

**Interview with
Charles Switt
by Michelle Meadows,
July 5, 1997**

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Released Form signed by Charles Switt
July 5, 1997, at the Simmons High School Reunion,
Marriott Hotel, Charleston, West Virginia

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Note: In the original transcript there were blank spaces.
These have been indicated by [blank space] in the following text.

Charles Switt Interview

Charles Switt: ... a number of times. We would go there for picnics oh, maybe couple of times a year. So, then Eastern Gas and Fuel, which was known as Carples Coal Company, they sponsored a summer camp program, and we would go there. And then we went there under the Boy Scouts, and stayed in tents. So I've been there a number of times, but I couldn't tell you exactly when. In the 40's my father went there under the coal mine and union, took the examination for mine inspector, qualification for mine bosses and so forth. I knew it was in the 40's because I drove him up and they stayed a weekend. And I went back and got him. So back then there was a lot of activity going on. I just can't tell you dates and years. But I went there quite often. And I've been there a few times in the years that it has been remodeled, you know. Probably a couple of times, I guess.

Michelle Meadows: [inaudible] ... the fact was I was sick when they had the reunion, and I had the flu. So I couldn't go up there. [inaudible due to background noises] [missing audio]

CS: ...which is the suburbs of Washington, D.C. (**MM:** Oh, okay) They're real close.

MM: I've never ...I went to D.C. once when I was younger, and I never ... we went there a couple of times. I went when I was like in 6th grade. (**CS:** Yeah) And they always show you like the Lincoln Memorial, the Washington Memorial and all this sort of thing. And I never really got to see like where people live (**CS:** Yeah) and just a tour. Uh...want to know ... are you retired? Is there like any volunteer work you do or anything? Or...?

CS: I'm retired.

MM: You say you were a Colonel?

CS: No, that's the other fellow.

MM: Oh, okay, I'm sorry, I'm sorry. Okay, what did you used to do?

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CS: I worked for the Metropolitan Transit Authority. First operated a train, manager on the rail system, that type of thing.

MM: Oh, okay. Are you married? (**CS:** I'm single) You're single? [chuckling]

CS: It's very rewarding, you know. If you're on the move all the time.

MM: Yeah, I do know. I'm not married, and I probably won't get married until I'm probably around 50. [laughing] With trying to get my education and everything... it's a mess. Uhm...okay, so you don't remember how many times that you went down to the camp. But you remember going several times, but not....

CS: Well, every summer I was at the camp, maybe not as a camper, but picnics, you know, every year. We used to go there every year, two or three times a year. Maybe the churches would take a bus. And then my family owned property in the area, and we would go, as a family, and go as groups. So I was up there quite often. And I can't pinpoint the times, because that's years ago. And I was very uh...fortunate to go there. And I knew all around, you know, had a couple [blank space] It was just a place that we visited, you know. Had nice times.

MM: I never went to camp (**CS:** Yeah), never went to camp. We always, I always used to stay with my family, but we never,,, because see, when people, when they talk about the camp experiences and things, I'm dying.[blank space] [laughter]

CS: The times we stayed, I think, in the campground facilities and as Boy Scouts, we would pitch tents. Much as I can remember, you know. I was in, I think, softball and we really enjoyed the pool, you know. It was out of the way ... quiet. It was years ago.

MM: Do you remember uh, approximately like, were you really young when you went to the camp, or were you a teenager? Do you remember anything like that or....? When you first started?

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CS: Well, we started going there ... maybe 12, 13, 14, some place [blank space] Yeah, because I came out of high school at 17. And I never went back, you know, doing any camping. These were before. **MM:** Right. Well, you said you remembered pitching tents, and you were part of the Boy Scouts. Do you remember anything else that you used to do, besides like did you have any kind of ... I don't know ... just general activities? Do you remember any more besides pitching the tents and just doing....? Did you have like ... I'm trying to think ... were there anything like crafts or....?

CS: Yeah, they had crafts there. And you know, sports activities. They had a, enough facilities to keep you busy, as far as I can remember. It was ... it was just like going out in the woods and nothing to do. It seemed to be, as much as I can remember. It was planned, you know. You had different things to do. It wasn't all that boring. At that age. [laughing] It wasn't the worst thing to do.

MM: Were you around just uh...were you around kids your age? I mean, or like boys? Or were you around girls, or were you around both? Or were you around the boys just the majority of the time?

CS: [inaudible] ... church activities and families, you know, we had everybody. But I'm positive that if we went sponsored, they would send boys one week, and girls the next week. (**MM:** Oh, okay) It wasn't a co-education like it is now. (**MM:** Okay) And they had

CS: I hadn't been there in years, but just the appearance of it. And the facilities and there was probably more craft work. It looked like they upgraded it. And even the had been improved. When it was integrated, they improved a whole of things that should have been done when it was segregated. And now, I think they have different groups to come in. There's more activity and more money has been spent in it since it's been integrated, which should have been done before. You know, they had but I've never been to it. And I'm sure that it was better facilities there than when it was as George Washington Carver. I haven't been there. It has been years since I've been to it now, and there's probably a lot of improvement from then.

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MM: Okay. Let me see here [blank space] This is a question that they want me to ask. Do you think that African American kids are missing something by being sent to the camp where they have the mixture of races, or do you think...? What do you think about that?

CS: Well, I don't have any idea. [inaudible] always lived in an integrated community, this old boy, you know. We moved in a part of which was, it wasn't really segregated. But uh, these people lived in different sections. But I have white neighbors back from the '40s, you know. And I live in the same type of neighborhood now. So, a lot of this I can't answer because I don't... And I ain't going back as far as I can remember. [blank space] [inaudible]... my grandparents had white neighbors, you know, next-door neighbors and so forth. (**MM:** Right, right) But the only thing I can see is the different classes of schools where they didn't put the equipment in that they should have. Just like George Washington Carver. It [inaudible] ... money that was spent in it after they integrated, it should have been spent years ago when it was occasions and so forth, picnics. We had a private picnic all the time. So it meant more to some other people than it meant to me.

MM: Because you were busy and you were very family-oriented. (**CS:** Yeah) Whereas someone wasn't, it was more like the camp was like an escape where they could go and have fun. Yeah, yeah. It was just for me, when I was younger and we had softball, and baseball and all those kinds of things. And I didn't do a lot of stuff with my parents, because my dad was also, he was a miner. He worked for [blank space] Coal Company and he used to work the [blank space] shift, you know, 'til like ... he work start I'd say probably at 1 o'clock in the afternoon, and he would come home like at 2 in the morning. And I never spent a lot of time with my family. So when we went to camp and everything, it was like softball camp or something like that. I looked forward to that, because I got to spend time with other kids and you know, we could talk and have fun. And you didn't have to worry about anything else going on.

CS: Yeah, before going to George Washington Carver, the coal company would sponsor summer camps up [inaudible] [blank space] It was before you would get to Belville on the right side of the highway going up. Now it was disastrous to me, living in whatchamacallit houses,

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you know, with no screen in it and bugs and so forth. I would only stay a day or two, then leave. [inaudible]... .going to camp at Carver it was better quality. The coal camps would require something and they would have activities, softball and football in the communities. I don't know if other areas had the same thing, but we had plenty of activities. So it wasn't just, it wasn't the only thing. Which was helpful. It kept your brothers from swimming in the creek and stuff.

MM: [laughing] Yeah, I understand. We used to go swimming in the creek. And then you get your toe bitten.

CS: You had to work to dam it up, though. That was one thing we liked about the camp, you know, they had the swimming pool, and the water was deeper.

MM: Well, we used to always get into trouble. (**CS:** Yeah) My mom would be running after us. And my grandmother would run after us with a hickory stick. And.... (**CS:** Yeah, it was good for you) She'd say ... we used to go run around and everything, so I totally, I understand what you're trying to say, so [blank space] We used to live outside of Summersville and I went to school in a real tiny, tiny community. There wasn't much for us to do at all. Let' see here [blank space] Is there anything you want to talk about? Like some of the things you remember besides the things you told me about the camp? Like is there any kind of story that you'd like to share or.... and talk about what a good experience that you had one summer or....?

CS: Well, you know, all the summers were enjoyable. I don't know if one, which one stood out above the other. You know, to me it was a fine place to go, but it wasn't the thing. But other people probably wasn't family-oriented like we were or had transportation. Maybe you'd talk to other people who'd tell you how great it was, you know, with them. But it was just something for me and my family to do, and it wasn't the only thing to be done.

MM: Did you have any brothers or sisters?

CS: Yeah, I had two sisters. And one of them taught at Valley High School until she died ... seven year back in '92. And uh, my other sister's a few years younger than I

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am. She attended camp there.

MM: Oh, okay. So usually, so what was the ... did you usually come home and then your sisters would go, or did you all go?

CS: I don't, yeah, something. We went there ... they didn't have the boys and the girls there at the same time. I don't know whether she went in the Girl Scouts or not. It's been too long to try to remember. And the short time to, you know, the interview [inaudible] ... put some thought to it. But right now I don't remember, but I will remember after talking to you.

MM: That's fine, I did the same thing. When you sit there and you talk to someone and then it's like something will escape your mind and then like an hour or two later you'll remember, you'll start remembering things. That's really [blank space] Did you ...I don't know, I haven't talked to anybody. You're my first interview, as you can tell. I haven't talked to anybody else. But I like ...I think it's interesting how you ...I think it's interesting about your family, how you talked about the roadside camp, the roadside and you go visit people and things like that. And that's really, I really like that. I wish, you don't see that too much any more, I think, where people get together and you go visit and you go here and go here and you go here.

CS: Well, it's [inaudible] motor home out west and visit family for a couple of weeks. And uh, when one [inaudible]... .Grand Canyons and Las Vegas, and came back down and came back another route through the Petrified Forest, and the Mountains and the Indian reservations. [inaudible] ...down Little Rock and down through Hot Springs and so forth. So we just went through a thousand of miles in a couple of weeks.

MM: That's wonderful.

CS: We didn't stay all night. Every other night we'd stay in a, in a hotel. But we just rented for the family to travel together.

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MM: That's great. That's all I needed. And you're, you were

END OF INTERVIEW