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Francis and Cheryl Wyatt for Wright State University Oral History Course 685

Steven Glazier

Francis Wyatt

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Francis and Cheryl Wyatt

An inter-racial marriage

Interviewed by Steven Glazier

Oral History Project
for
HST 685-03
Dr. M. McLellan

By Steven Glazier
2003

Francis and Cheryl Wyatt Interviews

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Summary

Summary of Interviews with Francis and Cheryl Wyatt

Francis (Fran) and Cheryl Wyatt met in the Air Force band, where they both worked as professional musicians. Both shared natural musical abilities. Both are energetic, gregarious, talented and likeable people. Fran is black. Cheryl is white.

Today Fran and Cheryl are happily married with two young adopted children. They live in Ginghamburg, Ohio. Their story is one which is at once common and extraordinary, for they have not only the normal adjustments of marriage to overcome; they have the pressures of societies' hesitant acceptance of interracial marriage hampering their own marital interracial difficulties.

The following documentary was undertaken as part of the requirements of a graduate study program at Wright State University in Dayton, Ohio.

Cheryl Wyatt was born in Michigan, near Detroit, to working class parents. She always liked music, a factor that influenced her life in many ways. The family view of blacks in general, and interracial marriage in particular was not one of tolerance, indeed Cheryl's father has not met her husband to this day (to date, 13 years after they were married). Cheryl's father showed more tolerance of gays than other races, and on many occasions told Cheryl and her sisters that if they married a black they could never come home.

Fran Wyatt grew up in Illinois. As a child, his life revolved around music. He enrolled in many music classes just to be able to play an instrument. Fran's family shared his love of music, with mother and sisters all being musically inclined. After his parents separated, his mother still saw to it that Fran was encouraged to continue his training. This talent for music lead Fran to competitions all across the nation. This same travel also exposed Fran to the still-lingering face of prejudice. In Birmingham Fran was harassed as he traveled by bus to a competition.

Fran's competition honed his talent into a winning style, gaining him national recognition when he was only thirteen. After two years of college Fran tried out for the Air Force band, and was accepted on the first test. The band presented Fran with a lot of travel, a lot of free time, and a chance to meet his future bride.

Cheryl tried out for the Air Force band immediately after high school and was accepted after her first tryout. She has had no voice lessons, has indeed relied on her natural talent as a singer all her life. Her life in the band met with the challenge of being

young and in need of a focus, according to her she “did a lot of crazy stuff” and yet during that time met her future husband.

Today Fran works at Ginghamburg United Methodist Church, where he is Director of Music. (see the web page copy overleaf) he also started an annual Paul Lawrence Dunbar Appreciation event which annually awards the *Dunbar Award* to deserving persons. This years award included contributions amounting to over \$25, 000.

Today Cheryl sings professionally and is the mother to two bright and active adopted children. She and Fran home school to better meet the needs of their children. According To Cheryl, “the good life is where I am right now...”

The following interviews are recorded in both audio and video. The transcripts are included in this booklet. The story of Fran and Cheryl’s marriage and subsequent life together is one that will give the reader a deep look into a successful interracial marriage.



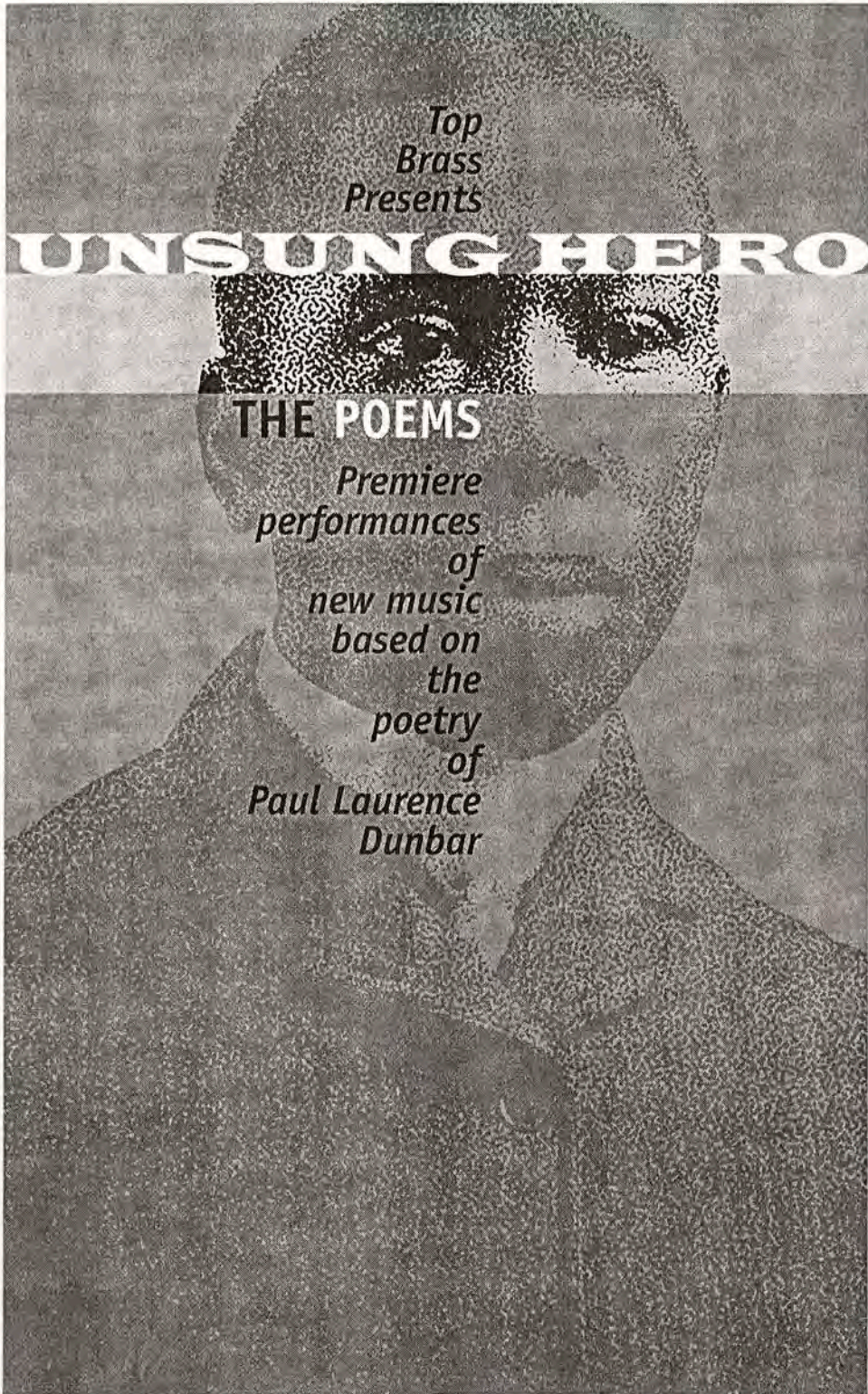
Fran Wyatt
Music Director

Meet Fran:

Our own Lawrence Welk - younger, more colorful and with a passionate heart for God, Fran breaks the rules when it comes to music.

On a weekly basis, you'll find Francis Drake Wyatt Jr. researching great, albeit non-traditional music for worship, creating the arrangements, rehearsing with the band and touching the lives of many with what he feels is God's greatest gift - music. He loves restoring hymns to a greater glory and is often found on his computer re-working music to modern day taste. Fran loves the fact that technology allows him to do things that financially, would not have been possible 3-4 years ago. With five years under his belt at Ginghamsburg as a musician, band leader and now Director of Music, Fran is constantly looking for ways to glorify God through music. 2001 brought about the 1st concert with the Ginghamsburg Band, called The Dance, and subsequent release of the band's 1st CD - The Felt Need. Fran is married to an extremely talented and witty spouse who offers her voice and heart often from the stage.

There is no other place in the world where Fran would be, yet continues to keep his percussive edge by traveling with the Top Brass Chamber group. Last year, they toured Bosnia and traveled the United States sharing their talents with the world. He spent 10 years with the Air Force Band, and has traveled with such greats as Michael Brecker, Arturo Sandavol and Joe Henderson. A big bowl of pasta, the latest copy of Electronic Musician and Black Entrepreneur magazines with a little country music playing in the background would signal the perfect day for this man.



*Top
Brass
Presents*

UNSUNG HERO

THE POEMS

*Premiere
performances
of
new music
based on
the
poetry
of
Paul Laurence
Dunbar*



Section One

Steven Glazier
HST 685-03

Interview with Cheryl Wyatt

Interview date:
February 3, 2003

An Interracial Marriage
An interview with Francis and Cheryl Wyatt

First interview, with Cheryl Wyatt (Cheryl)
By Steven Glazier (Steve)
Tape side "A"

Counter: 001

Steve: "It is February 3, 2003. Our subject is how Fran and Cheryl Wyatt handle a bi-racial marriage. We are in Ginghamburg, Ohio, and Cheryl, I would ask you if I would to tell me where you were born and a little about your childhood and growing up".

Cheryl: "Well, I was born in Michigan, () Michigan, which is about twenty miles outside of Detroit, a very rural, uh, suburban middle-class neighborhood. (I) Went to white schools growing up, had a good childhood. We were very outdoorsy, did a lot of snowmobiling, camping, stuff like that. My dad liked to be outside a lot, my dad worked a couple jobs, my mom stayed home with us. There were four girls; I'm the youngest of four. Got beat up a lot."

011

Steve: "What things did you like to do when you were young"?

Cheryl: "Oh, I liked to be alone a lot, I've always been kind of a deep person, liked to be alone, used to worry my teachers a lot, they'd say I was alone too much. Liked to be alone, played with my friends. I had a small circle of friends, unlike now, one or two friends, not a large group, didn't hang with large groups. Played trumpet, did lip-sync a lot..."

014

Steve: "You liked music?"

Cheryl: "yeah, always liked music. Didn't understand it, always wanted to be Mick Jagger, ask my mother, raised a good Catholic girl, asked my mother if I could be Mick Jagger and she said "absolutely not".

016

Steve: "When you were younger what did you want to do with your life, did you have any over-riding ambition that you wanted to do?"

Cheryl: "I never, we never really were taught to aspire past high school. So my goal was to graduate high school and that's about as far as I ever, I thought once I graduated high school that was it, I never really thought past that. I never, we never were really were taught to think past that. Our parents never went to college, my dad went to the navy young, he was, he graduated when he was in the navy, at that time you could go in and then graduate, so, he was pretty young. And he met my mother and she was pretty young, they got married, and she had four kids in five years, by the time she was thirty-two they had all these children, we were never taught to want anything

more than ... it was just unnatural to them. Talk about going to college you just, nobody in our family had.”

026

Steve: “When your family met people of other races what was it like, what happened?”

Cheryl: “Hummm Well, I’ll preface that by saying that my dad has still not met my husband, and I’ve been with my husband since 1986. We were always told, we were always showed that blacks and hispanics and everything was...just wasn’t the norm that...I was telling my husband today when we were cleaning the garage that if a black family moved in it was all the talk and it could be three or four miles away. “Black people were just taking all their jobs.” My dad was raised in Detroit where they had a lot of the race riots and stuff in the 60’s and so forth, I believe and uh,... My dad would always tell us, you, we could be gay and we could be any job but if we married a black guy we could never come home.”

035

Steve: “That must hurt.”

Cheryl: “It did for a long time, it hurt for a long time. They also raised me on the direct other hand to be strong and to do what I thought was best and to, kind of hypocritical within themselves, and then when I took the good advice then its always what set me apart, I believe, in my family.

039

Steve: “How did your mother react?”

Cheryl: “ My mother after about four or five years came around. I steadily prayed for her, I realized there was nothing I could do to change her heart. It was really out of my hands. She was raised in Philadelphia, very segregated, very segregated German Catholic family, and she could not understand it, she told me she thought it was a phase that I was going through. And then when the children came along, we adopted our children, she just fell in love with them. Has really gone out of her way to make him feel welcome and accepted. As have my sisters.

044

Steve: “So, as you grew up, you went to high school and graduated. What happened after high school?”

Cheryl: “The day after high school, I decided to go and visit my sister who was in the Air Force in Belucsie and that was the last time that I lived in Michigan. And then when I got, I was about seventeen at the time, and I knew I could sing, so I decided to try out for the Air Force Band, so I was seventeen, and auditioned for the Air Force band. Everyone told me I was crazy and you need to go to college. But I knew I could sing and I could at least do that, so I went and tried out and actually surprised myself that I made it. So, to not have my Mom and Dad to help me in any way to get into the service- they would have had to sign for me- I waited until I turned eighteen and then I went into the service in 1992 and I have been singing for money ever since...singing for food.

53

Laughter, both parties

Steve: “Singing for food!” When you were in the Air Force Band, what was is like?

Cheryl: “It was very challenging for me. I didn’t really have any money skills, I didn’t have any of... it was really crazy for me...I went through a lot of crazy stuff. Got

away from home, and I went from Michigan to Mississippi and then I went to the Air Force and then came right back to Mississippi so I was real far away from home. I was pretty much estranged from my dad. I was closer to my mom, but only arms length, it wasn't really a ... I didn't involve her too much in my life at that point because I knew I wanted to run crazy and I would break her heart, so, it was on a need-to-know basis, so I told her what she needed to know. It was strange in the Air Force, I got to meet a lot of different racial, different raced people that I never had a chance to meet or to interact with and I didn't understand at that point anything that my father had taught me growing up because they were no different than me. There are stereotypes that I..that are still dominant, engrained and embedded inside of me that are still coming out and I have to in effect regurgitate those bigotries and stereotypes that are down inside me that...

66

Steve: "Name one."

Cheryl: "It's odd for me to see a black woman and a white girl. And it's..a black woman and a white man and it's odd for me to see a white woman and a black man. And it's odd for me at times to see my husband and I together. Because it was so engrained that that was bad, that I have to continually... or if I see an Asian with a black, the first thing that comes to my mind is... odd. Even for me... that's odd. But I _____? not odd. But there are things that you're raised with in your own environment that just don't automatically go away. I'm still challenged with these things everyday. With class things, with racial class, with why is she with him, or why is he with her? Instead of realistic, you know, they're in love and they're together. Or even if it's and older person, or younger person together, I'm still challenged with those things that I was faced with that were odd or normal."

77

Steve: " You say that you have some engrained things, and of course, we all do, but how do you deal with them?"

Cheryl: "I actually do pray a lot about those things. When they come to mind, I realize that they are coming to mind to be dealt with. I usually will confess them out loud, saying, 'that is not true'. Or I'll go out of my way to meet and involve myself with them in some kind of conversation or make them feel welcome. If I see another mixed couple of any sort that comes to the church I try to go out of my way to feel welcome so they don't feel uncomfortable, but some times the thoughts will come and I'll be stunned by them... like... where'd that come from...that should have been gone along time ago. So, I'll think that too.

85

Steve: "So even though in your head and knowledge that the thought is wrong, it comes anyway?"

Cheryl: "It comes out of my hard drive. I think everybody has a hard drive of where they were raised. I heard someone say one time, 'everything you've every touched, tasted, smelled, or heard, is still on our brain' and it's kind of a living wake dream... it comes out and it's still there. It still comes out."

88

Steve: "So it's a conscious decision for you...
Cheryl: "It's a conscious decision...absolutely."
Steve: "to change...
Cheryl: "To change my heart. It's a heart issue."

90

Steve: "Ok" So, when did you meet Fran?"
Cheryl " I met Fran in 1987 when we were both in the Air Force Band. I saw him in the hallway and he was this skinny guy and I thought... 'who is that guy?' But he was the only black in the Air Force Band when I came up here to Wright Patt. He was the only black guy and by that time I had dated white guys and black guys when I was down at _____? (941/2) I had dated, because of my personality and the things I like to do, that who I started dating. Different guys, different nationalities or races, what have you. I met in '86 and couldn't stand him. (Snicker) But, we became friends and went out dancing all the times, so we really had like two or three years where we were the only two that could relate to each other within the Air Force Band. So we did everything together, we' go out to eat together, we'd go out dancing together, and then it went from there."

100

Steve: "You spent a lot of time as friends."
Cheryl: "We spent a lot of time as friends first."
Steve: "What's the Air Force Band like?"
Cheryl: " Oh, it was segregated. Someone had mentioned to me once when we were...a guy I was dating named Eddie when I was a _____?102 that the Air Force is open to desegregation because they have to... they don't have a choice but to accept all races. But you get people out... I had a sergeant tell me onetime... he used the "N" word... it offends me to even say it, but 'next time... don't date a "ummm", date someone in your race.' And he was my supervisor in the Air Force. I was like. Ahhhhhhhh! That was my first eye-opener that this isn't normal. This isn't normal, so..."

108

Steve: "How long ago was that?"
Cheryl: "That was when I got here, before I met Fran."
Steve: "So, in the mid '80's"
Cheryl: "Mid 80's, absolutely. It's still going on... it's really going on."

111

Steve: "What were some of the good times in the Air Force Band that you had?"
Cheryl: "Well, I think the best times were when we'd go out. I got really close to the band, I was the only female. We used to go on Mydol missions all the time for me which was really funny, because they really didn't know what to do with a girl when a girl go in the band. And I think learning about my music if it hadn't been for the Air Force Band, like I told you, I never really aspired, if it hadn't been for the Air Force Band and people telling me that I could succeed, I don't believe I would have done my music. I believe that God put me there to grow and to learn that what I have is a

gift and that I needed to use it. But, nobody at home, to this day my mother doesn't know what I did in the service. She's heard me sing twice in my life except, like you know, in elementary school. So, that's a different Oprah show. But, the good times were learning about myself, learning about my music and the travelling and the really good naps that I don't seem to have anymore. And, listening to the tapes. We would listen to the tapes and there're some drunken' days in there too. They were fun at the time, looking back, I wish it wouldn't have happened, but there is a real high incidence of alcoholism in the Air Force Band and the Military bands, because you have a lot of time at the end of the day... hotels and places you have never been before, so just a lot of laughter and a lot of work. I enjoyed the schedule. I have to be punctual. If we're going to say seven, then let's be at seven. It's hard for me to do a 7:15 when we say 7:00."

127

Steve: "Where did you go with the Air Force Band?"

Cheryl: "Well, I was in Mississippi and we went to Alabama. Actually, when I was in Alabama, I was told to not sing to the black children by one of the principles of the school. So, I not only sang to one, I said 'I'm black!'...that's just how I'm wired! So, I went to Alabama, the World's Fair, Mississippi. When I was in the Air Force here, we went Indiana, like seven states around our state.. Michigan, Texas..."

Steve: "More travel than you did as a child though?"

Cheryl: "Absolutely

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Steve: "What were some of the bad times with the Air Force Band?"

Cheryl: "A lot of aloneness because I ran so much trying to get acceptance in my 20's. A lot of partying, there were a couple of abortions in my 20's, that I regret because I did it for other people. I seem to turn into a people-pleaser because of fear of being alone. I felt really alone because I felt separate and different and even though I have accepted my faith and accepted the Lord in '81, I kinda ran like crazy... always do everything that came to... ah... before I married Fran. Fran stopped me and saved my life because I was just wild and crazy. I was a singer. I was a pretty singer, and I could get what I wanted. And so I did. I think my heart, my own heart a lone... in my 20's. In my 30's has been a net compared to my 20's even though I have children now. A little more settled. I grew up in my 30's. I don't remember my 20's much."

147

Steve: "When did you marry Fran?"

Cheryl: "1990. We eloped. We went through noon and nobody could show up and it was our only day off, so we eloped on my mother's birthday.

Steve: "What was your marriage like?"

Cheryl: "It was hilarious. There was a judge that came onto the elevator, we went to the justice of the peace and we were living together at the time and realized that we were just missing out on so much... there was so much blessing in our lives that we were missing out on, we were kinda like... were we renting each other. Do I want to go

ahead and buy? So, we eloped and the judge had come on to the elevator and we were kinda laughing to ourselves saying, 'You know, that's not him' because he was real slovenly, just kinda pudgy looking and just kinda funny and we were kinda laughing... I know he heard us and then we went up stairs and he opened the door and he said, 'Why don't you come in?' ... and it *was* him. We just started laughing. I laughed all the way through our vows. The judge said, 'You know, women tend to laugh through their vows.' My husband was crossing his eyes and it was just like something we did on our day off. Then we went to Church's chicken and I changed from my wedding dress into my jeans. I still have my receipt from the chicken place. Then we went to the mall and then we went home and went to bed. That was it. Nice Sunday!"

161

Steve: "I guess I can't ask about who all came?"

Cheryl: "We were there, and God was there, I hope, and judge whatever his name was was there. We know that they marry anybody in Kentucky so we went to Kentucky and got married."

164

Steve: "Tell me about how your family react and how did Fran's family react?"

Cheryl: "Fran's family reacted really well. They accepted me. They've always accepted me. That was new for me, Fran's family, because obviously it was a black family. And when I went home I always felt like I stuck out like a billboard in a desert. I just felt uncomfortable. It's just a whole... it's not a color thing it's a whole different culture. At thanksgiving is all different, seems to be all different food, from what I can see. Christmas morning at my house, we'd get up Christmas morning and the presents are ripped open. At his house, you get up, have breakfast, you have coffee, you kinda all sit around for a couple hours, then it's like "Do you want to open presents?" OK So, there was a culture shock there. My family was slower to come around. But one-by-one, my sisters, they like, 'Well, you know I don't believe in it, but if that's what you want', and then when they met Fran and realized that I was serious and it wasn't a whim. Because I was older than all of them when I got married, and I've only been married once and they've all been married a couple times, so I felt like, 'Ok, I waited, I know what I'm doing, you can all relax!'"

182

Steve: "We were talking about how your parents reacted and your dad has not met your husband."

Cheryl: "My dad has not met my husband. I think just a lot of issues with my dad. I think race is just something he hides behind because he doesn't visit any of his daughters. He comes right by Dayton every year. My dad always says he wants to do the right thing, he's been saying for the last three years that he wants to meet my husband, but he's not gone out of his way to make that happen. I pretty much told him, I did tell him that if he didn't meet Fran, that he couldn't see his grandchildren anymore because I would have to tell them the truth that I was _____?189 anymore. And all they would have to do is look down at their

brown skin and say, ok then, grandpa must not love me either. So, we just don't talk about Grandpa. Once in a while I'll bring up something that my husband does... it's really funny, because my husband my husband and my dad are actually like twins from separate mothers... they're just funny and witty and just mechanically inclined. It's like I married a darker shade of my dad. And I really wish that my dad would meet him. I guess I'm wishing my dad was different ...but that they could... I've been married the longest out of all my sisters... I just feel like that that's just worth at least a meeting. You don't have to like him, I'm not asking you to like him, just meet him and then you can deal with what you want with after that."

200

Steve: "When you talk about your dad, it appears as though you hurt."

Cheryl: "It still a closed room, but it's just sensitive to touch. It's very sensitive."

203

Steve: "What would your desire be for the future be for you mom and your dad?"

Cheryl: "Together or separate?"

Steve: "Both"

Cheryl: "Together, I would like them to speak with each other. I would like to feel that I could go home and see them both at one time instead of feeling like I have to choose. I mean, my dad's out of the picture now so that's out of it, but I seem like I have to juggle my loyalties and that is not fair. They divorced when I was in eleventh grade and I was the only daughter left at home at the time and I had to choose who I was going to live with. They made *me* choose. So, they set out the lights. And when I chose my dad because I could party and get away with everything I needed to get away with, my mother was very offended at that and it has only been very recently that we rebuilt our relationship. It came from me taking responsibility for things I did and also for forgiving her without her asking me. Forgiving her for her shortcomings. But I would just, I would deal with a casual relationship with my dad, once a year. I would love to see him once a year. He is getting older, he's in his mid to late 60's now, and would just like to ask him things. Just sit down and have a grown-up conversation with him. Just have a talk with him. I'm in the process now of just finding a week-end where I can just go home and be with my mother, without my kids and without my older sisters being there. Because I have never had just time with my mother. Just to talk to her about things and to ask her things and stuff like that. The deal is a nice casual, it doesn't have to be deep, I don't want any more drama, just everybody accepting everybody where they are and everybody going on with their lives."

222

Steve: "When you were married, you were still in the Air Force, so what happened?"

Cheryl: "In 1990, I married Fran and in 1992 they offered me the early out which is the big wad of money to get out and I said ok. Because we were thinking about that time about adopting because we had never been able to conceive between us, so they offered me money to get out. I heard the commander saying, 'Don't worry,

you don't need to, I'll fix it.' And I went to the him and begged him, 'Please don't stop this, I really want to get out.' I was done. The Air Force wasn't really a career. I couldn't see staying in twenty years. It was a job for me. That's all it was. So, we agreed that I would get out and that was found out and in the same week we found out about our daughter April who was a baby at the time. And then we started adoption proceedings and then I got out of the Air Force December 01, and April came home December 21. So then, I had all this money and it felt like the plan was in motion. So, that's when I got out and have been singing the different groups ever since."

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Steve: "So, Fran stayed in the Air Force how long?"

Cheryl: "He stayed in about two years longer than me. Then they offered him the same deal and he realized that it was time to jump ship. Because at that time when they offered it to you, that meant that in the next couple of years they might kick you out because they were downsizing. When they would kick you out then you wouldn't have any money. We were middle... we were Staff Sergeants. So, we realized, wait a minute, we can make money as musicians and start playing. We've done a lot of club gigs, took on a lot of students. We didn't have any insurance at the time... that was really hard, but we just played. That's why we're so tired. We haven't really slept in about nine or ten years."

245

Steve: "So, after Fran leaves the Air Force, what does a typical week look like for you?"

Cheryl: "A typical week... the first week he left was a party because we were home. It was like that was exciting. It was like summer vacation. And then it was *now what?* Because insurance was gone. Our daughter at the time had insurance, because she was adopted through the county, so she had Medicaid and full medical/dental until she's eighteen. She's a blessing. Had the kids not had insurance, I don't think he would have gotten out, I think he would have stayed in. A lot of gigs, probably five or six students a day, drum students. A lot of driving. He took a job in Kentucky because it was \$7.00 an hour and it sounded like a lot of money. Which wasn't. After you gotta get up at six and come back at six it doesn't sound like good money anymore; I think my husband, he's spent time sorting trash, for Waste Management and realized "what am I doing?", just a lot of picking up, how can I make money? He's always been a diligent person, always... we've had to pawn drums, pawn music equipment, TV's, to have money to live on, to survive on. Always made it, every single month, some months were close, but there's always gigs and gigs tend to pay pretty well, twenty-five dollars an hour so, but you're pooped 'cause when you add up trying to keep up musician hours and baby hours late at night and then getting up early in the morning, it's just a lot of tired days, lots of tired nights, a lot of stress."

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Steve: So how do people react to you and Fran as a married couple?

Cheryl: I don't really know because unless I really know someone, I don't really ask them and I don't really care. I've really kinda put a wall up and between new people and us because I can't spend my days wondering what they think. It would consume me because I'm a real _____?269. And I would stay very involved in my emotion of fear. We did have an incidence once when we were riding our bikes when we lived in East Dayton. It was pretty segregated. But there were a few black families, Mexican families that lived around us, and we were riding our bikes and got chased by some white guys in a truck that were throwing rocks at us. That was the first time I realized that when I was with my husband, I was black. That their prejudice was against me also. That there was a lot of prejudice against us and I think I realized at that time that not everybody is glad that you're together. I've even felt some of that when we came to this church and when we moved to our new house and so forth that I really felt that God wishes me to be careful because not everybody was glad we were here. That everything is not happy, but there's a purpose that we're together, there's a reason we're together. It has made me a better person. Being married, I'll tell people that I know are going to be in a mixed relationship that they really need to think about it. That they really need to do it for the right reasons because it is a challenge. We've had a lot of discrimination but my husband has had a lot more than I have growing up. When you talk to him, I'm sure you'll hear a lot more about that. You can feel it around people.

286

Steve: "When you say you can sense it, tell me what it's like."

Cheryl: "One time we went into a diner when we were in the Air Force Band and everybody got waited on but us. And it feels like you want to feel angry but you know that is not the response to take. And I had never been discriminated against because I had been raised in a white Catholic family. We went to church, we had our white friends, we did not have any friends that were not white so that was all new for me. And in the Air Force, you were not allowed to be discriminatory, it wasn't allowed, it was against the rules, but then when we were civilians and when we were in the civilian world ... it's frightening. When we were being chased, I was frightened. And I was frightened when we go home. We were being chased by the men because my husband went back out. I called his mother and told her junior was gone after these guys and we just started praying because I didn't know what they would do or what he would do something stupid, and I'd loose him. It's everyday I have to realize that my children are black, my husband is black, and I'm not. I can go out and be white without them, but they can never go out and not be black. So there's some guilt involved with me at times and there's pride, like how dare you stare at us, or I'll think they're starring at us because of that... because we're a mixed family. I get bitter and I have to keep that in check. It's hard at times, it's frightening... it's frightening. And I get sad for my husband, I worry about him. I feel bad for the things he went through growing up and I feel bad at times that I'm white... I feel guilty."

Steve: "Really?"

Cheryl: "I do, I feel guilty. We were talking about that today the things I used to say growing up. The things like, when I was growing up, if we all jumped on a person, we called it a nigger-pile. I told my husband today when we were cleaning the garage

and he said he had never heard that before. And I said I felt the need to apologize to somebody for that. And he said... he made me laugh... he said, you know we used say that all white people smelled like white chicken. I said that I didn't really know what that means... and he said, 'I don't either, but we used to say those things,'" And we were laughing and saying it feels good to talk about these things because we have talked about surface things, but not really in dept things. You know, at times when we walk into a restaurant even now I feel who's looking at us, are they going to seat us, are they going to accept us or see us as a white/black people or to see us a couple. Because when you're married, you become one, but I don't think people see us as one unless they're our close friends or Christians or close friends that see us as half an Oreo.

324

Steve: "It's interesting that just today because you were coming to do this interview that you and Fran started talking about some things and you have been married 13 years, and yet, some of those issues, like when you felt as if you wanted to apologize to somebody, it took for you to free enough to be able to share... is it hard to come to grips with sharing something might really be taken wrong?"

Cheryl: "I never expected to be taken wrong but I believe that when you talk to your spouse that timing is everything and it just seemed to be the time. That has just been on my mind and I felt bad about that for so long. I'll remember things, and I'll think, did I really do that? Did I really say that? Was I really taught that? Was I really taught that black people were really niggers and that if you ever marry one, you were out of the family. And then I married one. Was I really that rebellious, did I really think those things? Our relationship has grown, both of us, because of the cultural thing and the geographical thing also, but the black thing is... we deal with that because when he is discriminated against, then I'm discriminated against. The same thing when we go out of state, I feel odd, and when we used to go out with the Air Force Band, he was the only black gentleman in the group and we'd always stop at white places to eat. They would walk with him, or at times, not walk with him, and there were times when we didn't go out of the room, we stayed in and ordered in. But there were other times when we very rarely go to all black sections and you should have seen the guys wanting to walk with Fran to the Burger King. He's say, 'Sorry, I'm staying in tonight, you all are on your own!'"

351

Steve: "Today you have 13 years of marriage behind you, two kids that you have adopted, tell me about family life."

Cheryl: "Family life is... we call it peculiar because we don't educate our children in the normal way... we home educate so that we can have time with them. Because my husband is full time at Ginghamburg. We call it the Ginghamburg machine. He goes into the machine on Wednesday and comes out on Sunday afternoon in a state of comatose and has two days off and it starts again. We're real close to our two children, April and Brandon. Francis and me are really close and we do a lot together. I have to make myself take them to do things separately now that they're getting older because it's really easy to gather them as a couple and take them out

places. We to eat out a lot and I used to feel bad about that, but I don't anymore because at least we're together. We cook out more, I'm getting better. We don't get nearly enough vacation as I would like. We haven't had a vacation in a very long time. I'm trying to shape my children's childhood into something they want to remember and not something that they want to forget. And I think that it is. I think they feel blessed and will know their parents worked hard to love them more than their jobs."

372

Steve: "What was your motivation for home schooling?"

Cheryl: "The time issue and also my daughter needs a little bit more attention. I don't believe that she was getting that kind of attention that she needed at her school. They were in public schools and the public schools are great for the normal family. But, we're not the normal family. We were spending so much time at church, they were spending so much time at church, getting home at ten, no time for homework... something had to give and the job couldn't give. The job was paying the mortgage and the hours couldn't give. My husband has moved a lot of his office back to house now so he can be home and help me. We moved a half a mile from the church so that we could have more time with the family and not so much travel time. We found some time that way."

386

Steve: "For the sake of people listening to this, explain when you say "the church" what it is that happens at church."

Cheryl: "Our church, well our church building and our organization, I believe the people are the church. But for the sake of making it easy, our church is seeker sensitive, we're trying to pull people in from the outside, who don't normally come to church, with something that might stimulate them and make them want to come back again. So, there's new music every week. We get new music on Wednesday, practice on Friday night and Fran and Tom write it out on Thursdays. We do it Saturdays, sometimes we don't have Thursdays. Sometimes, like last weekend, we learned all the music on Saturday afternoon. It's five services every weekend and my children have come to take a couple of different classes while they're at church, sign language and they work in the nursery, and they love to be the teacher in the nursery. They're ten now, they have their "kids", and look forward to telling me about what they've learned at church and what they did. They're pretty content, so far, with spending a lot of time here. At least, I know exactly where they are, and they know where we are."

401

Steve: "So, I take it then, that Fran is employed."

Cheryl: "Fran is employed at Ginghamburg. He is the music director. I assumed that everybody knew that, but that's just me. He's been the director of music for about five years now... five or six years."

Steve: "Which explains the job aspect of being at the church so long."

Cheryl: "Absolutely"

Steve: "You attend, I assume, Ginghamburg also."

Cheryl: "We do. We are members. It took us about three years to join because we didn't have time to take the membership classes. Plus, we didn't want to jump in right away."

408

Steve: "And you are also professional musicians. Explain a little bit about what all that entails in terms of your week and time commitments and what kind of pressures that might place on your family."

Cheryl: "well, the pressure that it places on me, personally and my husband will share that with you, too, is that the older that you get, the harder it is to keep up the pace. We've since cut out a lot of our gigs, Fridays and Saturdays, a lot of them, the big gigs are in Cincinnati, so we gig out in one evening and make three hundred dollars, it's hard to turn that down. Especially when we moved to be closer to the church our mortgage doubled. So, now we have to come up with the extra money. It would entail coming in at four in the morning and getting up and being at church at eight o'clock in the morning and being absolutely exhausted, taking Monday off and sleeping through Sunday and Monday... simply exhausting."

421

Steve: "So, you plan to keep this up for very long?"

Cheryl: "Well, we have just cut back. We do have weddings and what we decided to do is less gigs and ask for a lot more money. We thought, if we ask for more money then they must think that we're worth it so they gave it to us. Plus, I've taken on few students, which helps to take up some of the money that is missing. And we have never worried about 'we're not going to make it' because we make it every month. God has always supplied what we needed, right when we needed it."

427

Steve: "What do you teach?"

Cheryl: "I teach voice."

Steve: "Voice."

Cheryl: "Which is really funny, because no one ever taught me voice. So I tell my students that when they come in... 'that I will teach them to open their mouth and find their voice'. I sit them down in front of a mirror and tell them to look at their mouth when they're singing and that's usually enough."

431

Steve: "So, what does the future look like for you?"

Cheryl: "The future, right now, doesn't look like it's on a straight path. It feels like it's going somewhere, but I don't see the end of the road. I don't know where that ends. I believe that God's growing us in places that ... I didn't... He was kinda sneaky and He was growing us. My husband was talking about going to seminary and getting stronger in our work and getting stronger in our faith. We'd like to be able to home school, first of all, that's practical for us, and put our children in a school that is feeding them. Music will always be of our lives. It's a love/hate relationship. I love it when I'm doing it and at

times I hate it when I'm doing it. It's like an addiction; I can't seem to put it down. That's the way it is for both of us. I have caught my husband in the studio in our house writing music 'til the sun comes up... with his eyes shut and he can't even crawl anymore. It's like flipping the remote... you just can't stop doing it.

446

Steve: "That's interesting. What's your idea of a good life?"

Cheryl: "That's funny! I was thinking of that today because I heard a song on the radio today called the "Good Stuff." The good life to me, my goal in life, is to raise children that want to be around me when I am old. The bad life was what's behind me. There's good behind me and there will be bad ahead of me, but I feel like I'm such a different person now because I have lived through it and survived it. I survived all that and came out the other side. I don't feel like a victim, I'm a survivor of my own abuse. God has seen me through, and he's going to take me places that are going to be really really scary for me. I know His will isn't always comfortable, but I can always trust it. So, the good life is where I am right now. In a little bit of chaos, with family around me that loves me.

Steve: "Thank You."

Section Two

Steven Glazier
HST 685-03

Interview with Francis Wyatt

Interview date:
February 3, 2003

An Interracial Marriage
An interview with Francis and Cheryl Wyatt

First interview: with Francis Wyatt (Fran)
By: Steven Glazier (Steve)
Tape side "B"

Counter: 001

Steve: "Fran, tell me about your childhood and where you were born, where you were raised, what things you _____"

Fran: "Born in St. Louis, Missouri, and raised there. Went to school in Illinois, right outside St. Louis, college in Ohio and then the military."

004

Steve: "What was life like as a child for you?"

Fran: "Very musical. Everything pretty much revolved around music of some sort. Because of that, I was in very diverse situations musically and racially. As a kid, instead of playing football in the streets I was usually somewhere practicing music or something."

010

Steve: "Go deeper into that if you would... what classes."

Fran: "I used to get into a bunch of music classes just to find a band. Symphonic band, concert bands, phonic orchestra, but I also took all the AP classes, like AP English, which was advanced placement English, AP History, AP Math. I was trying to dispute the fact that musicians were stupid. A lot of classes. As a matter-of-fact, when I was in college I was a double major. I was in jazz performance/computer science major in college. I always carried that out."

022

Steve: "Brothers and sisters?"

Fran: "Got three sisters. Two older, one younger. My younger sister is also a musician, she's a drummer. My older sister, next to me, played horn for a while, and then my oldest sister wasn't musical."

025

Steve: "She didn't fit in very well, did she?"

Fran: "She was a great leader, actually. She was a good leader. It was always a volume of situations musically, just not on the musical side of the house. She was one of the organizers."

027

Steve: "Tell me about your parents."

Fran: "My mom was the one who taught me how to play drums. My father was not musical at all, but he was a very good supporter. He would always show up for all the concerts and all the parades. Our home was always like the hangout for all the kids in the neighborhood. He's barbecue, and they'd all come and hangout in the backyard. He loved that. He would just barbecue all day long as long as there're kids left. I think he always wanted to make sure we had a safe environment. I grew up in projects in St. Louis, during the other part of my life. Middle class, suburbia, but there again, I think he always wanted to make sure that there was a safe environment for us. My parents didn't mind being the host of the neighborhood. They separated when I was around seven or eight, but I'd see my mom and dad a lot. Then he finally died when I was thirteen. My mom became mother and father to me. She always did what she had to do to make sure I got what I needed. She always encouraged me to stay in music 'cause she knew that was one way to stay out of trouble. She saw my friends all going to jail, or dying, so she always encouraged me to just to stay in music and to always to find situations that would always move forward in life. So that led me to a lot of diverse situations. That's probably why I got into the whole racial diversity thing is that she's always kept pushing me to think outside the box. 'Don't do this just because someone else is doing it' 'Who's doing what you want to do, go hang around them.'

047

Steve: "Did or how big a part did racial problems affect your younger life?"

Fran: "In my younger life, several little things, but nothing major before the age thirteen. Had a few...thirteen on, ran into a few things, because that's when I started traveling more on my own with their music. Before then, just little things, like when I was with a drum quartet in Illinois, and a bunch of kids went to a Dairy Queen shop, and at that time it was a very...very..ah... a very hard time. So, we were walking back from this Dairy Queen and we pass this bar and there were a bunch of bikers in there and they just started yelling out things, out the door at us. These were like grown men and here we were like maybe, what, eight, nine or ten years old, so what'd we do, we started yelling back! They came running out the bar and we took off running, so that was pretty scary. One of the other buses of older adults of that organization and they came back in and escorted us out of town, so nothing else would happen. That was nice of them to give us an escort out of town. Then probably the next thing after that, when I was thirteen, had some problems like in Birmingham, Alabama, stuff like that. While in the Drum Corps, I traveled a lot. At the age of thirteen, I actually traveled by myself. My mom had enough trust in me that when I was thirteen, she would put me on a bus in St. Louis, Missouri and I would ride to Racine, Wisconsin, once a month on my own for a whole weekend. We had what they called corps camps over the weekend, so I would go to that, so I got a chance to experience things quite a lot at a much younger age than most people. Good and Bad."

069

Steve: "You mentioned Birmingham, what happened there?"

Fran: "Just one gentleman that kinda wanted to help me out of town. I was thirteen at the time and we were actually leaving the area anyway, and as I was leaving, going

back to the bus across from the school, some gentlemen physically shoved me out to the bus... and things like that. I was thirteen and very small framed and these guys were pretty big, farm guys, so once again it was a scary thing. But, my mom had told me how to handle stuff like that so, I was ready for it, but I just didn't feel good, you know. But, luckily, once again, I had some other guys in the drum corps who were there to help me. So, to think about what would have happened if they weren't there, sometimes is a little scary. Of course, this stuff really makes you grow up with issues of your own as far as trusting people and how you look at people. While I've always been in racially diverse situations, I still deal with that, you have to sift through that and figure out what you truly feel verses are you saying this because of what someone has done to you in the past. Kind of a program response sort of thing."

083

Steve: "When you were younger did you have any desire what you wanted to do with your life?"

Fran: "Yeah, I wanted to be a big star. I thought I'd be playing drums with... I don't know who, but really I thought that music was for me. I thought I would be traveling and touring, that type of thing, that's what I really wanted to do apart from my really young age. I love computers too. I tried to move back and forth from that and computer science, but at that time if I had had my rathers, it would have been music. That's pretty much what I've done."

090

Steve: " You predominately play which instrument or do you play wide variety?"

Fran: "Percussion. Percussion, that is my first instrument and just kinda get by on a few others as needed, but percussion is my first."

091

Steve: "You apparently enjoy it."

Fran: "Yeah I do, I love it."

092

Steve: "What are some of your memorable times as a youngster?"

Fran: "Hummm"

093

Steve: "Any special memories in there?"

Fran: "The first time when I won an outstanding soloist award at a jazz concert, that was pretty cool."

094

Steve: "How old were you then?"

Fran: "I guess I would have been thirteen. It would have been my freshman year in high school. We went to our first jazz concert contest and I was chosen of one of maybe one of ten, ten or eleven, that was pretty good. Maybe, when I made DCI finals for the first year at Drum Corps International finals for the first year, that was pretty

memorable, I recall the day when I found out my father passed and that still comes back to mind sometimes.”

100

Steve: “Sure. And you went to college, where did you go?”

Fran: “Southern Illinois University at Edwardsville. It’s about forty minutes from St. Louis.”

101

Steve: “You had a double major?”

Fran: “Yeah, jazz performance and computer science.”

102

Steve: “Worked pretty hard?”

Fran: “Yeah, yeah. Not as hard as I should have unfortunately. I spent too much time in the practice room and not enough time in the computer lab doing the other side of that double major. But, yeah, I carried a full load, usually 18 to 20 hours a quarter.”

106

Steve: “Did going to college in a southern state cause any difficulties for you?”

Fran: “Well, it wasn’t a southern state. It was southern Illinois, so it was actually just slightly east of St. Louis. That was a mixed, very very mixed school, so no problems whatsoever.”

109

Steve: “After college, what did you do?”

Fran: “Air Force. I went into the Air Force Band. Then, I got stationed in Dayton, Ohio, and that was in ’85. I was stationed at Wright Patterson Air Force Base for ten years and that was another situation that really placed me in a very diverse, speech, gender and even though I was there, it was definitely there, it took on a different face
_____ ???114

115

Steve: “How did you get into the Air Force Band, did you have to apply?”

Fran: “Had to audition. ”Yeah, actually I went in with what they call a guarantee, so that I knew before I even went to basic training that I would be in the band. If I hadn’t had that guaranteed job, I probably wouldn’t have went. Once I got up to basic training, they did a bunch of extra testing and actually offered a computer job in the Air Force, too. But, no, I took the music.”

122

Steve: “How long were you in the Air Force?”

Fran: “Ten years.

123

Steve: "We already know you met your future wife there, so tell me about life in the band and then meeting Cheryl and how things went there."

Fran: "Life in the band... what do you want to know?"

124

Steve: "What's it like to tour with a band?"

Fran: "Um, it's fun. It is fun. You practice a lot and you spend a lot of time on the bus. At that time, I just really enjoyed partying, and so, you get a lot of that. And with nothing to do sometimes, you play so many small towns that literally the curb rolls up at 6:30. At that time, we were playing a bunch of high schools, we would go and do a concert in the morning, go do a concert in the afternoon, and then we'd go back to the hotels and you'd have nothing to do until the next day. We'd all do the happy hour and sit there and eat shrimp and talk and chat and do it again the next day. So that's pretty much what existed from when I was in the rock band. I played in the rock band, I played in the symphonic ensemble, played in the jazz band during my stint in the Air Force Band. We also had like a show band. I played in all those different styles. It was good experience, I learned a lot. My craft has improved a lot because I was playing every day. A lot of musicians don't find themselves in that situation; to where they actually use their skills every single day. But in the Air Force Band we did. It was a good time... musically.

140

Steve: Tell us about meeting Cheryl.

Fran: That was interesting. I was drummer of the band, she was the vocalist basically what it was was that none of the guys in the band liked to dance, I enjoyed dancing, she enjoyed dancing, so we would hang out together just to go dancing. We would seek out the clubs in wherever we were staying at and just go out dancing. So that's how we started. We'd go out dancing, talk and hang out. That part went on for months. And finally we just started dating. And one thing led to another, and we got married.

148

Steve: what was the reaction in the band when you and Cheryl started to date?

Fran: There were a few folks who didn't like it. We had one of our leaders actually come to us and say (I don't want to lie here) that, that, he didn't think this was a very good idea and he just had some issues with it. The strange thing about it is that this gentleman actually ended up becoming a very good friend of ours. Later. He became a believer, and, so we really could see how the whole 180 happened. But he was like really against us being together. He just didn't like it. He tried to do everything he could to keep it from happening. But then we became really good friends.

158

Steve: how did he try to keep it from happening?

Fran: he would say that we were not to be together when we were on tour, things like that. Even though we did! There was nothing he could do to stop us. That was his attempt to keep us separated. There really wasn't anything he could do, other than

voice his opinion. He was the leader of the ensemble but then you have regulations that you can't be discriminated against racially. That was what he was trying to do, and once we let him know that, there was nothing he could do about it. I think it concerned some other issues, also. We continued on with our relationship, we made sure that everything remained above-board, and didn't give anyone any opportunity to misunderstand our relationship.

169

Steve: When you were young and living at home was there an understanding or talk in the family about bi-racial get-togethers of any kind?

Fran: No, there was talk, my mom was the type that said, I don't care who you marry, as long as you are happy. Whether they be black, white, yellow, purple or green, as long as you're happy. It doesn't matter. But she was also very quick to make me aware of the challenges. The challenges of an interracial relationship. For whatever reason most of my relationships were interracial. It wasn't that I went out seeking someone of another race, it's just that the things that I enjoy, me being kind of a quiet person, for whatever reason that's who I attracted. I was reading an EBONY magazine just recently in which they were discussing the whole interracial thing, and the interesting thing was that the concept of the reason the black girls at school didn't find me interesting was that I was quiet, interested in jazz, I didn't go out skating a lot, that was the big thing, you know, going skating, I wouldn't do that, I was AP classes, so I didn't have time to do that. Most of my situations put me in more diverse gatherings, whites, Asians, other blacks, Hispanics, I was always in that mixed group. Matter of fact I found out in New Orleans that a lot of the girls, a lot of the guys thought I was prejudiced against my own race because I was so quiet, you know, I just wouldn't talk to anybody, unless they talked to me first. I stuttered too as a kid, so that added to my shyness. I just wouldn't talk. It just turned out that the girls who would talk to me were white. So that's who I ended up dating when I was in school.

198

Steve: When you and Cheryl began to date what was the progression of your thoughts concerning marriage, did you and she talk this over, how did you decide, was it just spur of the moment or did you give it a lot of thought?

Fran: It was on the spur of the moment. I had thought about it, obviously, before hand, but the actual popping of the question definitely was spur of the moment. She definitely had some concerns, you know, her family background was a little different from mine. My mom was always saying "whatever makes you happy", if you love the person, just go for it. She knew that wasn't the case with her family. She was a little more cautious, in a sense. Even after I asked her and she said yes, she was more cautious.

212

Steve: What were some of her concerns?

Fran: I think it's one thing to be dating interracially, but to get married is a different issue her 'cause now all of a sudden, when you're dating you go out, you go apart, you go out, you go apart, when you're married you are together all the time. People see you

as one unit now. So I think she probably had some concerns about that. Other than our marriage we ran into some issues, we used to live in east Dayton had an issue where some folks threw rocks at us as we rode our bikes down Springfield Pike. That just really just shook her up, that was early in our marriage. She had never been on the physical side of that issue. It's one thing to have somebody say something to you, or give you a look, but to actually have somebody start throwing rocks at you, or when you're out riding to have a car come up to you with a guy with his arm hanging out of the window obviously hiding some sort of weapon. She had never been in that kind of situation before. So I think she was really shaken up. So was I, I was, too. But I think I was just a little more prepared for it. It's different. I think she, I think her parents programmed her a certain way, I guess, even though she didn't believe the way they thought, when you hear something all your life it's still down there somewhere. Sometimes it's hard to realize that it's still there 'till something happens to bring it out.

235

Steve: Tell me about your wedding.

Fran: We were in the Air Force band. We didn't have a whole lot of money, so we just popped the question and hopped down to Kentucky and got married, came back from Kentucky, stopped at my favorite food restaurant (Popeyes Chicken) we ate chicken and went out and caught a movie (I think it was Joe Versus The Volcano) and (laughter) and we came on home and went to bed. Obviously, we never told anybody we were going to get married, we had to have permission from our commander, we got that and we just went out and did it.

243

Steve: So you obviously didn't invite a whole lot of people.

Fran: No, no I knew I didn't want too many people with a twenty piece chicken dinner! Had to keep costs down (laughter).

246

Steve: So, what was your folk's reaction to getting married?

Fran: My mother just wanted to make sure that this was what we really wanted to do. ..make sure that I was making a wise decision. My father was already dead, my mom was very supportive once she knew that this was the one I wanted to spend my life with.

250

Steve: Had your mother met Cheryl?

Fran: Yes she had, yes

Steve: Any comments about Cheryl before you married?

Fran: Not that I remember, no I don't think so. I think Cheryl was just a little uncomfortable when she first met her, so I think Cheryl may have acted a little quiet, that may have made my mom wonder if she liked going out (to Fran's mothers home) because she was quiet, so my mom wondered, did she like us or not, you know, that

type of stuff. It took a half a year for them both to come out of it, but she realized that there wasn't any animosity, that it was a misconception.

261

Steve: How are their relations today?

Fran: I think they're very good. I really do. Because of our distance we don't see her a whole lot, but Cheryl talks to her on the 'phone, I think they get along well.

264

Steve: So what happened, you stayed in the Air Force how long?

Fran: Ten years.

Steve: What caused you to leave the Air Force?

Fran: They offered me money to get out. (laughs) I felt like getting out anyway, then they had the early out benefit packages so I just took advantage of it and went ahead and got out. I felt that there was something else that I was supposed to be doing. I really didn't know what, because all I knew was music, but I also saw that guys who had retired from this band, from the Air Force band, once they retired, none of them were playing music. They said "I'm not going to do this any more, I'm going to do something else." Music was too important to me. So I decided that I would get out now while I still have a passion for it, than to stay another ten years and lose my passion for it. So that's what I did. I got out. Actually, Cheryl got out first, she was out with the same package before I was offered, and she was trying to decide if she wanted to get out or not. My advice to her was, I'll tell you what, you stay in, I'll get out! I'll be a house dad! (laughs) I don't mind. So she went ahead and got out first. And then when they offered me the package, I got out as well.

280

Steve: What was life like after the military, it obviously was a big change, and you obviously stayed in the area, so how did things work out?

Fran: It was tough. I only had two years of college, I didn't finish my degree, I dropped out to join the Air Force band. I went to audition just for the reserves, and they offered me a full time position. So I didn't have a degree to fall back on, for teaching or anything like that. I really didn't know any other skills other than music while I was in the service for those ten years. The employment situation around town was... we went on some gigs, but not enough to make a decent living. We were concerned about where the finances were coming from. I did a bunch of gigs and took a job at Snappy Car Rentals for about a week. Then realized that that wasn't gonna work. This was the dead of winter and they wanted us to go out and wash cars in the winter, so I said, 'ok, I'll find something else.' So I took a job as a glass cutter for about two days, when I cut my hand about three times... I went, 'that's definitely not going to work'! So I left that job. Actually, at that time, Cheryl was singing downtown Tipp City and Kim Miller from Ginghamburg Church saw her singing and asked her if she had ever sang at church before. Cheryl told her that she would love to, so she came out and started singing at the church. And then I came out and started playing at the church. One thing lead to another, and I ended up working at Ginghamburg United Methodist Church. In between those two things, the church

and the Air Force Band, I really didn't know what I was going to be doing. I didn't know where God was going to lead me. It an interesting thing to jump out there in faith, not knowing where it's going to end at.

306

Steve: Did you and Cheryl have any children then?

Fran: Not when we first... ah well..yes we did. We had April. April Wyatt. She was maybe a year... year and a half, when Cheryl go out and about three, three and a half years old when I got out. So, obviously, there was some concern. But, luckily we both got out with benefit packages and that helped us transition into something else. That wasn't bad, that wasn't bad, it helped, but still the concern was there about how to provide.

315

Steve: What kind of pressures do you and Cheryl have in your marriage? Does race play a part in your marriage?

Fran: Not as much, I think, between her and I. Because she has always been pretty well acclimated to the -----318 of other culture. I have always been pretty well acclimated to the European/Caucasian culture... whatever you want to call it. So, I think we both have enough knowledge of the two cultures that we don't have any major gaps of understanding between us. But, I think did happen, was we got April... I think with Cheryl... she told me one time which I thought was pretty profound, she said, 'when she goes out by herself, everybody sees her as just white. When she goes out with April, all of a sudden people are looking at her differently.' It took her some time to know how to deal with that. When she's out with April, it's a black family. It's a mixed family, or black family. But, when she's by herself, all of a sudden, she's white again. That's probably the only issue right off hand that's she's had to deal with. With in last, six assorted years.

333

Steve: Does that bother you?

Fran: Yes, it does. Not mad, just angry. Angry at the ignorance. We try to deal with it, but sometimes the "looks" do get to you. You try to respond properly, but sometimes it does get the better of you, especially if our kids are with us. I never want my kids to feel they're second rate to anyone. We always speak words of encouragement to them and words of love, so when someone else tries to push upon them the feeling other than that upon them³⁴⁴???? So, yes, it does bother me sometimes.

345

Steve: What's the future look like?

Fran: What's the future look like...

Steve: Where would you like to be, what would you like to be doing, what would you like to achieve?

Fran: It used to be... if you had asked me five years ago, it would have been 'within the next two years, I want to be receiving my first Dove Award', if you had asked me that two years ago. Now, it's 'I want to be used more by God to speak against racial

injustice and racial reconciliation and things of that type'. I've even shared with Cheryl the slight possibility of politics. The whole race thing is a big issue in my life. So if there's anything right now that I could think of that I would want to do, it would be to just all of who I am to confront that issue. For whatever reason, I realize that my whole life has always been surrounded by that...just the diversity I kinda find myself feeling kinda sad for those who haven't experienced that because there's so much out there. So many different things of different cultures that some things in this culture you just don't get in this one, some things you get in the Latino culture, there's a certain kind of passion that you find there, that you don't find in the African/American culture or the white culture. Then there's a ???366 in the Greek culture that you don't find in the Jewish culture. There's so much stuff out there and I think we just miss out on it, when we don't embrace how God has made everybody different.

369

Steve: Have you taken any steps to make that dream come true?

Fran: Recently, I had the opportunity to preach at Ginghamburg United Methodist Church and it was actually the first time I've ever delivered a message of that type. It was over the Martin Luther King weekend, so yes, that was my first step. My mom always called me "Deacon" Wyatt. I knew that God was calling me to speak, but because of my stuttering and my shyness, I didn't know how it would ever come about, and I always kind of shied from it. But, I think that weekend helped me to realize that maybe what I was getting as a youth is accurate. Maybe God does want to use me in that way. Sometimes we just have to face the barriers that we have and do it anyway.

383

Steve: Tell me about how the Paul Lawrence Dunbar award came to be, and what part you had in it.

Fran: I play with a group called Top Brass and basically the followers of the group met up with the directors of the Paul Lawrence Dunbar Historical Museum, which is in Dayton and actually started the idea talking about possibilities. So, I actually had nothing to do with that. Basically what I did do though, is try to help really them to make sure the event was truly a multicultural event. The nice thing about Top Brass is that in itself, it's multicultural group. Dave and Norman are white guys, Heimi is Hispanic, and of course, I'm African/American. The group is very diverse and economically diverse, so I think that's a great group to do this whole project. Basically, like I say, I think we're right up to the table as this project goes. It has really tried to embrace the ethnicity of Paul Lawrence Dunbar. It's one thing to just do his poetry, but we needed to embrace the way he wrote his poetry, as a kid we studied Paul Lawrence Dunbar, I remember studying it in the fourth grade. So when we started doing this project I got really excited. I was really encouraged that the two white guys wanted to do this music and this poetry. I thought it was a really cool thing.

407

Steve: What is your idea of the good life now?

Fran: My idea of the good life? Spend more time with my kids, enjoy being able to provide for my kids, nothing luxurious, just being able to provide for my family. Plus being able to get a few extras that a few years ago would have been out of the question. To have plenty of time to spend with family, serve God, it's a good thing.

416

Steve: You and Cheryl home school your kids, why do you do that, do you like doing it?

Fran: Yes and no. I'm not thrilled about it, it's a serious time commitment, but April has a special situation, it's very good that we're able to help her to learn, in a style that will help her to grasp what is going on. We don't want her to be "pencil passed" through the system, we want to make sure that she is actually learning the things that she needs to learn in order for her to be successful, and to be an integral part of society. That's why we do it. At school, I wasn't seeing them, between my work at the church and the few outside jobs that I had, I just wasn't seeing my kids. So that was one of the reasons that we truly decided we had to home school.

430

Steve: How are things with you and Cheryl?

Fran: Good, very good. Just like with any marriage, you have your challenges. I find that we're talking a lot more, about issues, that's the biggest thing, we talk about it. We talk about it and get it out, and hopefully we're able to get the other to come an understanding of what we're trying to say, what we mean. It's better that it's been, that now we're at a high point, so that's a good thing.

Steve: That's a good thing.

Section Three

Steven Glazier
HST 685-03

Interview with Cheryl and Fran Wyatt

Interview date:
February 3, 2003

An Interracial Marriage
An interview with Francis and Cheryl Wyatt

First interview, with Cheryl Wyatt (Cheryl) and Francis Wyatt (Fran) together
By Steven Glazier (Steve)
Tape side "B"

Counter: 463

Steve: "It is February 3, 2003. Our subject is how Fran and Cheryl Wyatt handle a bi-racial marriage. We are at Ginghamburg, Ohio. We have interviewed each of you separately, and wanted to get you interacting together as a married couple to give us a little bit of what life's like and how you get along, what you laugh at, what you cry at

Fran: She's GREAT! (laughter) She's the perfect wife! (more laughter)

Steve: Well, that's good.

Cheryl: Tell them what you do all day.

479

Steve: Obviously you can laugh together, tell us what life is like for you

Fran: What is life like?

Cheryl: My elbow's poised. (laughs)

Fran: Normal. I think. Just wake up and Cheryl makes coffee, I smell the coffee, she gets the kids up

Cheryl: I think it's really abnormal for other people, if they would see our lives, it's normal for us, it's not a normal... a typical family. I was thinking today how we were saying over the weekend that still waters run deep, that's where marriages get to when you grow to a certain point your water becomes still and very deep. It's not like a raging river any more, but leave it alone, just leave it alone, it's where it's supposed to be.

Fran: The kids are...able to take care of themselves a lot, we have to go find them sometimes, try and figure out where they are 'cause they'll just go and play. On their own, for hours. Cheryl will have to go look for them to see if they're ok. I spend a fair amount of time in what she calls the cave, which is my studio, just working on things.

Cheryl: I spend a lot of time trying to figure out what Fran needs during the day. We talked about that the other day, too. The first few years of our marriage ... that he has what he needs and make sure that the children have what they need. I feel like I'm coming into a time in my life where everybody is pretty much plugged in and on course and now it's time to figure out what I need. He's pretty in tune with that.

Fran: Since she said she wanted a Corvette!

Cheryl: I wouldn't get a corvette! He got me a riding lawnmower when we moved into our new house. It has a surrey with fringe on top so I won't get sunburned. (laughter) people think we're joking, but somebody gave us a snow blower last night. We have a really big driveway and Fran said "Cheryl will really enjoy using that snow blower"

(laughter) I figure if he's concentrating on those things that's bringing money into the house then it's fair mine is the house and my stead is to take care of the house, and I try to do that without too much complaint; unless the bathroom is really bad, then I ask "does anybody else see that?" Then it's see what?!

Fran: yeah I see that, it's a mess!

Cheryl: then you get to clean it up! (laughter)

504

Steve: Do you still do gigs together?

Fran: every one

Cheryl: mostly, I think we mostly gig together now.

Fran: we do mostly do private stuff now; because we didn't like the environment on most of the gigs. Things have changed.

Cheryl: plus it pays a lot better that we master the gig, get the booking fee, don't show up the city by the size of the band, now we're small, very small. We can work together and spend time together. When I'm gigging I'm always at somebody else's party. I'm always dressed up fancy at somebody else's party. When Fran's out, he's away from me. I know what kind of people come to those kind of parties, so I'd rather that we be together. So that strengthens us because we have time to and from the gigs, because they're usually in Cincinnati and we can talk about the future. Sometimes about the past, but usually about where do we need to go, why are we stagnate right now, where do we see ourselves musically.

520

Steve: And you are singing?

Cheryl: Yes

522

Steve: you sound, at least to me, as if life is fulfilling, as if you're happy, (nodded assent, murmurs of agreement) did you foresee that when you were married, is this what you wanted the future to look like when you were married?

Cheryl: I think when we got married we did, but when you go through the mid...

Fran: when you go through the hard years

Cheryl: the mid section; the drinking part; the partying; the almost splitting; and...

Fran: been through it all

Cheryl: and coming back together; you realize what it's worth; that you've got to plant a tree and wait years to see the fruit.

531

Steve: so you had some tough times?

Fran: oh yeah

Cheryl: absolutely

Steve: share a little about that

Cheryl: go ahead Fran! (laughter) I dare ya! (laughter)

Fran; we got together on the basis that we were going to go out and party all the time. So we never really knew how to communicate without partying and alcohol being involved. So we decided, you know we need to stop this drinking and stuff. And then we realized we have to talk to each other. We found there were some things we don't like about each other. And so we began to talk through it and there were some things that bother me about you, and bother you about me. That takes years. Really. It takes years to get to know a person. I feel that I know her now, and I think she knows me.

Cheryl: I think so too.

546

Steve: so did you find yourselves changing a little bit to accommodate each other?

Cheryl: absolutely. I had to let go of a luggage, a lot of baggage, things that were taught to me about being black, about how he would treat me, different stereotypes. I had to let go of a lot of that stuff. I had to see Fran not colorblind, but as a black man, and I had to make myself get into his world. I had to make myself get into his world, and to get interested in the things he's interested in. There were only a few things that we are interested in the same. We're really a lot different, now that we're getting older in our relationship, we're really a lot different and that's exciting because we realize that you may not like this group but that's all right, that's fine, I'll go see them. And that's the way I am with him, I don't feel as though I have to be involved with his jazz gigs all the time because that's not where my passion is, but I always felt as though it was supposed to be like that. We realized that this is the way I am, take it or leave it. We also went to a really good counselor when we were at a really fragile stage in our relationship. He told us that we had no basis for divorce and that we needed to learn to get past this. [he said] if we were chained together what would either one of us have to get used to that the other one did. I would have to get used to him playing gigs; because I was with him, I was chained to him. He didn't give us an out, never gave us an out. From that point, divorce was not an option. Unless somebody was getting abused then we had to stick it out. How do you stay married for fifty years? Stay married. It's really not a big secret. Stay married.

574

Steve: so you decided to overcome the rough spots. From that point forward what happened in your relationship?

Cheryl: a lot of crying

Fran: we've matured, we stopped, I stopped thinking about me, as much. Cheryl started thinking about the things she needed, things that the family needed. Once again, just growing up.

Cheryl: I think the biggest thing for me was just being able to talk to you about deep things. For a long time in our marriage, I wouldn't talk to you about past things or talk about things that would present itself into a confrontation. We were very surface for a while. When I realized that you are timing sensitive and I needed to know when to talk to you about certain things; and we started to become in tune with each other. I would come to talk to you about deep things when you were on your way to a gig; I know that it would be selfish of me to burden you with something else. Now I realize that you have

my best interests in mind. That has changed my mind from just loving you to being in love with you and being in love with our life and realizing that we'll make it past that to the next big thing, whatever that big thing is. We're so much stronger; we're able to mentor younger couples. Tell them that in ten years that thing will not be important, just say you're sorry whether you are or not because that thing doesn't matter. It's trivial. Most things in life are trivial and don't matter. They are not life and death.

607

Steve: so, how would you counsel a bi-racial couple who are dating and thinking about getting married?

Fran: if somebody comes to me and wants to be a jazz musician I ask them "is there anything else you can do?" If you don't have to be a jazz musician, don't. I would say the same thing about inter-racial relationships. If you don't have to be with this person, don't, because it's hard. It's hard. You really catch it from all sides. But if you feel that you have to be with this person, then go for it and stick to it; don't be another statistic. It's not going to be easy. It's not easy. You are not only going to get attacks from the outside; you're going to get attacks from the inside. You start thinking "what would it feel like to be out?" "how would it be different?" "I wouldn't have to deal with this, I wouldn't have to deal with that." So, if this is something you don't have to do, don't.

Cheryl: we have told friends that it is hard. I think a lot of times about my niece (she's white, obviously) who has a child by a black guy, is she doing it because that's a fad? And I don't want her to invest her life in a fad if it's not something that she's....I don't want to see her get involved with it and that it's too hard for her and get a divorce. It is hard, but it is worth it. Now I can't see myself anywhere else. There are times I forget that we're mixed...

Fran: I do too...

Cheryl: and there are times I'm very aware of it. Like with our neighbors, very white neighbors that have been nothing but rude to us. I have been sharing with Steve earlier that when I'm with you'll I'm with you all, but when you and the children are away you're black but I'm white, they don't know about you. I have guilt about that, I deal with that all the time. My children are black but I can never be black and teach them how to be black. I can't do that. It's a difficult life, it's worth it, I fell in love with Fran, I fell in love with the person.

671

Fran: there are times I come to the realization that wow, she's white! I've done that. I don't know how you come to that, to be honest. It becomes just another characteristic.

683

Steve: is that what happens when race isn't the most important factor?

Cheryl: there are times when I feel that he's been discriminated against then my guard goes up. [general joking and anecdotes]

Fran: there are certain situations when she'll say "Fran, you're walking black now!"

Cheryl: tell them about the shoes issue. That's a huge difference, a cultural difference with us. You are never without shoes. I am always without shoes. It's a culture thing, remember you told me it's because slaves were barefoot, so to have shoes on is a sign of

freedom, where to me to have shoes off is a sign of freedom. He says, "please put your shoes on," the kids have to have their shoes on in the house, it makes me crazy.

Fran: it's true, I guess that's one of the joys of life. Getting to understand, really dig into another culture. Not just white/black things, but Greek stuff, Latino's, there's just so much stuff out there. It's not just about dating, it's becoming knowledgeable about other cultures. Hopefully we stop seeing it that way, stop seeing it as inter racial marriage. It's just a marriage of different cultures.

730

Steve: I want to thank you, both of you for taking all this time tonight, and for being so free with your time.

Section Four

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Suggested Readings on Inter-Racial Marriage

- Alonso, K. (2000) *Loving v. Virginia / Interracial Marriage*
Berkeley Heights, NJ Enslow Publishers, Inc.
Summary: Explores the Supreme Court case that challenged and eventually overturned Virginia's law forbidding interracial marriage.
- Dalmage, H. (1965) *Tripping On The Color Line*
New Brunswick, NJ Rutgers University Press
Summary: explores the cultural ramifications of multi-ethnic marriages and the families that result.
- Grapes, B. Editor (2000) *Interracial Relationships*
San Diego, CA. Greenhaven Press
Summary: a collection of essays on interracial marriage. Some interesting views, some are rather extreme.
- Hohman, K. (2002) *The Colors Of Love / A Black Person's Guide To Interracial Relationships*
Chicago, IL. Lawrence Hill Books
Summary: A complete exploration of the facets of interracial relationship. Includes information on weddings, medical concerns and more. Good resource.
- Landau, E. (1993) *Interracial Dating And Marriage*
New York, NY Simon & Schuster
Summary: Surveys the history of interracial marriage superficially. Presents experiences of interracial dating experiences.
- Root, M. (2001) *Love's Revolution*
Philadelphia, PA. Temple University Press
Summary: A very thorough investigation of the nature of racial relations centered around interracial marriage. Includes interviews and studies to support the conclusions.

Suggested Video on Inter-Racial Marriage

Title: Story of a People, Volume One

Subject: Interracial Relationships

Comments: A collection of interviews with interracial couples together with others around them. Presents both positive and negative viewpoints.

Hosted by Louis Gossett, Jr.

Quality of Life Questions Asked During Interview

Interview with Cheryl Wyatt

016

Steve: "When you were younger what did you want to do with your life, did you have any over-riding ambition that you wanted to do?"

Cheryl: "I never, we never really were taught to aspire past high school. So my goal was to graduate high school and that's about as far as I ever, I thought once I graduated high school that was it, I never really thought past that. I never, we never were really were taught to think past that. Our parents never went to college, my dad went to the navy young, he was, he graduated when he was in the navy, at that time you could go in and then graduate, so, he was pretty young. And he met my mother and she was pretty young, they got married, and she had four kids in five years, by the time she was thirty-two they had all these children, we were never taught to want anything more than ... it was just unnatural to them. Talk about going to college you just, nobody in our family had."

431

Steve" "So, what does the future look like for you?"

Cheryl: "The future, right now, doesn't look like it's on a straight path. It feels like it's going somewhere, but I don't see the end of the road. I don't know where that ends. I believe that God's growing us in places that ... I didn't... He was kinda sneaky and He was growing us. My husband was talking about going to seminary and getting stronger in our work and getting stronger in our faith. We'd like to be able to home school, first of all, that's practical for us, and put our children in a school that is feeding them. Music will always of our lives. It's a love/hate relationship. I love it when I'm doing it and at times I hate it when I'm doing it. It's like an addiction; I can't seem to put it down. That's the way it is for both of us. I have caught my husband in the studio in our house writing music 'til the sun comes up... with his eyes shut and he can't even crawl anymore. It's like flipping the remote... you just can't stop doing it.

446

Steve: "That's interesting. What's your idea of a good life?"

Cheryl: "That's funny! I was thinking of that today because I heard a song on the radio today called the "Good Stuff." The good life to me, my goal in life, is to raise children that want to be around me when I am old. The bad life was what's behind me. There's good behind me and there will be bad ahead of me, but I feel like I'm such a different person now because I have lived through it and survived it. I survived all that and came

out the other side. I don't feel like a victim, I'm a survivor of my own abuse. God has seen me through, and he's going to take me places that are going to be really really scary for me. I know His will isn't always comfortable, but I can always trust it. So, the good life is where I am right now. In a little bit of chaos, with family around me that loves me.

Interview with Francis Wyatt

083

Steve: "When you were younger did you have any desire what you wanted to do with your life?"

Fran: "Yeah, I wanted to be a big star. I thought I'd be playing drums with... I don't know who, but really I thought that music was for me. I thought I would be traveling and touring, that type of thing, that's what I really wanted to do apart from my really young age. I love computers too. I tried to move back and forth from that and computer science, but at that time if I had had my rathers, it would have been music. That's pretty much what I've done."

345

Steve: What's the future look like?

Fran: What's the future look like...

Steve: Where would you like to be, what would you like to be doing, what would you like to achieve?

Fran: It used to be... if you had asked me five years ago, it would have been 'within the next two years, I want to be receiving my first Dove Award', if you had asked me that two years ago. Now, it's 'I want to be used more by God to speak against racial injustice and racial reconciliation and things of that type'. I've even shared with Cheryl the slight possibility of politics. The whole race thing is a big issue in my life. So if there's anything right now that I could think of that I would want to do, it would be to just all of who I am to confront that issue. For whatever reason, I realize that my whole life has always been surrounded by that... just the diversity I kinda find myself feeling kinda sad for those who haven't experienced that because there's so much out there. So many different things of different cultures that some things in this culture you just don't get in this one, some things you get in the Latino culture, there's a certain kind of passion that you find there, that you don't find in the African/American culture or the white culture. Then there's a ???366 in the Greek culture that you don't find in the Jewish culture. There's so much stuff out there and I think we just miss out on it, when we don't embrace how God has made everybody different.

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Interview with Francis and Cheryl Wyatt together

522

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Cheryl: the mid section; the drinking part; the partying; the almost splitting; and...

Fran: been through it all

Cheryl: and coming back together; you realize what it’s worth; that you’ve got to plant a tree and wait years to see the fruit.