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**The Vietnam Archive
Oral History Project
Interview with Cindy Williamson
Conducted by Kelly Crager
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Transcribed by Emilie Meadors**

NOTE: Any text included in brackets [] is information that was added by the narrator after reviewing the original transcript. Therefore, this information is not included in the audio version of the interview.

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1 Kelly Crager: This is Kelly Crager conducting and Oral History Interview with
2 Ms. Cindy Williamson. Today is August 30, 2010. I am in Lubbock, Texas, on the
3 campus of Texas Tech University and Ms. Williamson is joining me by telephone from
4 her home in Springfield, Missouri. Alright Ms. Williamson, please tell me some
5 background information about yourself. Can you tell me when you were born and where?

6 Cindy Williamson: I was born in Key West, Florida, on October 2, 1958.

7 KC: And what were your parent's names?

8 CW: Jerry and Phyllis Staples.

9 KC: Jerry and Phyllis Staples. I should point out that you're obviously the
10 daughter of Jerry Staples. We've conducted an interview with your father.

11 CW: Right, correct.

12 KC: As part of the Navy, the River Division 593 in Vietnam during his two tours
13 there. Did you have any brothers or sisters?

14 CW: Yeah, I had a sister. She's four years younger than me and then a brother
15 that's six years younger than me; Cathy and Mitch.

16 KC: Now, your father spent a lot of time in the United States Navy, and you said
17 that you were born in Key West, Florida. So, you were born while he was stationed down
18 there. Is that correct?

1 CW: Yes, that's correct.

2 KC: Now tell me, if you can, about growing up in the Staples Family. Tell me
3 about your mother, tell me about your father and what they were doing in growing up.

4 CW: Of course, my mom was the one that raised us mainly because my dad was
5 gone a lot. Even though we were stationed in San Diego most of the time, most of his
6 tour, he was still out on ships or over in Vietnam. He was over there twice for two years.
7 So, for when I was growing up those years, he wasn't home a lot. She was very strong
8 and a very good mom.

9 KC: Were there any particular hardships you remember? And this is prior to your
10 father's going to Vietnam, in terms of your mother being, for all intents and purposes,
11 while Mr. Staples was away, being a single mom, raising a family, moving from place to
12 place?

13 CW: No, we really had a normal family. We enjoyed when my dad came home.
14 We went camping a lot and did a lot of hiking together. He'd take me hunting. He did
15 real good about taking us one on one. My mom got me started in softball which is
16 probably the best thing she'd ever done. I remember him not being at most of the games,
17 but then he was at the one where I was going to see if I got in All-stars or not and I got hit
18 in the eye. I was pitching the ball and got hit in the eye and started crying. They said,
19 "Are you crying because it's hurting?" I said, "No, I'm crying because my dad's
20 watching and I'm probably embarrassing him."

21 KC: Oh wow.

22 CW: Yeah.

23 KC: And how old were you when that happened?

24 CW: I was probably about nine.

25 KC: Probably about nine, okay. Well, what other sorts of things did you and your
26 family, your sister, your younger brother—what sorts of things did you do as kids?

27 CW: Well, we went on vacations back to Marceline, that's where my mom and
28 dad both—they were high school sweethearts. We went to vacation back here probably
29 about every other year and then when we didn't come back, one of my grandparents
30 would usually come out there, out to California to visit us. They'd take us to Disneyland
31 and Knox Berry Farm whenever we had company and things like that. Mainly we just

1 went camping and my dad played softball, I remember that. I loved playing softball with
2 him because my mom would throw the ball like a girl. My dad would throw it hard, and I
3 liked that.

4 KC: Did your grandparents play a major or important role in your life since your
5 father was gone?

6 CW: Not really because they were back here in Missouri, and we were in
7 California. We were in California most of the time even though he was in Vietnam, we
8 stayed out there. My mom had a sister out there, my aunt, and that was the only family
9 we had out there. So, we would go there on weekends and stuff like that. I remember my
10 mom talking for hours to my aunt while my dad would be gone. That would be the time
11 you wanted to ask if you wanted to do anything.

12 KC: Right, right.

13 CW: Because she'd say yes. She'd take us to the beach. She'd take me and my
14 girlfriends out to the beach sometimes. We had a good life.

15 KC: Prior to your father's deployment to Vietnam for the first time, did you
16 remember having any sort of issues or difficulties or excitement in terms of moving
17 around from place to place?

18 CW: No, we didn't really move that much, not really.

19 KC: How old were you when your father first deployed to Vietnam? I believe it
20 was in 1964.

21 CW: Yeah, I was about six years old.

22 KC: Six years old. What do you remember about that first time your father was
23 going to leave for a year?

24 CW: All I really remember is that my mom was sad. I remember him leaving
25 and, you know, he would leave for like a week at a time to go train people for boot camp
26 or things like that or two weeks at a time. One time he left, and I thought he was gone,
27 and I jumped in bed with my mom, and he had broken his leg when he was training. We
28 had these guys and maybe that was after he had gone to Vietnam, I don't know, but he
29 broke his leg and had a cast on it, and I jumped on that. I don't know why I thought of
30 that. Anyway, I don't really remember a whole lot about it. I don't know why. I don't
31 remember much of him leaving that time.

1 KC: So, you don't recall the scene of him actually leaving that morning?

2 CW: Oh yeah, we said goodbye in the driveway. He wouldn't let my mom take
3 him to the airport.

4 KC: Now, I remember your father explaining that scene to me. Can you do it from
5 your perspective? I think it would be very interesting to hear what your father said about
6 it and then hear what you had to say.

7 CW: Well, there's nothing really for me to explain except that I remember that
8 everybody was sad. I believe it was our landlord that was taking my dad to the airport,
9 and everybody was crying and upset, and it was hard to see my dad like that, you know?
10 That's basically all I remember. We all just thought he was going to be gone for a couple
11 weeks or something. I had a baby brother then.

12 KC: Right, yes, your brother. Now, you were the oldest of the children when your
13 father left for the first time. Granted, six year olds probably have a limited understanding
14 of being away for that long. A year is a very, very long time for a six year old. What kind
15 of role do you remember playing as the oldest of these young children in a family whose
16 father had been sent off to war?

17 CW: Well, the first time when he was over there, I was probably just the big
18 bratty sister. I didn't take a whole bunch of responsibility or anything like that. That
19 pretty much came the second time that he went. The first time I was just annoyed with
20 my brother and sister is all.

21 KC: And them probably with you, too.

22 CW: I imagine. My mom said I was a lot of help to her, but I don't remember
23 things like that.

24 KC: Does anything come to your mind—again, this is a year without your father.
25 Does anything come to your mind about being particularly difficult while he was gone?

26 CW: My brother had a lot of bronchitis when he was born. So, there was trips to
27 the hospital. My sister cried a lot. I don't know if she had something wrong now, but she
28 cried a lot. I think she missed my dad probably more than me for some reason. I don't
29 know what the deal was. I don't know if she was just a momma's baby or what, but my
30 mom had gotten Tennis Elbow from carrying my sister around all over the place. Of
31 course, my mom was nervous about him, my dad, being over there. And then my brother

1 ate all the time, I remember that. I know that she got real skinny, my mom did. I don't
2 know, that's a lot of stress.

3 KC: Stress and worry.

4 CW: Yeah, you've got two little babies and I was only six. She had these two
5 little babies to take care of and he was sick all the time and Kathy got Scarlentine, but
6 I'm not sure if my dad was there for that or not. We ended up having to take her to the
7 hospital. Yeah, that's a lot of stress for my mom.

8 KC: Absolutely a certainly challenging time with the family at home and things
9 you have to deal with there as well has having a father in the war zone. Six years old, so
10 you would have been in kindergarten by this time?

11 CW: Yup.

12 KC: And this was your kindergarten year in San Diego then?

13 CW: Actually, I was in the first grade, I think, because I started kindergarten
14 when I was four. I would have been in first grade.

15 KC: Do you remember anything—and this may be asking a lot for a first grader to
16 remember, especially forty-some odd years later, but do you remember anything about
17 the war or any sort of news coverage about the war or anyone talking about it?

18 CW: I remember my mom watching the TV about it and at certain times she
19 would cry, and she would shut it off. She really tried—I can remember her trying not to
20 watch the news, but she would watch it once in a while and she would cry. At that point I
21 didn't have any of my school friends or anything saying anything about the war.

22 KC: Again—

23 CW: I'm not sure there was even much going on at that point over there.

24 KC: Yeah, for the U.S. back at that time, we weren't nearly as active as we would
25 be later, certainly for your father's second tour. This is 1964, 1965, in the advisory phase
26 at the time that he left. Well, your father comes home in 1965. You're a year older, your
27 family's a year older. Your mother may have aged a lot more in that one year than just
28 chronologically. What do you remember about your dad's return?

29 CW: I don't remember the day that he came home, but I remember that things just
30 kind of slid back into normalcy. My mom wasn't so stressed and the whole time that my
31 dad was gone, I don't think we ever went anywhere or did anything. My mom didn't

1 really want to go to the commissary I don't think. When he came home then we started
2 going places, doing things. He would take me to the zoo, and I remember he would take
3 me to some place, and we would go squirrel hunting. We got up one morning and went
4 fishing. I think I slept the whole time I went fishing. I just remember it went back to
5 normalcy then and I really couldn't tell the difference in him.

6 KC: Do you remember the reunion? The first time seeing your father after he's
7 been gone through all this time?

8 CW: Not that time, no. I remember my mother cleaning house to be spotless. I
9 just, you know, it was like, "Why would you clean house? Is dad coming home?"

10 KC: Well, none the less it must have felt terrific to see your dad again.

11 CW: Oh yeah. Well, in my mind I was like, "Oh my god, thank goodness because
12 now things are going back to normalcy again."

13 KC: Now, your father will spend the next few years there in San Diego. He'd
14 done a lot of training, training of recruits and doing various different things there. What
15 was life like for you growing up in those few years before your father was called to
16 service again?

17 CW: Like I said, he'd play softball and we'd go camping. I don't know, I'm
18 probably guessing, but at least once a month we would go camping with friends and we
19 would come back on vacations, and he'd take us up to North Missouri to see snow one
20 time. You could tell that he was putting a lot of effort in to being a parent. So was mom,
21 mom always did. We had a really good time.

22 KC: So, you settled back in for an extended period of normalcy as you said. Now,
23 your dad would again be called to go to Vietnam with the PBR's (Patrol Boat, River),
24 with the river division. What do you remember about your father being called back?

25 CW: I remember that I thought—I'm older at this point, like ten or eleven, and
26 I'm thinking, "He's already over there one time. I don't think that's fair that he would
27 have to go back." And then my grandparents just said his parents came back to California
28 to see him before he left. I'm not sure whose idea it was, but we decided to go to the
29 Navy Exchange and buy some tape recorders so we could send tapes back and forth. So,
30 we got three, one for him in Vietnam, one for my grandparents, and one for us. I ever
31 heard my grandma say, "I don't understand why he's going back. He doesn't have to go

1 back. He's the only child, the only son. I don't understand." She was just kind of
2 hysterical at that point. I'm not even sure my dad ever heard her say that or anything. At
3 that point I'm thinking, "Then why is he going? Does he not love us? Why would he
4 rather be over there than with us? He's already been over there, done his tour, why does
5 he want to go back?" I got angry. Over that year that he was gone I was angry at him for
6 being there. I don't know, I feel really bad for saying that, but it's the truth.

7 KC: I think that's certainly understandable for a young child to see this happen
8 again. Do you remember him leaving the house a second time?

9 CW: Yeah, yeah. Again, he would not take us to the airport. We couldn't go the
10 airport and I'm not even sure who took him that time. I remember standing in the
11 driveway again and then I think we were told to go back inside so that him and mom
12 could say goodbye by herself that time.

13 KC: So, your father's going for a second tour with the Navy in Vietnam. I don't
14 know, did your parents make it known to you that this would be in a different capacity?
15 Because the second tour was considerably more dangerous than his first tour. Did they
16 mention that or keep you away from that?

17 CW: You know, I don't think that they did, but I knew, I knew that people were
18 getting killed over there. I don't know, at that time I probably thought that it was just as
19 dangerous the first time so why would he do this again? God gave him his life so why,
20 you know, I don't know, why would you gamble to try to lose it again?

21 KC: Well, you mentioned that you're a little older for the second one. You're ten
22 or eleven years old and more aware of what's going on around the world. You mentioned
23 that you knew people were dying in Vietnam at this point. What did you know overall?
24 What was your overall level of understanding of what was going on?

25 CW: In my mind it was a poor country that was fighting. That's all I really knew
26 was fighting and that we were going to go over there and try to help in the war. We were
27 going to go over there in the war and then we were going to get out and that hopefully
28 would end while my dad was over there. I didn't know what he would be doing while he
29 was over there, I just knew that he was going.

1 KC: Tell me about this next year. You're older, your brother and sister were
2 older. More activities, more things going on. You have more understanding and greater
3 awareness. What was that second tour like for you and your family?

4 CW: I had a lot more responsibility as far as helping mom out with my brother
5 and sister. My mom talked to me a lot more. It was not necessarily about Vietnam or
6 anything, but she would talk to me about not really even many, I just felt like she was
7 able to talk to me easier and we were closer. Although, I gave her some hard times while
8 he was gone. I tried to run away from home one time. I ran across the street and over to
9 the school. So, she went running after me and my sister went running after her and my
10 sister almost got hit by a car and I gave her a lot of hard times and I don't know why.

11 KC: Do you remember what the particular issue was when you were trying to run
12 away?

13 CW: I'm sure it was something silly. She probably wouldn't let me do something.
14 I know a lot of times I was wanting to go to the beach, and she wouldn't take us, she
15 wouldn't let me go.

16 KC: Well, you say it was probably over something silly. In many ways, as any of
17 us who have daughters, I have a daughter about that age right now. A lot of those things
18 and a lot of it could be attributed to just a child trying to reach out and be their own
19 person and anger and all those kinds of things that come up. I would imagine that maybe
20 some of this had to do with your father being gone. Once again, there was some anger
21 and some misunderstanding on your part, and you obviously didn't think it was fair. I
22 don't want to put words in your mouth, but does that sound like that could be...?

23 CW: I know he was angry the whole time he was gone and I'm sure I did take it
24 out on her and I'm sure I took it out on my brother and my sister.

25 KC: Right.

26 CW: One of my responsibilities a lot of the time was to give them baths and I
27 wouldn't have any patience with them. I just wanted them to hurry up and get out of the
28 bathtub. I don't know, just for some reason I couldn't remember that. I remember telling
29 my brother one time that he was adopted. I don't know if that had anything to do with
30 him being over there or not (Cramer laughing). I mean, he actually cried, and I told him

1 not to say anything to mom because it would hurt her feelings if she knew that I had told
2 him. I just know I acted up a lot whenever that happened when he was over there.

3 KC: What about school? You're at the age to where you're learning a little bit
4 more about social studies and different things. What was school like for you going
5 through that period?

6 CW: I was doing the same—I was never a great student, but I don't think my
7 grades were ever shot down because of anything. I know that when we would bring the
8 war up in school I would feel—I never even thought of this until you brought it up. I felt
9 like maybe I should get a little attention because my dad was over there. I don't know
10 why I would feel that way. I didn't know anybody else in school that had a dad that was
11 in Vietnam.

12 KC: Okay, I was going to ask if it being San Diego and a large military presence
13 there if other children had their fathers there.

14 CW: No. I lived in Spring Valley which was a little way from the bases.

15 KC: So, what about the kids. There you are, again, for a year your father's gone
16 and he's not able to go to the dinners or the sporting events or whatever else is associated
17 with growing up and going to school. What was it like not to have your father available
18 there for you during that time?

19 CW: It was kind of embarrassing because my dad was not there. Of course, there
20 was other kids there that didn't have their dads there, but the majority of them were and I
21 just remember them feeling a little embarrassed and of course, I would get a little angry
22 at my dad for not being there. That's why whenever that time when I was playing softball
23 and the game to find out if I was going to make All-stars for the state or not, of all times,
24 I get hit in the head with the ball that time and I was just mortified. All I wanted to do
25 was make him proud and see what he missed out on. That's what I wanted to see.

26 KC: Your father had mentioned that one of his daughters, one of his classmates
27 said something to her about his father, about your father being in Vietnam. Was that you
28 or was that your sister?

29 CW: That was my sister.

1 KC: That was your sister. Did you find the other students and teachers supportive
2 of you given that your father was away at war or was it a non-issue or was there anything
3 there that you remember?

4 CW: No, nobody ever gave me any special attention for it or anything like that or
5 even spoke about it. I don't even know that they knew that my dad was over there.

6 KC: What do you think the hardest part of him being gone for this year was or not
7 just you, but for your family?

8 CW: The worry, the worry that he wouldn't come back (crying). I know that my
9 mom started taking classes for—I know she would take some sewing classes, she took
10 some typing classes and stuff. At that time, I don't really have any idea why she did it,
11 but I was afraid she was doing it because he wasn't going to come back and that she
12 would have to take care of us with finances and everything.

13 KC: As a ten or eleven year old girl with more access to more media, were you
14 keeping up with the news and what was going on?

15 CW: No.

16 KC: Were you trying to stay away from that or was news never your thing
17 anyway?

18 CW: News was never my thing anyway.

19 KC: Yeah, most kids won't be able to sit down and watch the news at eleven
20 years old. Did you know when your dad would come back? Did you have any idea what
21 day or what week or what month he would be back.

22 CW: No, I don't remember. I just know that the week before my mom was
23 cleaning the house again, you know, making it spotless. I remember her cleaning the
24 house, which was no problem, but then she started cleaning up the garage and wanting
25 me to help her clean the garage. I remember, we had a confrontation about it. I said,
26 "He's just coming home mom, why do you have to clean the garage? Big deal. I mean, it
27 was a big deal he was coming home, but why do you have to clean the garage?" I just
28 couldn't understand that. There was a part of me that was glad that—of course, I was so
29 glad he was coming home, I didn't want him to die, but at the other time I didn't think we
30 should have to clean the garage because I was so mad at him for going in the first place.

1 KC: That's a very interesting contradiction and emotions and approach to things
2 there. When it's not unexpected I wouldn't think. Obviously, you're thrilled that your
3 father's coming home, but like I say, you're harboring some resentment or bitterness that
4 he was gone in the first place.

5 CW: Yeah. I was glad he was coming home, but it just felt like maybe he didn't
6 love me as much as I loved him.

7 KC: Very interesting. Describe for me this second reunion with your dad when he
8 comes home.

9 CW: The day that he came home I was mad at my mom because she wouldn't let
10 me, and my two other girlfriends go to the beach. She wanted me to be there. I didn't
11 think that he would care. I told her, "He wouldn't care if I'm not there." And so, when he
12 came home, of course, I was glad to see him. All I remember really is just seeing him and
13 we hugged. That was all I remember.

14 KC: It's one thing to have this reunion as so incredibly important as it is, but the
15 reunion is one moment. What about the time after this? You're a preteen and in your
16 teenage years and in itself causes enough difficulty. And then you have this anger toward
17 your father because of his leaving and coming back. What was it like in your family,
18 from your perspective, following your return with your dad for the second time?

19 CW: It wasn't the same.

20 KC: In what ways?

21 CW: He was quiet. He was just quiet, and he would get angry. I can remember
22 going to a friend's house and he'd say, "Be home by six." Sometimes I would be a
23 minute or two late and he wouldn't think anything about it and another time I'd be a
24 minute late and he would just come unglued. He was just different. You know, of course
25 he was different, but I don't think I probably understood why he was different.

26 KC: Were you as close to him as you may have felt before?

27 CW: I don't think so. Before he went, I just felt like I was his little girl. My sister
28 was the girly girl, and I was into softball and stuff and my sister was into dance. I just felt
29 like we clicked and when he came back, we didn't. Some of that is because my brother
30 was older, and he could do things with him. Not that he has done a whole lot with my
31 brother.

1 KC: So, the family dynamic has changed here a little bit. Did you —you
2 mentioned before that you didn't really understand it was because of the war, but was
3 there any part of you that said, at any time, "Look, my dad was at war, sometimes wars
4 change people, and this is a part of it." Was that maybe not on your radar?

5 CW: I'm sure my mother had talked with me about it, you know? I don't really
6 remember the specific competition with her, but I'm sure she's talked about it with me.
7 But I really didn't have it in my heart to forgive him for a long, long time. You know, as
8 a teenager I might have just used that as an excuse to be angry and want the things I want
9 and not have to listen to him.

10 KC: What was the most challenging thing growing up in this family in the post-
11 Vietnam War service years?

12 CW: I don't think I understand the question.

13 KC: For the years from the time your father comes home and from the time that
14 you grow up and out of the family, you move onto do your own thing, what sort of things
15 stand out in your mind as being the most challenging in terms of you dealing with your
16 father, dealing with the rest of your family? What was the most challenging part of being
17 in that family until you left the home later on?

18 CW: His mood swings. Most definitely that was the most challenging. And then
19 me being a teenager, you know? We just did not see things. We didn't see things the
20 same way and I remember that whenever I got to be like a senior in high school I'd get to
21 stay up until one o'clock in the morning or something and I'd come home. He drank
22 every day, but he wasn't a drunk. I would get home at one o'clock in the morning and we
23 would have some of our best conversations at that time.

24 KC: When you say "best" what do you mean?

25 CW: Just he would talk to me about—I would even talk to him about a
26 relationship I was having with a guy, and he would talk to me about what they expected
27 and how I should just be strong. I don't know, I guess he maybe it just felt like he was
28 more laid back and we could talk.

29 KC: Very interesting.

30 CW: And other times I'd come home at one o'clock and I'd be two minutes late
31 and I'd be in big, huge trouble.

1 KC: Now, I ask you about the most challenging part of this time. What was the
2 most positive or rewarding part of this time?

3 CW: Probably the best part about it was that they came to us one time, we were
4 still living in San Diego and said, “Your dad’s being transferred.” We can either go to—I
5 can’t remember, it was some place really warm. I think one of them was Hawaii or we
6 could go to Alaska. My biggest fear was we wouldn’t come back to California and
7 promised we wouldn’t go back to California. So of course, I picked Hawaii and we ended
8 up going to Alaska, another reason for me to be angry. It was probably the best thing that
9 ever happened because we were stationed to Adak, Alaska, which was an Aleutian chain
10 island. Probably as I look back, if I had stayed in San Diego, I might have gotten into
11 drugs because a lot of my friends were playing with it. We spent a lot of time together
12 there as a family. We had a cabin there; we went every single weekend. We were there I
13 think three years. My dad only left one time and then that was for a couple of months.
14 That was the best time we ever had.

15 KC: How old were you when your family moved to Adak?

16 CW: Well, it wasn’t too long after he got back so probably about twelve or
17 thirteen maybe. Twelve or thirteen.

18 KC: And where did you go when you moved back from Alaska?

19 CW: My dad retired to Missouri, and I was angry then. I ended up running away
20 again, but that time I ran away to Georgia.

21 KC: What led you to Georgia?

22 CW: I didn’t care where we went. I just was mad because I moved to Missouri,
23 and I got a friend that lived up the street from me. Well, they moved us out to the country
24 of Missouri, too. I got a friend that lived down the road from us and an ex-boyfriend
25 because we lived in Missouri about a year. At that point my grandparents helped me buy
26 a car, but I didn’t want to take that car because I didn’t want to be found. I had like three
27 hundred dollars or six hundred dollars or something like that and bought a cheap, crappy
28 car and the three of us took off and my ex-boyfriend had a brother that was in the Army
29 in Georgia. So, we took off to Georgia. I don’t know what we were going to do.

30 KC: How old were you when you did this?

31 CW: Sixteen.

1 KC: Sixteen, so you're still in school.

2 CW: Yup. It was during the school year, too. My friend that went with me was a
3 year younger than me, so she ended up calling her family and her dad and my dad both
4 worked for the state highway department at the time and they both came and got us. I
5 remember meeting my dad in like a restaurant type thing and he said he wanted me to
6 come home, but it was my decision. So, I came home and the whole time—I don't even
7 know how many hours it takes to drive from Georgia to Missouri, but I sat in the back
8 seat, and he never said a word to me. I don't know if it was that night or the next night, I
9 went to him and asked if I could go to town that night and he set me down and he said,
10 "Cindy, you can go to town, but if you run away again, I'm not going to get you."

11 KC: How did that affect you? It's pretty powerful stuff.

12 CW: Well, you know what, it all boiled down that he came and got me, he came
13 and got me, so he loves me. So, I'm not going to run away again, I'm not going to take
14 that chance. So, I stuck it out, I stayed. I was never happy there, but I stuck it out.

15 KC: Do you think this helped to clear up any issues about his attitude towards
16 you? The fact that he came down and got you?

17 CW: Yeah, I never really thought about it before, but I probably, yeah.

18 KC: When do you graduate from high school—?

19 CW: He was mad at me because when I left, I put a note in my car that I had left,
20 and I don't even know what the note said. I put it in my car because my mom would be
21 the first one home and I didn't want her to find the note by herself because she'd been
22 through things all by herself forever. So, I wanted my dad to find it. He was mad at me
23 because she found that note all by herself.

24 KC: Did she ever talk to you about what that did to her?

25 CW: No, I don't think my mom ever did talk to me about that. I mean, I'm sure
26 she did, but I don't remember it. I always knew my mom loved me and I would never
27 hurt her on purpose. I know I've hurt her because I was angry, but I never hurt her on
28 purpose.

29 KC: When did you graduate high school?

30 CW: 1977.

31 KC: 1977. What did you want to do once you graduated high school?

1 CW: I wanted to do underwater ballet at Sea World in San Diego.

2 KC: Is that right?

3 CW: That's right.

4 KC: How did that thought get into your head?

5 CW: Actually, I wanted to be a marine biologist, but I wasn't good enough in

6 math or science. So, then I wanted to go out there. And my mom would have sworn that

7 that's what I would end up doing, but I ended up getting a boyfriend and ended up in

8 Missouri. I ended up marrying him and having two kids. I was up there and went through

9 a divorce. I moved up there maybe—let's see, I think I moved up there thirteen years

10 from the time we moved there until I had my kids and everything and then I got the

11 divorce and I moved down here to Springfield.

12 KC: And how old were your children when you got divorced?

13 CW: Nine and eleven.

14 KC: That's a tough time for them.

15 CW: Yeah, yeah.

16 KC: After going through the things that you went through as a child, as you

17 became a parent on your own, I'm sure a lot of things become a little bit clear why your

18 parents did what they did. It's seemingly what we all go through.

19 CW: Oh yeah.

20 KC: Did your experiences affect the way you approached parenting?

21 CW: You would have thought they would have, but I don't think they did.

22 KC: Do you think that a different kind of perspective or insight on why your kids

23 may have been behaving the way they were at one time or another?

24 CW: I don't know, my kids were nothing—I mean, they were nothing like me.

25 They weren't temperamental, they were very good kids. I was very lucky, I don't know.

26 Yeah, probably because I did make sure that I was at all of their games and got them

27 involved in things even though they really didn't want to be. My daughter didn't want to

28 be, she didn't care to be in dance or anything like that. My son played football for a long

29 time, but I don't know.

30 KC: What kind of relationship did you have with your mother, and especially

31 your father as an adult?

1 CW: Um, I think we've all be really close since I've grown up. I think we've all
2 been—you know, whenever I grew up and moved out and we would talk on the phone
3 and my dad has always been the one to say, "I love you" before we hang up, always. My
4 mom took a little bit longer. She had a lot of siblings, and I don't know what that had to
5 do with it, but she, for a long time would never say that, but she does now, she says it. I
6 don't know, for when we were growing up there wasn't a lot of hugging, but there sure is
7 now.

8 KC: Have you forgiven your father?

9 CW: Yes. You know, I forgave him a long time ago, but I don't think either one
10 of us even realized—he might not have known that I was angry at him, I don't know. I
11 never came out and told him, you know? In 2008 I went to a game warden's reunion and
12 met a lot of his buddies that he was there with, and I just can't even imagine coming
13 home and having your country not celebrate with you or appreciate you or honor you.
14 And then to have your own daughter, you know, be pissed at you. I just can't imagine.
15 When we were there in 2008, I talked to him about it a little bit and I asked him what it
16 felt like to not only come home to the country like that, but to your daughter being pissed
17 and he just got a tear in his eye, and he says that I had to hope that I grew up and figure it
18 out for myself why he was over there. And now I'm just so proud of him.

19 KC: Do you feel guilty about the resentment that you harbored?

20 CW: Yes, yes. Wasted a lot of time being angry. I've done a lot of blaming. You
21 know, another thing is, when it was just me and my dad we never talked about—he never
22 talked about Vietnam. He never talked about what he'd done over there. I've heard him
23 talk about a couple of stories about other guys and how brave they were and what they
24 went through, but never one time he'd say, "And I'd done this." But whenever I was at
25 the reunion, his comrades told me these gracious stories and I'm just so honored to have
26 him as a dad. Blessed, very blessed.

27 KC: Ms. Williamson, I just have one more question for you. It's a pretty broad
28 general one so interpret it and answer it however you see fit. How did your father's
29 service in Vietnam most affect your life?

30 CW: Overall, when it was all set and done?

31 KC: Sure.

1 CW: Just growing up I knew that my dad was an angry man and I'm just so glad
2 that he had that anger in him to get him through. I think that all of us grew up probably
3 better for it. That he went there, you know? We learned a lot. I think when I go to work, I
4 put my all into it. My brother and I talked about this awhile back. Say you had a quota of
5 sixty. My quota's always seventy-two or eighty because I put my all into it because that's
6 the way my dad's always done it. That's the way he raised us. You do what you can and
7 then you do some more. I think that's awesome.

8 KC: So, do you look at this as being a positive experience despite the negative. I
9 seem to hear you saying is that overall, something very positive came out of this. Am I
10 reading that correctly?

11 CW: Yes, yes. You know, as kids you don't realize what you're going through,
12 what your family's going through, what your dad's going through. When you grow up,
13 you look back and you see how strong of a person your father, or your mother is that's
14 serving and then you know that a part of that is in you. If they can do that, so can I. I
15 learned that he was over there because of me. Now he's fighting for my freedom, for my
16 rights. Say no or yes, I learned that, but it took a long time to learn it. So yes, I'm proud
17 of him and I'm glad he did it. Thirty-five years later, forty years later.

18 KC: Very good, very good. Is there anything else you would like to add, Ms.
19 Williams?

20 CW: No, that's it. I think I'm done.

21 KC: You think you're done?

22 CW: Yeah, I think I'm done.

23 KC: Okay, we'll go ahead and end the interview then. Thank you very much.

24 CW: Thank you