

Ashley Berry: Can you please state your name and you know that you're being recorded.

Chelsea White: My name is Chelsea White and I know that I am being recorded.

AB: Where were you born?

CW: I was born in Rock Hill, South Carolina, but I was here before I turned a year old, so I consider this my home.

AB: Which makes sense. Why did you move? Do you know?

CW: Well my mom, she was nineteen when I was conceived, and...yeah. So my mom was nineteen when I was conceived and she decided to separate from my biological father because he struggled with addiction, and so after I was born it became more serious for her to separate herself from that situation and so she pretty much...and he was from South Carolina and at that point her family lived up here.

AB: Gotcha.

CW: So she moved up here to be with them and her mother had moved here for a guy that she was seeing. So that's how the whole family ended up...

AB: Oh, that's kind of a theme. So you were raised in Appalachia, pretty much your whole entire life. What does your mom do for a living?

CW: She's a nurse. She was a CNA for most of my childhood and she eventually opened her own staffing agency, and then went back to school and got her Bachelor's degree two years before I did. And then went on to teach the HOSA program in Cherokee schools. So now she's a nursing teacher; she teaches high school kids who are considering getting their CNA's.

AB: Nice. Did education play a huge role when you were growing up because that's something she stressed a lot?

CW: Yeah, so part of my experience growing up in Appalachia, especially growing up with a single mother for most of my childhood, she eventually remarried my step-dad, who's my sister's dad, but it was that the community here raised me so I had a lot of my values taught to me from extended family, a lot of which aren't even related to me. But Mom and all of my extended family were really huge on...they had people in their own lives that struggled with either addiction or poverty or domestic violence and so they were always telling me if you want to be able to provide for yourself and be safe and secure and comfortable, then you're going to have to go to school. And they were also always telling me, they made my head really big because they were like "You're so smart that

you have to go to school.” But my grandma was teaching me to read before I was even in kindergarten, and just really always wanted me to be independent, was part of that.

AB: That’s really cool because a lot of times in some of the other people I’ve interviewed education wasn’t stressed as much, so that’s really cool that that was something that was super focused and more to help you get your independence, so that’s a really cool thing. I know your mom was a single mom, was she the one that also kept your home maintained and helped you learn how to survive on your own? Like cooking, cleaning, making sure you can live on your own, because sometimes it’s not always the mom that does that. And I know you said you were raised by the community as well, so who taught you that part of life?

CW: Ironically enough, I have no domestic skills whatsoever. My partner is actually...he’s much better at home maintenance than I am. He does most of the cooking. But when I was growing up, I spent most of my childhood with my mom’s siblings or her parents and her grandparents. So my great-grandparents played a huge role in my life. I lived with them for years until my great-grandfather passed away when I was in high school. They were the ones who really...my great-grandpa was sitting at the stove every morning frying his bacon in the leftover grease from the dinner before, and they were the ones who...they always had a garden. So they really taught me what it meant to be homesteaders, and be able to provide for yourself and live in a sustainable way. My great-grandma did most of the cleaning but he did most of the cooking and the gardening and that type of work. It’s interesting because my family has always lived in multi-generational households, so there was always help. My great-grandparents and I were living together, and my grandma was living there, too. Their daughter was living with them, and then their great-granddaughter was also living with them, so we would all contribute and make sure that we were helping out. And I was taking care of them in their final years as they were having a lot of falls and that kind of stuff. So we all took care of each other.

AB: So, family was a huge role in your life.

CW: Family and community, yeah.

AB: Would you say there was any specific toys or what was your play life like? I know you said you grew up in a household that there was family, so you were the only young child. Did you play with other children?

CW: I was definitely not the only really young child. I’ve always been...I grew up with my cousins. I’m the oldest of my siblings by seven years, so I didn’t have any siblings of my own, but I was taking baths with my cousins because my mom has four siblings of her own and she’s the second-youngest, so I was growing up with their kids and they would be keeping us while my mom had to work or my mom would be keeping us while they had to work, and so usually we were playing together. As far as toys go, I feel like...I

know we did a lot of coloring and my aunt tells me that I used to climb in the dryer and just play. She'd be like, "you'd be like, talking to fairies and stuff, I don't know what you were doing." There was a lot of imaginative, doing with what we had. And then we had a lot of dogs growing up, so playing with the animals was a big part of my life, too, which carried into my adulthood because I now have three hound dogs of my own.

AB: Very nice. Yeah, I think that's kind of part of what I gathered so far, is that mountain culture you do what you have to do. You play outside, you make things up, so do you think that sets you apart in a way? That you had that imaginative life growing up? Like life in the mountains versus someone growing up in the city and had access to all those toys, people, different things.

CW: Yeah, absolutely. I remember just even being a preteen/early teenager just thinking there's nothing to do here, so you would really have to figure out what you were going to do, which meant for some people just hanging out outside Walmart, or for other people it just meant really just joining a lot of extra-curriculars at school because that's all there was to do. As a young kid I think it definitely made a huge difference because there wasn't...like, it takes 20 minutes to get anywhere around here, right? So there's not a lot of play dates and that kind of stuff, so it's really like your community becomes your community. I remember my grandma used to take me to...there was a pavilion right down the road. I grew up on the Tuckasegee river, right here. And there's a pavilion right down the road, and, they don't do this anymore, but every Friday night, or every other Friday, they would have a square-dancing thing there. And all of the neighbors would get together and go there. So it was really, yeah I think it was very different, because I don't imagine in cities that there would be a whole lot of that kind of entertainment.

AB: That's fair, you wouldn't expect a city to have a square-dancing hoe-down in the middle of the town. So you would say, I think community played one of the largest roles.

CW: Absolutely, yeah. Community was really everything to me. My idea of family is not nuclear at all. It's very expanded. Even beyond living with my grandparents and my great-grandparents and my aunts and uncles. I would stay with church members, neighbors, I just remember anyone and everyone going out of their way to make sure I was safe, I was fed. And people would even say, "Oh you don't have to worry about anything, we're all looking out for you" when I would be around town. At one point I moved with my grandparents right into downtown Sylva, so I'd be riding my bike and always recognizing someone who holds a special place in my heart. And what that meant for me, once I got of age, is...so I graduated from Western in 2016, and I had two Bachelor's degrees, but I was still waiting tables and still cashiering like I have been since I was fifteen, and I couldn't support myself, so everyone's solution was "you have to leave here, you have to go to Raleigh, you have to go to Greensboro." But for me, I felt...it makes me cry just thinking about that because number one, it doesn't feel like I would survive in a city, but also this place and these people are my heart, and I owe

them my whole existence. So now I'm a community organizer. I went back and got my Master's degree, and that's what I do for full-time, is to organize and try and get more opportunity for the people that live here. The solution for not being able to support yourself shouldn't be "you need to go somewhere else," it should be "well, we need to fix the problem here so that people have access to jobs that pay them living wages and so that they can keep food on the table for their kids."

AB: Yeah. The community sense of your upbringing really shaped your passion, like what your career and goals in life are.

CW: Yes, absolutely.

AB: That's awesome. That's really cool that you do that. I had no idea.

CW: That's how Fiona and I met.

AB: Yeah, she told me she did her internship this summer with you and that you were her boss, but she never really told me what she did. I got snippets of what happened. You said that community and the sense that everyone in the community is your family was a really big value growing up. I know we're in the Bible Belt, and the mountain regions are also a little religious. Did religion play any role when you were growing up, as well?

CW: Religion played a huge role from my grandma. My parents were never very religious, my mom and my step-dad I mean, although they would say that they're Christians. That's the religion that they identify as, but they never participated in church and that kind of stuff. But my grandma was always taking me to church. The Methodist church that's right by the high school up here, you pass it on the way to Cullowhee, that's where I was going as a kiddo. And I remember Bible study teachers who would just watch me any time that I needed to be, and I think I gained a lot of my values from the church, and as far as believing that, you know, love thy neighbor, and don't kill people, that kind of thing. But as I got older, I also...in the Bible belt, there's two segments of religion, right? And I started seeing some more hypocrisy where people weren't really walking the walk as much as they were talking the talk, so they were preaching this method of love and guidance and acceptance and trying to create a better world together, but then they were behaving in a way that was demonstrating hate and intolerance. And so as I got older, or when I became a teenager and I started questioning certain things...I'm a big proponent of justice and equality for everyone, and I started questioning those things and so I still consider myself to be pretty spiritual, but I did remove myself from organized religion because it felt like it became more of a clique. I removed myself from organized religion, but I do think a lot of my values came from that. And I think when I was younger it felt different. The church really felt like they looked out for the entire community, but I think what changed as I grew up is that people only started taking care of people in the church and not expanding that outside. For me, there's so many people

in this community who matter to me and maybe don't fit into that perfect Christian category.

AB: Yeah, that's totally understandable. I think as we all grow up, our role within religion changes a little bit. I kind of had a similar thing. I grew up in Boone, Wilkes county, Watauga. Growing up religion was not a super big deal, and my dad wasn't very religious; he was actually kind of, surprisingly enough, wanted me to learn the basics of all the world religions and you can pick for yourself. Yeah, he's not like that anymore, he made a switch, but yeah that's what he was like. But it was still pretty big in high school, and Young Life was the way to be popular and that was a huge thing, so I was religious and I believed in God and I was spiritual, but I've never been super invested in it, just because of the same. I think it should be "love everyone, support everyone, help everyone." And some churches are like that and that's amazing, but some are not, and that's like your own thing to figure out.

CW: You mentioned Young Life. That was definitely how it was here. All of the cool kids would fit into that Christian, athletic...FCA was another group, and I think that's kind of what turned me off, too, is it became almost this...title you would claim, to put yourself on a pedestal instead of something that's for personal growth and betterment of all people.

AB: Yeah, and I don't know if you had this, but when I was growing up in elementary school, middle school, high school you had the club that would meet before or after school and they would have the prayer around the flag pole and that was a huge thing. If you missed a couple days sometimes people would question you, or...I did track so if I missed a couple days my coach would sometimes pull me. So that was another thing, being an athlete, and that was part of how you were popular, which is not always super important, but most time mountain schools are super small. You mentioned community, and you know everyone you grew up with, so that also comes into play with the whole thing.

CW: Sports were definitely a big deal, too, around here. I mean like Friday night football... Even some of the people I work with now that are local leaders or politicians, they talk about Friday night football being such a huge thing in their jobs and what they do, so even beyond just growing up and being a high school student. It impacts the community culture at large, and it's really how we...sports is a way that we identify ourselves, too. It's always been like the Smoky Mountain Mustangs versus the Tuscola Mountaineers. There's a very much concrete identity, even though they're right over Balsam, and a distinct separation between the two. And yeah, it kind of defined who you were within the school, too. If you were one of the football players or one of the track kids, or for me I was a marching band nerd, so that was the category that I fell into. But I think it creates...sports were a place for the community to come together, but also create that sense of identity and also kind of defined individual roles for people, too, within the school, and I think the popularity, like you were saying.

AB: Would you say that different mountain cultures and small mountain towns, like Sylva, that we're in now, would they have a social hierarchy to them that would play into a role within the community?

CW: Absolutely. I feel like last names are a big deal around here. I was technically the first generation to be raised here, so I don't have one of those last names that goes way back. My mom remarried a Sutton, which is a pretty popular name around here. There's definitely a social hierarchy, almost of genealogy. Like territory claiming, if your family goes back the farthest then you are closer to the top of the hierarchy, and it actually influences our government. People get elected based off of who their family is and who knows them, and it distributes power in a vastly different way. I think even in schools there's also a social hierarchy because the teachers will have taught your siblings or your parents, and they'll remember. Like my principal in elementary school also taught my step-dad. And so, I think that that has a lot to do with it. And then, I think the social hierarchy is also influenced by the people who are the most involved in sports and the Christian groups and those kinds of things. I think they did have a lot more sway within the community and the school, too. I remember, and I don't know if this is on point with what you're asking, but an example of a story of how much of an impact you can make is that me and a group of friends wanted to start an alliance group for LGBTQ students. In high school, I was probably 15, and we got together, all of us, not really being...we were like the marching band nerds, like we weren't really the recognized people within the school, and we sent the application to start this club to the principal at the time, he's no longer the principal there, and we just got it back with a big, red "no" on it. No explanation, no kind of meeting or anything, but any group of kids that wanted to start a religious group or if they had parents in the community who knew the principal and had that pull, they could make a very big difference. And even today I have friends who have kids and they talk about, not here in Jackson county but in Haywood county which is very similar, and one of them talks about the PTA at the school that her kid goes to is all the same parents, and they make all the decisions for what's happening and talks about how because she hasn't been involved in PTA, her kid has suffered and has actually asked her to be involved in the PTA so that she can do these other things that she's not getting to do. Because it's so small, any amount of power can make a big difference in the community's life. And I just think about, for example, and I live in Haywood county now, so this is all fresh in my brain, but like the Smathers family in Haywood county. Mayor Smathers is the Mayor of Canton, his father was the mayor of Canton before him, and his grandfather was the mayor of Canton before him. There are streets name Smathers Street. Last names are really everything around here. I know that was also a tangent.

AB: No, that's totally fine. I love tangents. But I could kind of see that where I grew up, last names were really a big deal. So, originally my dad moved to Wilkes county when he was a teenager, but originally grew up in Cocoa Beach, Florida. Very different. And my Papa got fed up one day and just apparently packed everything in the truck and drove

until the truck broke down. The truck broke down in Statesville, and they eventually went a little farther up. Yeah, very crazy way to move. So, my dad kind of had that same experience growing up. He described it almost cult-like almost, families were in groups, and if you were an outsider you would really suffer unless you befriended one of the family groups. And luckily his best friend was a Keay, which is a really big last name in that area, and his family had been there for pretty much ever; settled it. So, they kind of took him in and it helped him a little bit in his high school experience. But then he joined the army and moved away. So, I was actually born in Tallahassee, because he was stationed out near the panhandle. So, he was there and he went to El Paso and different things, but I didn't move back to North Carolina in that area where my grandparents had settled until I was about three. So, our last name wasn't still a big thing; I had left so all his friends had moved, so we didn't have that group of your parents' friends and all that growing up, so I kind of had the same thing a little bit. Not as bad as he did because it's lessening a little bit now. But I can definitely see what you're saying. Last names are everything in these small towns. Which I guess makes sense if you've known everyone forever. Do you think outsiders coming into mountain communities, is that a thing that's not really well accepted?

CW: Yeah, I think it depends on the context. For one, Floridians: definitely not; do not come up in here in our mountains and start trying to build your millionaire houses, and learn to drive before you come here, please. I think yeah, outsiders as far as that goes, is a really big deal. And even outside of Asheville, people look at Ashevilleans as outsiders, right? They're like, "oh no, Asheville people are starting to move out here because housing isn't as expensive out here." And they're like, "we're going to turn into Asheville." That seems like a really big deal. But I think there's other contexts where I do think it's changing. I see my sister and she's still in high school, and I see she's befriending such a more diverse group of people and names. Humans that look different and come from families that haven't lived here before, so I think the generational change that's happening is they're more accepting and more open-minded, and I think that kind of comes from the age of the internet, right? As people become more, when they're exposed more to things that they're not used to, which is what I think is why the mountain folks are so wary of outsiders is because they're not used to it, they're not comfortable with it, it's stuff that they don't know. I think as the newer generations have more exposure to that, then their sense of acceptance and what it means to be a community is very different, because their community can even be virtual, and consist of people that live across the world. So I think that's going to be changing a lot. But I think that being an outsider for now, especially if you talk to older people, one of the things I hear all the time, and this is because I went to Western I think, and so much of my coursework involved public speaking, but people tell me all the time, "you don't sound like you're from here." And I'm like, "that's so frustrating because I grew up here." But I know when they say it, what they're saying is "you sound like an outsider," which then means they're questioning what are your real intentions here, because most outsiders have intentions to either profit off of us or plant their roots here and exploit

the beauty of the mountains but not give back to the community of the mountains. That's how people see Floridians and people that are moving in.

AB: I can also understand that, because people move in and build these houses, especially Wilkes and Watauga you have a lot of people, we call them Lowe's Millionaires because Lowe's was really big until they moved to Charlotte, and that was where their headquarters were, and you also have NASCAR, which kind of picked up and left as well, but you had a lot of people that were left over and that were very wealthy from that, and they had people that would come back and settle because of those two things and they would build these lavish houses on the mountains but they would kind of not give back. They wouldn't come to the community things, they wouldn't come to the library's fundraisers or different things. I get that being a fear, but I also think that it opens up for more opportunities, because if there's just the same people in the same area, you're kind of stagnant. Would you say the university played a role though? Because the university's obviously bringing lots of people, and then professors settle here and that adds more names to the pool. Did you think that really played a role when you were growing up or do you think it's kind of...since it's in Cullowhee, which is not really far, it's just up the mountain, like that mountain separates it.

CW: No, I think the university here has an impact, and that's part of why education was so emphasized when I grew up. I have a feeling, and this may not be true, but if I had grown up in Graham county for example, or Cherokee county, which is farther west, they don't have a university there, I don't know that people would have emphasized it so much, because that's part of what they said, was you can just go to Western, they have so many scholarships for local kids, you're so smart we know that you'll get in, and that was really heavily pushed. Going out of state was never something that was considered, but it was always almost projected that I would go to Western. And so many of the community members here do go to Western, so I think the university creates opportunities for the people here, but it also does bring in those outsiders; the people who are professors who come to work here, or the people who move in here because they want to go to the university, but I think that it's created so many opportunities for the community, even community members that don't go to the university, I think that it positively impacts our community, just as much as it does create some annoyances, like more traffic obviously, and more kids obviously. But also, that means that there's more economic growth, there's more stimulation, and I think that that played a big impact here, too. And I think Sylva has a very different culture from some of those more...I think this is even less rural than some of those counties farther west, simply because of the university. And just thinking about when I started as a freshman there, I entered with a freshman class that was less than 1,000 students, and that was in 2011, and now the incoming classes are nearing 2,000. The university is growing exponentially. I think it plays a big impact here, too, but it's also something that means we have to accommodate for that, and the community has to figure out how are we going to expand to allow this to be a part of our culture as it continues to grow and bring in more people, because we weren't made for this many people.

AB: It's definitely not made to equip to handle the extra 20,000 people that are constantly coming down the mountain. And then, yeah, it's grown exponentially. I'm also a tour guide so I get to know how many people, and there's a quota that the university has to have to add so many people a year. So this past year it was over 2,500, and it'll be closer to 3,000 next year.

CW: Oh my gosh. So it's more than doubled.

AB: Yeah, it's more than doubled. Which, could be a benefit, and also provides challenges. So I know we talked about community, and then religion, and the family aspect, also. We touched a little bit on the poverty. Do you think poverty plays a larger role in mountain culture? Sylva doesn't face it, maybe, as much because of the university and things are coming through, but I know that tends to be a common theme throughout mountain life.

CW: Absolutely. And I think Sylva, outside of the university, absolutely does see it. I think that poverty is a part of our culture. I mean when I was growing up, when I grew up with a single mother, I had Medicaid as a kid. Part of the reason that we depended on the community to help raise me is because of that poverty. I think we have such a strong sense of community because we all depend on each other to survive because of that poverty. Here it's becoming more like, "I've got mine and I've got to protect it," but when I was a kid what I remember was always "I've got mine and if you need some, I am here to provide for you as well." It was almost kind of like a tribal mindset. We have to survive together; we can't do it if we are in it alone. Even today, we have unemployment rates that are less than 5%, but we have poverty rates that are nearly 20%. So the jobs here, unless you work at the university or in manufacturing, the jobs here are mostly jobs that pay poverty level wages, and I think that's across a lot of rural and especially Appalachian communities, because the people here have been exploited. These corporations come in and they know that because we're so isolated and we're not a big city and there's not that many other opportunities, they're like "oh, we can pay these people poverty level wages and where else are they going to go?" I think that it has become a really significant part of our culture. For me, what it meant growing up, I never really identified as poor, but I always kind of knew that I was. I don't think everyone here experiences poverty, and I think some of those generational families experience it less so because, as we know, assets equal wealth, so when they can inherit their great-great-great-grandparents' property from way back when, that means that they are already starting off on a better foot than some of the families that haven't been around for as long. Yeah, I think here what it meant is we all kind of depended on each other and it means that...I think we're seeing more judgement, but it meant that we didn't really look down on people for being poor, because we were all poor. We all had canned food in our cabinets and we had potluck meals at least after church once a week, if not twice a week, because it was much easier to cook one dish to share with a bunch of people instead of cooking a whole meal for the family whenever times are

hard. And the churches did a lot of reflecting then, too. Looking out for each other and poverty. I think that's kind of why I grew up to do what I do, now, which is fight for my community and the people that are living in poverty. People living in poverty, for me, growing up seeing it around me so much, it was never "you made a bad decision and that's why you're in this situation," it was always "this is how human beings exist and survive, is that we have to come together." It was never like there was something wrong with us.

AB: That's a very good point. I think it's, from what I've learned in various history classes and studying southern culture and mountain culture, especially southern Appalachia in general, poverty has always been a common thing and when factories did start coming in and pulling people out and doing the unfair wages has been a thing that's happened for over 30, 40, 50 years. It's been a common thing. Do you think it's ever going to get better? Do you think that's ever something that mountain people are not going to have to worry about? It's not going to be something that's in the back of your head growing up and just general life or is just going to be something that's stuck with mountains forever?

CW: I don't know who else you've interviewed, but this is my life goal. I do think that it will change. I don't know if it will change in my lifetime, but part of what I love about Appalachian culture and part of why I didn't want to leave here, besides the fact that they raised me, was our entire existence has been born out of revolution, here in the Appalachian Mountains. If you go back in history, we have been radical revolutionaries against the Civil War. We were taking refuge here in these mountains, and coal miners revolutions...the term "redneck" literally comes from coal miners revolting against their employers. I think that it's going to take time and it's going to take a lot of conversation to get Appalachian people back to our roots of, "we've got to communicate, and we've got to organize together because when we do unite our voices and we demand better, then suddenly we get better." And that's how we have gotten improvements throughout time. We're doing significantly better than we used to be, but we're still struggling a lot, and I think that part of that is because we have been very intentionally kind of divided amongst ourselves. You don't see that community connection like I was talking about earlier, like with the square dancing, so I think it's just a matter of getting back into that mindset of, "oh, we've all got to look out for each other." And then we come together and we create this change and say, "everyone here deserves at least this type of wage" because if we're going to have the top employer be the fast food industry, and they're going to be employing more families than any other person in the county, then they need to be paying those families at least \$17.00 an hour regardless of what they're doing, because they are employing more than anyone else. I think that we will get to a place where: one, we can rely on each other more, and two, we won't struggle as much because we will be able to fight for better standards for ourselves because we know that our communities are worthy and I think we've just reached this point where it's scary to organize and it's scary to fight back, but also that's my goal. That's why I'm staying here, is because I feel like that static electricity in the air. People

are ready to fight back, you just got to talk to them and start the conversation; make them realize, "oh, we've done it before and we can absolutely do it again."

AB: That's a really good point. I think that that is true, they could totally, if everyone united, the community is very strong and could kind of make those changes, and that mountain communities have fought back for generations against different things. That's something that's part of mountain culture that doesn't really get talked about a lot and I don't really know why it doesn't get talked about a lot other than there's a scare factor to say "yes, we're mountain people and we can easily fight back and revolt" or if that's just not something people even know today. Maybe the younger generation, like my generation, even younger doesn't really think about it. I obviously know about it because I'm a history nerd, and I'm a history major and I love studying history, but maybe someone else wouldn't even think about it.

CW: I think that...I don't know why it feels like it has been wiped out of our history and what we talk about together, but I think a lot of our sense of pride as a community comes from that history of being like "yeah, we made these places." The people who settled here in these mountains were tough and we have been tough for generations and we settled here because we were displeased with what was happening in other areas and were like "ok, we're going to make our own in these mountains even though the conditions are harsher and even though the land isn't great for farming like it is out in the Piedmont." I don't know exactly why that's been tapered out, but if we could get them to start talking about it again, I think there's a huge sense of pride that comes with that, too. Like, hell yeah, we made our own history here. And that's part of what I do is remind people we are fighters and we are worth fighting for.

AB: Which is awesome. I think that's so cool that that's what you do, because that's super important, and it is a part of mountain life that doesn't get talked about very much. And I think it's something, once people realize it, they do identify with it a lot. Especially, like where I grew up, my dad's generation, that was a really big thing. I don't know necessarily why. I don't know if it's just because their age group or what but that was a big thing that they could make their own and no one could tell them what to do and no one was going to come in and tell them what to do and the community was going to survive no matter what, which is a really, really important thing. I know we talked about a lot of different things, but what are the key values and beliefs that you think are essential to mountain culture, especially in this region of Appalachia?

CW: The key values for this region. I would say community is a huge value for this region. I would say people here value family a lot, which I would say family before community, and then community is the second tier of that. And people here really value hard work. They get disappointed in people when they see they could be working and they're not working, and they want to support each other but they also want to know that we're all pitching in, so they really value when people work hard and do their part. I think people here also value manners, which is a weird thing to say, but I think people here really just

value that...what's the word, cordialness, like politeness, going out of your way to say, "yes ma'am, yes sir," that consideration for one another. Obviously, people here value their religion and God a lot, and church. For me, I don't know if this is necessarily a value that is echoed within the community, or at least not a surface level value, but for me, one of the values that I learned from this community is the value of justice and the value of compassion, and those two things hand-in-hand and just knowing that if I'm doing well then it's my duty to make sure that others are doing well, too. That's what I mean by justice, is like spreading that love and that sense of compassion to others. That's something that I learned, and I think that maybe it's not a surface-level value that people project on the top, but I think it is something that when you grow up in a community like this, that it does become engrained in your sense of self and purpose.

AB: I think that it definitely does. I wouldn't call it community rules, because that sounds not correct, but there is a certain expectation when you are involved in the community and you're giving back, I think that is one, that you are supposed to give back and uplift the community. You're not supposed to remove yourself from it, so I do think that that's kind of a value. Maybe not super prominent, but I think it contributes to all the others.

CW: Absolutely. Like you said, they don't like it when you remove yourself, so I feel like they value when people stay here. I think they say then when they have a pipeline for the community college here that takes you to the university, and then they want you to stay here and work for a little while and give back to the community here, so I think that is definitely a value.

AB: Awesome. How do you think the mountains have changed over the course of just your life? How many changes have you seen?

CW: I think I've talked about some of them so far. I think kind of that sense of community has been segmented into more of a sense of individuality and I think that stems a lot from the national era that we're in where everybody's kind of living in a state of fear and just wanting to protect themselves right now, and so there's less of that engagement in the community because people don't necessarily feel safe to, anymore and I've seen that gradually get stronger and stronger. I saw we started having less community stuff and then no community stuff and there was fewer potlucks and then no potlucks at all, so I think that's definitely changed. Also over the course of my life I've seen more gentrification, just more outsiders moving in like you were describing. More Floridians building these multi-million dollar houses and more people from the mountains living in mobile homes instead of living in...I remember my step-dad, his side of the family having houses that their grandparents started building and then they added on to it a little bit and then the next generation added on to it a little bit, and so instead of living in those situations, I'm seeing more families living in mobile homes and trailer parks because they can't afford a house to live in. Meanwhile, I see a lot more seasonal people here who have houses that they stay in over the summertime, and then they go back to Florida for the winter, whereas it used to be they would come and stay in a hotel or they

would contribute to the economy while they were here, but now they have a house here; they've claimed part of the land. I think that's definitely changed. I think the role that the university has played has changed as they've been growing, too. I think SECU used to have a bigger emphasis and now it's translated more over to Western because Western is so big and is gaining so much popularity. Also, I've seen the way that we've been developed change. In my lifetime I've seen plants shut down and be replaced by Walmart or fast food restaurants, so I've seen what the primary providing industries change, like what people are doing. Fewer families are able to do things like manufacturing and trade skills and more families are working minimum-wage jobs working in fast food restaurants or at Walmart or something like that. I think that's a big change that I've seen, too. Also, what I've seen change is the shifting in roles, like when we were talking about who maintains the house. I think there's a lot of that that is changing because we've entered...I think what it used to be is because the community looked out for each other, most of the men would work and most of the women would help cater for the kids, or the men would do at least the outside work, like my great-grandpa did the gardening and the canning and that kind of stuff. But now, I think we see a lot more of everybody's working, so moms and dads are working and they're usually working multiple jobs and so we see a lot of people working harder for less and that dynamic changing a little bit, so there's not so much of that home structure as there used to be, I don't think.

AB: I definitely could see all those you described, especially the home structure changing. Some people want it to change, which is great and some people it's just a necessity of life. Like if you're a single parent, you have to work, you have to provide, and because of the poverty issues you have to work harder. You can't have that kind of lifestyle anymore. It could be beneficial or not beneficial depending on the person you ask, but I definitely think that's a really big thing that a lot of people are talking about now. I know it's more brought up. People talk about that and the loss of community more than they talk about the other issues. They talk about how people can't have the home life they want but they don't really ever address the poverty issues.

CW: I think poverty has so much to do with it. My mom lived in poverty, I lived in poverty as a kid, but because they don't have that community to lean on, people have to work harder like you said. I think that's going to impact the kids, too. Kids are going to grow up with less of that sense of community and I can kind of already see that change as well.

AB: Given that, do you think there's any mountain traditions or values that you think needs to be continued on or revived in a way? Or what do you think needs to fade in the background?

CW: I definitely think that our mountain traditions of community, like any and all activities that represent community need to be revived. I want weekend square dances, I want potlucks, I want to see people coming together to get to know their neighbors. That's

something that I really miss. The days when neighbors would bring over a tray of cookies and introduce themselves because they were new to the neighborhood, and that kind of stuff. I think that needs to be revived, and also, I think, and this is related to poverty and this is related to climate change, and this goes very big, but I think we have to get back in touch with the land here, too. I would love to see, and as I'm doing the work that I'm doing I'm thinking about "how do we create sustainable opportunities for people here?" That's something that I've been thinking about a lot. I would love to see our schools have gardens where we're teaching the kids how to garden and letting them take that food home and teaching them how to can it, that way they can understand how they're impacting the land and how dependent we are on the land, because that was a huge thing for even my great-grandparents. It doesn't even feel that long ago that we would depend on all of the canned food that they had canned by hand that was in the cabinets for the wintertime until the summer hit and they could be gardening. That's something I would love to get back in tune with and also just the tradition of being fighters and standing up for ourselves and not letting the wealthy, white-collar people really run us down and tell us what we can and can't have or can and can't do. I think reviving that tradition of being fighters is something that I would really like to see.

AB: I think all that's good points. And back to the getting back to the land part, I think that's something that's starting to be a little bit more of a push, my other major at Western is Anthropology and one of my professors does that Southern Seed Legacy thing where they swipe heirloom seeds to people and give them seeds that are provided and the community garden, which I know is getting more popular, but there's also the whole aspect I think the university could contribute a lot to that. I know there's been a push asking why doesn't the university grow its own food and different things. I think that would be really helpful. Like you're talking about schools, maybe like the high school getting modern community garden. That would be a really awesome...not necessarily push in that direction, but just to teach people what it's like, because I think it's kind of been lost as well.

CW: This touches on what's changed about the home culture, as well as also goes along with what I would like to see revived, but with the gardens, if we could teach the kids how to tend to a garden but then how to use those foods to cook a meal, because I think part of what's also changed is that because people are working two or three jobs, or they're running around like chickens with their heads cut off because they're raising a family and working jobs, they don't have time to do those traditional things like actually cook and sit down together and they depend so much on quick fast food which impacts their health and we know has so many cultural implications, too. I think that teaching kids how to cook and use those foods, because if their parents don't have the time to cook, they're definitely not teaching them what to do with it, so it's one thing to learn to get back in touch with the land and raise the food but then also what do you do with it? How do we make sure that we're cooking healthy foods for our families and our friends, but then that leads us back into the tradition of "we all cook food and bring it in together, then we have a potluck!" It starts with the kids, and I think that that would...I

would love love love to just see us re-ingraining those skills and those values back into our kids.

AB: You bring up an interesting point about they don't know what to do with the food once it's done, and I think that's true. Also, eating fast food's just easier, but food here is kind of expensive, just like produce and stuff, and I think it is because we're so isolated. Obviously, if you drive down to Asheville you can go to Aldi or stuff and you can get stuff a little cheaper than you do here, even though it's Asheville and Asheville is known to be a little bit more expensive than the rest of the mountains and I think it is just because we're isolated, so it is harder to get produce here because we're not growing a lot of it, so you have to import it in. Also, they can charge whatever they want because this is the only Walmart for a pretty good distance. People from Cherokee come here to get groceries and stuff, so they're going to charge what they want to charge, because regardless, you have to get food.

CW: Exactly. I think that's right. So teaching families to grow their own food, to overcome that burden. I lived in Bryson City for a while, and this was the closest Walmart to Bryson City. You could either drive to Murphy or you could drive to Sylva, and they have an Ingles and a IGA in Bryson city and that's it, and the price of the food at Ingles is so much more expensive than the food and Ingles here in Sylva because it's the only grocery store in Bryson city. We just moved to Haywood county in December of last year and there they've got three Ingles in Haywood county, they're building a Publix, they've got two Food Lions and then they've also got the Walmart. So there you see a shift, even just shopping in Waynesville it's cheaper because there is that competition and they know if I can get my meat at this other grocery store \$2.00 as opposed to \$4.00 then I'm going to go get it for \$2.00. I think having options, like when I visit Greensboro and there's a little corner grocery store every few feet, and my friends can literally walk from their house to go get produce just down the road for cheaper than what I can get it for at Walmart by driving 15 minutes away, so I think that makes a huge difference.

AB: Yeah, I think that would be something if that could happen that would be amazing just for the community. It would help with the poverty issues, maybe the community thing you're talking about where you have more potlucks, I think it would contribute to a lot of different factors. This is kind of a heavy hitter question, but it's my last question, so just going to warn you a little bit. How do you feel you've contributed to the legacy of Appalachia so far?

CW: I like this question. I feel like I am contributing and have contributed to the legacy of Appalachia by trying to reconnect the community with their legacy. Everything I do in my job as a community organizer, and everything I do is thinking about "how is my community going to survive in the future?" I think what I've done so far in contributing to that legacy is I'm working with the leaders in our local communities to start considering policy that's "how are we actually benefitting the families here?" And also I go door-to-door in my job and just talk to people and ask them about their life situations

and then start having conversations where we're bridging those gaps that have been lost between the community and the individual and bridging the gaps of losing touch with our history of being fighters. I have conversations with people and reinvigorate them into this, and then we actually do fight and we've done things, like in Waynesville we won a raise for the town employees to a living wage. In Sylva, we're going to start a certification program where we will certify local businesses that are employee friendly, so if they pay their employees a living wage and they do that kind of thing. I think me contributing to the legacy is me organizing the community so that they can re-stimulate their own legacy and be a part of contributing to it themselves. I think that's my biggest thing. Also, just changing the culture, like I'm bringing these ideas that we've been talking about, like "how about we do square dances," and community Thanksgiving dinners into the spaces that I come into so that we can just start making it a habit of doing these things again. I think part of what I'm doing to contribute, too, is figuring out how to give the people of Appalachia a voice. By knocking on doors and having them tell their stories, we don't stop there. I take them in to talk to legislators and give them the real deal lay down on what's happening out here in the western part of the state. Also, get them to sit down with their county commissioners and say, "this is what y'all need to be working on." I think giving the power back to the people is part of the Appalachian legacy, too, and I think that's a big part of my passion for contributing to that is making sure that the people here are in charge of their community and the way that their lives turn out.

AB: That's really awesome and I think it's really amazing that you're doing that in general. Have you seen that much of a progress so far? I know you've talked about the Haywood county thing, but have you seen what you're wanting to do start to slowly be implemented?

CW: Oh my gosh, yes! I am seeing that people are...I call it the babies in the river analogy, I don't know if you've ever heard of it at all, but if you're walking next to a river and you see babies floating down the river, like a ton of babies, your first instinct is "I'm going to pull these babies out one-by-one," and start pulling them out just as fast as you can, but meanwhile if they're continuing to float down the river, you kind of have to go upstream and figure out why they're in the stream to start with, because otherwise you're going to get tired. Eventually you're not going to be able to keep pulling them out and they're going to keep coming unless you stop that flow. I think we have started to successfully steer the view of the community to start looking upstream, to instead of trying to help individuals one-by-one get a better job or better situation, well why are so many of us struggling? Because we're all working minimum wage jobs because that's the only jobs that are here. So how do we change that? I think we've been successful in that, and I think just having the town recognize...the town of Waynesville and Jackson county is also certified living wage, but having them recognize what a living wage is, it is not \$7.00 an hour, is a big difference. In the conversations that I've had, we have community leaders who are people who are living in poverty, who are living on fixed incomes, who have gone to their legislators and have now talked about their lived experience and I

think we're creating a change around that pointing at each other as the problem and putting up that wall, like "I've got to protect myself because I can't trust anyone else," and I think we're being really successful at rebuilding that trust between neighbors. In the group that I do this with, we have meetings once a month and we're going to have a meeting this month and it's people from all different walks of life who are coming together and who are being genuinely vulnerable about themselves and their story so that they can find common ground with each other, and I think that that in itself is contributing to a massive change. It's going to be a long-game change, but I think it's contributing to the change of connecting with one another so that we can start to fix these problems as a community.

AB: That sounds amazing. Like that's great what you're doing. Well thank you for talking to me today and kind of hanging out.

CW: Thank you for interviewing me. I'm glad Fiona connected us. I hope your paper goes well.

AB: Thank you!