with Elijah, all three of them ended up in the military. But I was determined--I'm staying in Atlanta. I want to be a boxer. And that's what I did. And so eventually, I got a job. We trained at the Boys Club there. Now it's probably called the Boys and Girls Club, but back then it was just called the Boys Club. In fact, I told them, they gave me a job at the Boys Club, because I told them I knew how to drive a school bus, see? And they needed someone at that time, they needed someone to drive. They had a bus, like a school bus, and so that was my job. When I got to the Boys Club, I got the bus, and I took it and they showed me the route, and I would go and pick up all the guys and I bring them to and from the Boys Club. Because when I was in high school, most of the school bus drivers were students. So I drove school bus in eleventh and twelfth grade, right here. That's how I made extra money, in fact, the car that I brought back from Lafayette, Indiana, I ended up buying another car my senior year, and [turns to Anita] I think I gave you that car, right? [Anita nods] Yeah, the one I bought from Lafayette. So I drove the Boys Club bus, and pick up the guys and bring them to

and from the Boys Club, bring them to the Boys Club. In fact, one of the guys I picked up every day ended up being a very successful boxer himself, Evander Holyfield.

Unknown: [Off-camera] Wow.

CS: He lived in the... um, I used to pick him and two... What was it? He had a brother named Bo Bo and Bernhard. And Evander. I used to pick those three guys up and bring them to the Boys Club. And I remembered our boxing coach was Mr. Carter Morgan. And Mr. Morgan, I remember one day he told me to take the young guys out behind the gym to run--because part of training, for boxers, is running. That's how you get yourself in shape, too. So I remembered when I took the guys out behind the gym to run, I kept yelling at the other guys, "Man, y'all, c'mon! pick it up! Pick it up!" I was trying to get them motivated like, "Pick it up! Pick it up!" But you know, there was one guy that I could feel it, he was right behind me. And when I got around the field, I turned around and look -- I saw that big smile. And it was Evander. That big smile, he was right there. So he was highly motivated, and he ended up being very successful, of course, in life, you know, as a boxer.

Unknown: [Off-camera] It sounds like both of you learned from your parents the idea of motivation and being motivated. So you motivated kids with even past your boxing and still doing it in school with the programs that you've done. So that's something you really seemed to pick up with the support from your parents, that you can do whatever you want to do.

AP: Yep, you can do whatever you want to do.

Unknown: [Off camera] You can tell in your performance, you love your Gullah heritage. Did your family originally come from the islands before coming to Beaufort?

AP: My parents... my dad grew up where the air station... In fact, both of my parents grew up near the air station... My mother, um...

Unknown: [Off camera] What happened? Switch? [unclear]

[End of clip 2]

[Start clip 3]

AP: My mother's people, or my mother's side, came from Hutcherson's Island, which is near Savannah, Georgia but it's part of Beaufort County. But they grew up where the air station is now used to be, the community up there used to be called Angelique before the federal government took over and made the air station. My great-grandparents used to row their boat

from Angelique--because there's water out there on the backside of the air station--on the backside of the air station to where K-Mart is now--because there's water behind K-Mart--and they were rowing the boat, they came over to buy lumber because they wanted to add some rooms on to their house, and they were rowing back across the river, and the boat capsized and both of them drowned. At the time my mother was being reared by her grandparents because my grandmother had left, you know they would leave to go to work in Virginia, and D.C., and New York. And then they'd send money back home. And so when the parents died, my grandmother made it back home, and my mother ended up going to school at a boarding school, which was called... what did they call it? Normal Training... Training Normal School? But it's called Old Schofield's School, we call it Old Schofield's School. And it was set up like Tuskegee Institute. And in fact, Mr. Schofield came from Tuskegee, and they founded that school there. And my dad was also a student there, but he wasn't a boarding student, they would walk back and forth. His home was in Seabrook, which is right by the river, and he was the baby of his family at the time. And his dad and his oldest sister was rearing him because, like I said, his mother died at childbirth, having, they were twins, my dad and his twin, brother, but the twin brother died at 11 months old. And my grandmother on my dad's side was 27 years younger than my grandfather, and she was my grandfather's second wife because his first wife was Robert Smalls, General Robert Smalls' cousin. So General Robert Smalls was present at their wedding, at his first marriage. And my grandfather was from a county just above us which is Colleton County. He was born over there on Cherokee Plantation, which was founded in 17... I think about 1776, something like that. Daniel Blake founded that plantation. They didn't sell, Daniel Blake didn't sell off of any of his Africans. So he had one of the largest, he was one of the largest slaveholders in this area. They say he had something like 500 and something. So a lot of people end up marrying cousins, because he didn't allow a whole lot of outsiders. So my grandparents were cousins. It was all mixed up on Cherokee Plantation [laughter off camera]. But my grandfather was way before his time. He was born in 1870 something, just a few years after the Civil War ended. He was one of the first ones on there that they formally educated, he was one of the first graduates of South Carolina State University. He was in that first graduating class. And he came back and he started a school on Cherokee Plantation, and he bought property over in Beaufort County--because Cherokee Plantation is in Colleton County--and Beaufort County, and Seabrook, where my father was born, he bought property there, and he started a school there as well. So, my daddy's oldest sister basically ran that school, and my grandfather ran the school on Cherokee Plantation. And he also had a farm, so he exported vegetables, because the railroad track runs right down from the house, the homestead, in Seabrook. So he used to, his vegetables would go to New York or Chicago. He bought lots of property. Very, very, very, you know... way before his time. Way before his time. Everybody know him as [unclear]. That was on my dad's side. So, he ended up sending my dad, and his brothers, they went to Tuskegee. My aunt, Aunt June, the one that reared my dad, she was a graduate of South Carolina State University.

Unknown: [Off camera] Wow.

AP: Mmm [nods]. So, my dad was a second generation college grad. My mother was a first generation, she was the first out of her family on my mother's side, to be educated.

Unknown: [Off camera] So education was a value even back then?

AP: Oh yeah, oh yeah. And even my uncle--my uncle that Dennis went to go live with in Philadelphia--he was an educator, and he was also a tailor. Because when he was at Tuskegee, he learned how to do tailoring. So, he was a tailor for all of the big, big... what's that big, um, where that the legionnaires? Where that disease break out? He used to be a tailor there, the head tailor there, for quite, for several years. And, my dad, when he was at... well, he went into the Navy, and then he went to Tuskegee, and his degree was in welding, so he helped build the Savannah River Plant. The nuclear waste plant in Savannah. Then he later started painting. So, you know, it's just, you know a lot of stuff you take for granted until you hear everybody else's story, and you realize that they really beat the odds. And this place was a very unique place, because being the first set of blacks to be freed during the Civil War, a lot of stuff that took hold of Southern Communities didn't take a hold here. Because blacks when they came out, they came, they started getting educated. General Robert Smalls, even though he couldn't read or write, he was one of the biggest cheerleaders for education. That's how we got the [Unclear] Re-Education Act. Through him. He wrote it. He introduced it. And that's how we have public education today. And after he became free, he took some of that money, and he hired tutors to teach him how to read and write. Mhmm [nods].

Unknown: [Off camera] So what direction would you like to see Beaufort, St. Helena, and the Gullah Culture go?

AP: I think, you know, this whole thing with recession and economy. It's a new day. It's a new day where we have to go back to the small businesses. It's the small businesses that are going to turn this economy around. Not corporate America, because people don't trust the big businesses anymore. I don't care how much money they have, there's just something about big businesses people don't trust anymore. We've gotten so far from the human element of anything in life. So Gullah gives people the opportunity to touch back the human side. Whether it's the suffering, whether it's the joy, whether it's the victories, whatever it is, Gullah gives people an opportunity to touch some of the raw parts that we kept kind of frozen because we didn't want to feel the hurt, we didn't want to feel the pain. And when you don't do that, you're really dead anyway. So now we get a chance to open that up, get the infection out, so that the healing can take place. And, I thank God has given this gift [unclear], has given this gift to us, as a healing. I was writing the other day... and there's the big white baptist church [points], Beaufort Baptist, it's the

largest baptist church in the area. And I had several years when I started doing this full-time, and all of a sudden I ended from being a mother of one, to a mother of four over night. Some kids I had been taking to church, great-grandmother who was taking care of them had died suddenly. Well, the grandfather had died first, of a heart attack, and then three weeks later, his mother, which was the children's great-grandmother, died. And so they were basically the two care-givers because the mother was in prison, and none of them knew their dads at the time. So I would pick them up and take them to the church when they were living with their great-grandmother, and so overnight I ended up with four kids, going from a mother of one, right after I decided to give up my teaching job. And I gave up teaching, I was like 25 hours away from a PhD, I was just about to finish up my PhD and God said, now's the time to step out on faith, and this is what I want you to do, praise the lord, that's what I'll do. Everybody thought I was crazy, in fact my family and my mama, they thought I was crazy, but they supported me through it all. And, I ended up with these kids, and so I had a friend who had a cleaning business and I said, "George, summer's out, you know when school is open they get the free lunch and free breakfast, but now that school's out, I got to feed my kids through the summer. I need a job." He said, "well, come on and work for me." So he had the contract that would clean the baptist church, and they had a nursery school. So I'm here, like I said, 25 hours away from a PhD, and I'm scrubbing these little nursery toilets, and I said, "Well, Lord, I thank you." Because God will humble you--he just needs to know where your heart is. I said, "I just want to feed my kids." And so in the midst of that, I noticed that they had these free pieces of literature, so about three years later, I'm writing, and I said "dang, I need my daily word." And I said, "I remember they have them at Beaufort Baptist, so I'm going to ride by here and I'm going to pick up me some daily words." And when I rode on the campus I started crying, just started weeping, and I guess it was just the Holy Ghost that moved me. And I said "lord, what do you say?" And he said, "you tell your people, just like Joseph," to go back to the story of Joseph, in Exodus, and he said, "just like Joseph, who was sold into slavery by his people, let your people know, that they were sold into slavery by their people. White folks didn't have that kind of power, it takes some 20 million Africans out of the second largest continent. Because if you going to tell the story, you have to tell the whole truth. You gotta tell it all." So I said, "Oh, lord, let [name unclear] have it, let [name unclear] have it, don't let me have it!" God says, "if you're going to tell the story, tell the whole truth." He said, "just like Joseph in Potiphar's [unclear]." He said, "I heard the crime, it's all part of a bigger plan. Just like Potiphar, big house, that's where Joseph worked, y'all worked in the big house on the plantation." He said, "hear me?" I said, "Lord, I hear you." He said, "Just like Joseph ended up in the prison--falsely accused." He said, "I know a lot of you are falsely accused, but it's all part of a bigger plan." He said, "Just like Joseph moving into the palace," He said, "the palace is prepared for you--are you prepared for the palace?" He said, "You complain. Y'all want to blame white folks, you want to blame this folk..." Now we on the Hispanics, now we blame the Asians, now we blame the Indians. Everybody that comes and does something in America that we as black folks aren't doing, we want to blame everybody. God

said, "I praise everything in you. You're the fathers and mothers of all humanity. Are you prepared for the palace? Because the palace is waiting for you." And that's the story, that's what I want people to understand--that God has given us a culture, the Gullah culture. And he said, "As you preserve," I was in the middle of a performance, and he said, "As you preserve the culture, the culture will preserve you through economic development. Every common job... tourism is the number one industry in the world. It's the number one industry in the state of South Carolina--it's only second to healthcare in America. And we don't teach our kids to prepare for the number one industry in South Carolina. We give them just enough education to flip a hamburger, and just enough education to scrub a toilet, and we don't give them enough education to say, 'if you preserve your culture, if you embrace your culture, your culture will sustain you. When you go to the Caribbean, kids are taught from the womb to embrace their culture, therefore their culture takes care of them. There's no welfare systems over there, in the Bahamas. Because those kids learn those straw baskets, they learn every, when you step off the boat, "I sing for you if you give me a quarter, I sing for you if you give me a dime," But we have taught our kids to hate our culture. So we turn that around, and we empower our kids with their own culture. And if culture wasn't important then God could take the whole Book of Numbers out of the bible. All of it is is heritage--so and so begat so and so, and so and so begat so and so, and God said, "you teach the children," he told Joshua, "teach the children, and mind them what I've done," and so that means history and heritage is important. If it's important enough for God, then it's important enough for me. And if we give that to our kids, and we empower our kids, and tell them to stop making excuses for failure, because there's no excuse for failure. If 50% of us survived the horrors of the middle passage voyage then there's no reason that, with all the modern conveniences today, our children should be failing. Even if we don't teach them how to read and write, you can teach them how to make a basket. Because half of these folks started businesses, right after the Civil War, after Jim Crow, after Reconstruction, couldn't read or write, but they became prosperous. We died, we perished, not because of a lack of knowing how to add two plus two, knowledge that means learning, wisdom, if you want well, he said then get wisdom. Wisdom is taking that knowledge and using it the right way. We got a lot of, look at the boy who just shot up all those folks in Colorado? Intelligent man--but no wisdom. So that's what I'm hoping.

Unknown: [Off camera] So a couple last questions, are we see more Ms. Pearly Sue?

AP: Oh most definitely, as long as God gives me work.

Unknown: [Off camera] And we still want to see your gym, Mr. Singleton.

CS: Okay.

Unknown: [Off camera] We still definitely want to see your gym. So, that will be the last thing that I'll put on here, you standing outside of that wonderful gym you started for children.

CS: Okay.

Unknown: [Off camera] And we thank you so much for sharing with us your childhood, your inspiration, your motivation. This is exactly what we want to share with children all over the world.

AP: Tell them that if they can dream it, they can achieve it.