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Singleton, Charles

Charles Singleton

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Interviewee: Charles Singleton

Interviewers: Peter Rutkoff, David Slutzky

Location: St. Helena Island, South Carolina

Date: July, 2013

CS: --- that you gonna break that chair. And why, and why don't we talk, and--I wanna, and you doin' a good job of giving me eye contact, I appreciate that. And I said but if you keep slamming that chair on that table you gonna tear that chair up. You understand?

DS: Yes, Sir.

CS: Now see, when you said that that's---what I look for acknowledgment. And then, then OK you doin' a good job. So, now get your point book and take off twenty points for slamming the chair on the table. Now I'll tell you what you can do. First, let me have you do this here. Put that chair under the table, just kinda slide it up under there and you can earn ten points back. That way instead of losing twenty points, you only losing ten points. You understand?

DS: Yes, Sir.

CS: Ok, good job, I appreciate the "Yes Sir". And, and after that, you know they got their--they get their point book and they write it down. And what the point-book is, is that they stay in a group home from Monday to Friday. Now Friday, if they got enough points they get to go home for the weekend. But if they don't have enough points they have to stay in the group home for the weekend. They won't get to go home and do whatever they wanna do, they have to stay in that group home and we find things to keep them busy. So, and that was when I um, yeah that's when all like these guys here, uh, some guys they weren't in the group home but these guys here were boxers at my gym. (Points at Newspaper photograph) this is Owen Fraiser and this is Joe Armstrong. Um, I used to teach them how to box at my gym on [Lady's Island].

DS: Any family connection with?

CS: Not really, no. Um, this guy here, Owen, like, one day I was walking in the gym and he came over and he said "What's this". I said, "It's a boxing gym", and he said somethin' like "I think I--I like to box, I think I'd be a good boxer". Something like that he said and then he said, "So how do I learn to box". I said, "Well, if, you know, I can teach you". And he started, you know, bringin' me start to train him. And um, and I took him to tournaments and other fights and stuff, and he did pretty good, good box. And even today sometimes he'll come by--by the gym and say hello. So, yeah, these two guys here (gestures at the photograph) in fact I think both of these guys did real good in tournament. They fought in tournaments like Golden Gloves

tournament and stuff like that. Cause I uh, I remember one time there was a tournament in another part of the state, was up, above Texas. He went there, and I think he went to train at a place out there, he went out West, somewhere. But---here are some other guys. This guy here I can't remember his name, and this guy here I can't remember his name either. But these are some guys that trained in my gym. Um, this was just a, this was um, they were doin' a newspaper, it was "The Art of Boxing", and I was teaching this guy, this is Joe Armstrong. And I think where this here we were in a fight and he's getting ready to go in the ring, and I'm just kinda touchin' up to make sure everything is together. Yeah um, it's called the "Fist of Fury" I didn't come up with this on my own (chuckles).

DS: It just fits.

CS: Yeah.

DS: Well thanks we're looking forward to seeing your gym as well, and you can show us around there and tell us more about your life.

CS: Ok, ok, I ---

[End clip 1]

[Begin clip 2]

PR: So is this the scrapbook with some clippings? I think?

CS: No, one of my scrapbooks is not here.

PR: Ok.

CS: The one that I ain't remembered. But---

PR: Yeah that's the kind of thing we're having the kids look at.

CS: Oh wow, ok see this is, I think these are amateur boxers here (unknown holds up framed photos) this is me training guys.

PR: Ok, sure, sure.

CS: And these are guys I uh, used to take them to boxing matches. See, I would teach them the art of boxing---

Unknown: How about this one? Got that one.

CS: --and I'm teaching them in my gym.

PR: Right, right.

CS: And um.

DS: This is an art case made by Charles Singleton using driftwood that he found. Put it together as a diorama.

[Conversation in the Background]

PR: So David do you wanna--?

DS: Right let me.

PR: Ok, so, David will talk to you a little bit here and then we'll take them to the gym?

CS: Ok.

PR: Can I lay these out?

CS: (CS nods) right.

PR: Ok.

DS: Ok, what we'd like to do is just uh, go around the artifacts that uh you get in front of us here and you can just tell us what they all represent.

CS: Ok, well um, this one right here "Georgia Golden Glove Champ 1975". Um, when I finished high school in 1973, my goal was--I was a 'tournament beat' at boxing. And, I remembered, the summer after I had finished eleventh grade, I um, I was coming from Lafayette, Indiana, and I went through Atlanta, and I thought "Mm this is a big city, I bet they got a boxing gym here". So that's why when I heard the announcement over the loud speaker, "anybody interested in being an electronic technician there in Atlanta, Georgia". I said, "Hm that's the school I just went through this past summer coming from Lafayette, Indiana". They said, "if you--after two years of study, if you successful completing, you know, the course you'll be an electronic technician". Let me tell you, right now I would have to get a dictionary to give you the---to tell you what an

electronic technician is. Cause I don't know, but I finished that school, I graduated I guess, but, my purpose of going to that school was to find a boxing gym. And I remembered, I went to class the first day as soon as class was over, I got on the phone and started calling. I called, I think, the first person I called was the YMCA, and I said, "Y'all got a boxing program" and they said, "No". And they gave me the number to Warren Morrow Boys Club. So, and I called Warren Morrow Boys Club, they gave me directions how to find the gym---I mean where they were located. Well, I was, I found it, I was kind of, I mean cause I wasn't really used to ridin' around in a big city. You know, Beaufort is small, but ridin' around in Atlanta I was lucky I found it. And when I found it, and I started talking to the director of the Boys Club, we just kinda, everything was working and working we were good, and he, he ended up hiring me. Gave me a job, because, at the time, um, the perso-- they had a Boys Club bus. They'd go and pick up all the guys and bring them to and from the Boys Club. And I told him, I said, "I know how to drive that bus". And he said, he said, "What". I said "Yeah I know how to drive that bus, I'm eighteen years old now". I said "In South Carolina most of the school bus drivers were students and I was a school bus driver in eleventh and twelfth grade". I showed him my school bus license and I drove the bus around in the front of the Boys Club. And he saw that I knew what I was doing, he gave me a job. My job was to come, get the bus, go pick up the guys and bring them to and from the Boys Club. One of the guys that I picked up everyday was Evander Holyfield, and his two brothers. He had a brother named Bobo and another brother named Bernan. And um, I used to pick them up and bring them to the Boys Club too. And also um, I remembered after I met Mr. Catamonga, who was the boxing coach, um, you know everything just seemed like it was working, um, we, we were good, I had a good relationship with Mr. Catamonga. And um, what he did is um, I remember one day he said, he said, "I want you to take the younger guys and run, let them run around the back of the gym". Cause you know in, in boxing part of training is running, you know. And um, so I took the guys behind the back of the Boys Club, and the guys were just kinda dragging their feet, you know. But it was just one guy who was right behind me, I kept telling the guy I said "Pick it up, pick it up, come on man, you--you lazy man, come on get up". And, when I got, I got everybody to run in the field, this guy well, I turned around and looked, this guy was sitting there smiling, that was the guy that was right behind me, that was Evander Holyfield. And, of course, I developed a good relationship with Evander, um, he was a, a of course you know he made it big in boxing and as a professional too. Um, right over here (points) this picture of him, this is, this is in Texas right here. And this is, how this happened, um, I was one of the trainers that worked with Evander when he fought Mike Tyson, and uh, cause um, I saw Evander I found out some, after, this is after I had come back from Philadelphia, and I took my guys to a boxing match in Atlanta, Georgia. And, when I got there found out that the boxing match it was at a school, in the auditorium, now Evander Holyfield he doesn't bought this whole school just to put on amateur boxing matches. So he owned this school, in fact one of his sons fought on that card. And um, I told him after the fight, the fight was over, um the boxing match was over, I said "Evander you know somethin'". He said "What" I said "You could beat Mike Tyson, but there's somethin' you gotta do", and at this time Mike Tyson seemed like every

guy he got in the ring with he'd drop them. I said "But you can beat Mike Tyson". And he listened to me he said "Huh". I said "Yeah you can beat him", I said "Only thing you got to do is improve your defensive techniques". I said "Now, twice I had two trainers and boxers, in boxing, those two guys that trained me, those two guys, they--you--they work with you too. Cause when I was in Atlanta, Georgia, Mr. Catamonga, was my trainer and he was your trainer. And when we got, when I got to Philadelphia, the guy that trained me was Mr. George Benton and Mr. George Benton from what I was told, he spent some time training you. But how, how come you for some reason, I-- you didn't pick up some of the things that he was teaching". He said, "Ok, well you come to camp and you teach me". I said, "Wait a minute," I said, "Ok, well, I remember something, that a guy that told me in Philadelphia years ago. He said, "you gotta be careful when you're talking to a fighter, especially if that fighters successful and making money, cause sometimes, the people that's already connected with him, and working with him, they might think you trying to steal their fighter". And a guy told me this in Philadelphia years ago, so I was trying to explain that to Evander Holyfield. I said, "I don't want to cause no problems, Evander. I spent ten years in Philadelphia, and Mr. George Benton was a good trainer. He also worked with Joe Fraiser, and he trained Joe Fraiser's son, Marvis Fraiser. A lot of guys out of that gym. I said "But I don't want to start no problems". He said, "No, no, no, no, you come to the---I'll tell you what, we'll go early". So, I said, "Ok". He got me a ticket; I flew out of Savannah, Georgia to Atlanta, Georgia, and he got on the plane and we flew from there to Texas; I think it was Houston, Texas. Don't hold me to that. But anyway, I started working with him, what I did is I just worked with him on defensive techniques, and um, I called Mr. George Benton one day and I said, "I'm working with Evander you know he can fight Tyson". And Mr. Benton told me, he said, "Listen, don't try to teach him everything right now because he won't have enough time to learn it. Pick out about, maybe three, four, five techniques and teach him that. And you just drill him on that, just keep working on that. I said, "Ok, thank you, George". Um, sometimes I used to call George, Mr. George, because as I grew up here in the South, I learned to have respect for the elders. If I didn't tell Ms. Julie Mitchell, "Hey, hello Ms. Julie" or "Hello, Mr. So and So", if I didn't do that when I walked around the street, and that got back to my Father, it might be a whippin'. So, when I got to Philadelphia, when I met Mr. George Benton, he said "Listen, Charlie, you ain't gotta call me 'Mr.' all the time". And so, but anyway, um, Evander, you know, did, I was at the first fight. That he--when he fought Tyson (points at photographs) this one here was the first fight, um, he um, he beat Tyson. But, the thing is that I learned from what the guys told me in Philadelphia, you gotta watch out.

PR: Right.

CS: As soon as that fight was over, the first place that I was headin' is to the airport. I was ready to get out of there because I was so stressed out. Um, and I got on the plane and I don't think--I think before Evander had finished putting on his clothes I was flyin' outta there. And then I, you

know I saw him maybe twice since that fight. Um, now in the second fight when he fought Tyson, the one when Tyson bit his ear, I wasn't sure that fight would...

(CS, PR, and unknown laugh)

CS: But um, I um, I guess, that was one of the highlights in my life, was boxing. But, I guess one of the biggest highlights when I was in the ring would be...this right here (holds up small plaque) this little thing right here. One hundred and seventy-eight pound champion Golden Glove 1978, this was in Albuquerque, New Mexico. And, these were the gloves (holds up boxing gloves), that, that I jus--had on my arms when I had that fight. I fought in a lotta tournaments. (Phone rings) whoever it is they gotta wait. Um, (phone rings again) they ain't gonna wait, they gonna keep calling me. 1970, I think it was 1977, I think it was the National Golden Glove, it was in, it was in Hawaii. And um, and so when they have these national tournaments, um, they, you know, the guys come from all over the whole United States. So, in '77 I think I made it to my last fight; cause when you fighting these tournaments man, it's like what it is when you start off, they gonna have three or four hundred guys in the tournament cause every state is sending somebody and there's eleven weight divisions and what they do is, if you win your fight you still in the tournament, if you lose the fight you out the tournament. And in '77 I think I made it to the last fight and I lost the championship. So...now don't hold me to that, cause let me tell you, in 1970, um let me see about seventy years ago, I was in an automobile accident and I had this thing that they called Dementia, shrinking of the brain, where sometimes my memory's you know, not as sharp as it used to be. It didn't come from boxing, it came from that automobile accident, that was the hardest punch I ever received. Someone pulled in front of me and bam I was going to the Lady's Island Middle School and I had a head-on collision. So, anyway, I want---I just wanted to let you all know sometimes when you guys find 'that guy was punched wrong from boxing' I ain't punched wrong from boxing, I was punched wrong from that automobile accident.

PR: It's understandable.

CS: But anyway um...yeah, I remember 1970 that was a big year for me. Um, I won a couple of tournaments that year, cause um, one of the biggest ones was this one right here (holds up boxing glove). This was Albuquerque, New Mexico and um, I remember, you know, fighting in these tournaments like I'm saying if you win you're still in the tournament, if you lose you're out. Sometimes you got to fight two times in a day going at morning, you fight, and then you may have to come back and fight again that afternoon. Because what they try to do is eliminate guys 'til they get to the last championship fight and the la-- the championship fight it's gonna be twenty two guys eleven of those guys gonna win and the other eleven gonna join the rest of them. So, I have been all the way to the end I have really wanted to win this Golden Glove. And um, the guy--you know you look a lot at some of the guys thats in your weight division. And I was watching some of the guys I saw this guy, I said , 'I think he can make it'. I was watching

him fighting, and anyway, this guy that I'm talking about he was from the state of Texas. This guy, his arm was twice the size of mine. I said, 'you probably lift a lot of weight, but that's alright. All them big muscle don't meant nothin', it's how hard you can punch'. So, I--the same thing that I was thinking, that guy ended up makin' it to the last fight. I made it to the last fight too. So now it's me and him. But what I did, I'm glad my mother was a school teacher, she was always teaching me the courage and education. I bought a book out of the airport in Philadelphia before we got to--to Albuquerque, New Mexico and the book was called "The Magic of Believing". It was like a psychology book. But I bought that book, and then I remember reading, I-I didn't have time to read the whole book but I read enough of it where, all of the sudden, my mind clicked. And I said, "I'm ready". And it seemed like when I was walking in that, in that ring to tha--that last fight, um, they would have us, they would have like young ladies would come and get us, like these young ladies, they would come and they would get us and they would walk us to the step and then we would go in the ring. Then, I got in the ring and what I was thinking about: would this guy have strong hook and stuff. First thing he hit me with was a left hook. Boy, hit me right here (points to upper lip) and I could tell I was bleeding on the inside of my mouth. But I didn't panic, because I had read, not that whole book, I just read enough of it. I said to myself, 'You got yours, now I'm gonna get mine'. I threw two punches; I threw a jab and a right cross and he wobbled like this here and BAM hit the canvas. I had knocked him out. Um, all of that came from, well, course you have to train and make sure your body is in shape to compete in these kind of sports. But um, it's a good thing I bought that book, "The Magic of Believing". I'd like to meet the guy who wrote that book, thank him cause that book was the one that helped me win that fight. Then um, then I always give praise to my mother for encouraging me, educating me, cause if I didn't know how to read, I wouldn't have been able to read that. But yeah--because I could remember that was a big fight too cause I was gettin' ready after I made it to the last fight one of the guys on the team came to me and said, "Charlie guess what". I said, "What". [He said] "the fight gonna be on TV". I said "WHAT". And then I started thinking, I said man the fight--this is the first time that I'm fighting on TV. And all my friends from Philadelphia at Joe Fraiser's gym gonna see this probably and all my guys from, my friends from South Carolina, that knew me when I saw a kid, gonna see this fight. I said, "Ok", I read that book a little bit, I shut the book down and then I start--sat there and I just started visualizing cause I think that was one of things they told me in that book, you gotta visualize and see yourself accomplishing whatever you're trying to do. And then after I thought, I said, "I'm ready". We got in the ring and I thought about this guy, tearing a good left hook, first thing pow, all this bleeding. And after I threw them two punches, the fight was over. I had done won and snatched the Golden Gloves. So---

DS: It's not how you start it's how you finish.

CS: Yeah, yeah. That was the first time in my life that I had um, the book, like I'm saying, was like a psychology book. And mainly my understanding of psychology is, you know, something

that deals with, you know you using something mental to get something done. Like um, for instance like telling my son, "You go outside this room and I might rip you, so you better stay here". Now, my purpose is trying to get him to sit down and stay one place don't go out the door. So, he sits down, then that psychology has worked. So, this psychology was you know telling me, it was reading, what I remember reading is like you got to visualize and see yourself accomplishing whatever you trying to do. And I believed that book. And one day I may write that guy, I'm gonna find that book and write a note to this guy and thank him cause that book helped me win that title.

DS: You know I know, speaking of psychology, you've done a lot to turn around a lot of young boys as well. I noticed you had some certificates here when you uh, after boxing when you worked on social work and turning around some young men. (Gestures at certificates) can you tell us what these represent and the work you did based on them?

CS: Ok, yes I was um, at one time I was a licensed social worker but I'm probably not one now. Because you know you have to keep your classes, you gotta go to classes and keep continuing education. After I got married, you know things sorta changed because um... I have a five year-old son now. Um, but yeah, I spent---I used to work at a---when I came back here from Philadelphia with one of the first jobs I had, I worked at one of the islands. You know where Penn Center is?

DS: Yes we're staying there this week.

CS: Ok, I worked in one of those houses, it was called, one of those houses was called, Genesis Home for Boys. And it was a home that um, we got students with behavior problems, and our job was to help to turn them around. And, how we did that was what they call a teaching family system of working with students. And um, one of the main things you have to learn how to do is how to have interactions, how to talk to them. Now, I used to be real good at doing interactions, I just haven't done it in quite a few years now. So, um, but the interaction went something like this: "What's your name"?

DS: David.

CS: Ok, when I call your name, all I want you to do is give me eye contact. David. Ok, the first thing you gave me eye contact. Now what I'm gonna do is tell you what you did wrong. Ok now, we just got through eating dinner, right? And when you got to be eating what you did is you took the chair and you grabbed it and you kinda slammed it under the table. And you know something if you keep doin---

[End clip 2]

[Begin clip 3]

Unknown: What brought you to the military?

CS: She's was the navy.

Unknown: Is she from here?

CS: No she's from Kentucky.

Unknown: Oh, wow. Lot of navy people out of Kentucky. Was she from [inaudible] then?

CS: She's from, um, Bowling Green, Kentucky.

DS: Alright so here we are at the Charles Singleton's training gym. How long have you had this gym?

CS: About twenty something years. I um--this used to be like a Mens Club. But I was walking through here one day and I, and I just started asking questions, 'Who owned this building'. And some of the people that I asked, they knew, and they directed me to some other people that I knew, that was part of this. They used to have like, this was like, like a Mens Club I think. They used to come here, have meetings and stuff but it's more like a social club. And I told them that um, I wanted to convert it into a boxing gym. And the people that um, that owned it, they, they were supportive because they knew that I grew up in this community. And um, and they knew my boxing history. And so, they gave me a real good deal, and I was able to buy it, luckily still here.

DS: How often do you use it today? How often is the gym used today?

CS: Well, this gym has always been like this. Um, right now my goal is to be open Monday thru Friday. But um, depending on you know, me being married now...when I was in this gym I was single. But now being married I gotta deal with my wife and my son, you know. I'm not open like five days, I'm trying to get it back to that. I haven't put on a fight in a while either, I don't like I used to. Before I was married, I used to put on amateur boxing matches. In fact, Beaufort High School used to be in Port Royal, but now they built a new Beaufort High School (points) right over there. I'm trying to remember, I remember putting on the amateur fight at the old Beaufort High, but I think, I think I put on, yeah I put one over here too. At the new Beaufort High. Then there's a Lady's Island middle school (points) about two, three miles up this way, I remember putting on an amateur boxing match over there.

DS: Will you tell us any memorable moments that happened, that happened in this, right here? In the fighting ring.

CS: Well...this ring...well I guess...I can't think of anything right off the top of my head but um, I had some guys, some that really ended up being some good boxers. For some reason I'm thinking of this guy named Horatio. Horatio lived a few blocks in that direction, and, but Horatio's...his working is kinda cause him to move around. He was working with somebody, doing something, I don't think he's in the state right now. The last place he called me I think he was down in Florida. And um, but Horatio was a good boxer, and, some, he um, I had the thoughts of talking to Horatio about him turning professional, he could be a professional boxer. Um, and I had another guy in here too, that I was, would talk to. We had about two, three guys in, you know you sittin' in here boxing all the time and you gonna learn the skill, try and make some money with it. You know? But I had about, about three or four guys that I know, that I felt, you know, had a talent. But anybody come here, you know you could work to be a professional boxer, but first you gotta have that wanna-do attitude you gotta wanna do it. Somebody told me that a long time ago, don't force anybody to be a boxer they gotta wanna be what they, they have to want to be a boxer. So, that's what I do. When I get a guy and I see he has talent, and I think he could be a professional boxer, I tell him like, Horatio I mentioned it to him a couple of times. But um, I don't try to force it on him, I let him make that decision. But um, yeah, I would've loved to see some of the guys part of this gym, you know, take what they've learned and be a professional boxer.

DS: Did any of the young men that you worked with at Genesis Home ever come here to train as well?

CS: Yeah, they used to do that because see, at the Genesis Home for boys they would, the guys, we had guys from age eleven to eighteen. And um, I used to bring them here they used to love to come here. And I would have them get in that ring, and you know, workout and stuff and they, they really loved to come in here and um, that was something that um, that we used to do. Um I mean it wasn't like a Monday thru Friday every week, but I mean it's like um, I had some guys that I was actually you know, saw potential that they could be a professional boxer if that's what they wanted to be.

DS: Any point systems at the homes or when they come here they knew that they could get more points, if they got enough points that's their ticket in??

CS: Yeah, well, yeah well you know they could get points from, if they came here, follow the instructions. They could, they would get points for following instructions. In other words, if we were at the gym and we're in here, like one guy's hitting the bag and another guy might be

working on the treadmill, doing something. And one guy is outside, and he's out there talking with somebody out there and he's not really into this then he may lose some points, and the guys that are in here, earning points.

DS: I notice you have a lot of posters around here, are these fights you were connected to, had involvement with?

CS: That's, that's the one right there. These, I just picked them up somewhere and just kinda put them anywhere there was a good fighter that made a lot of money. I seen some of their fights on TV, in fact this guy, Pacquiao, I don't think I've ever seen his fight. But I heard that he was a good boxer, and um, he made a lot of money. But this fight right here was the one that I worked with Evander with um (muttering) I don't even remember

DS: Yeah, I should thank you.

CS: No you don't have to man.

DS: Ok, well thanks. Yep, I've always wanted to see your gym here, and I just, I look at the ring here and after just talking to you on several occasions and seeing this is---this much of your turnaround of young kids and your love of boxing continuing to help others learn the craft.

Unknown: In the summer because of the heat you don't put on the lights?

CS: Yeah I used to. And see--um, cause, yeah, um what I do I use---

[End clip 3]