

## **Texas After Violence Project**

### **Interview with Ms. Burnett Clay & Ms. Helen Phillips**

Date: May 16, 2009

Place: Home of Jennifer and Walter Long  
Austin, Texas

Equipment: Sony 1080i mini—HD DV camcorder;  
Sennheiser external microphone

Recorded on: Sony mini—DV cassettes

Interviewer: Virginia Raymond

Videographer: Sabina Hinz-Foley

Transcription: Maurice Chammah, Anna McCorquodale, Mara  
Benson

Reviewed & edited: Maurice Chammah, Kimberly Ambrosini-Bacon

RAYMOND: May sixteenth, 2009. We're here in Austin, Texas, on Live Oak Street, at the home of Jennifer and Walter Long. We thank them for their hospitality. My name – the person talking is Virginia Raymond. The person behind the camera is Sabina Hinz-Foley, and also in the room are Ms. Clay's daughter, Cynthia Smith, and Danny Smith. Walter Long is also probably going to be walking in and out of the area. But just to go back, we are going to interview both of you today about two young men, your son, Keith Clay, and also Johnny Johnson, is that right? And you've consented to be interviewed. Well thank you very much. Miss Clay, we can start with you, just tell us a little bit about yourself, where you were born, how you grew up.

BURNETT CLAY: I, Burnett Clay, was born in Jasper County, which is in East Texas, on May the twenty-first, 1933. We was all raised on the farm, it's eleven children. I have eleven sisters and brothers— five sisters, six brothers— who is all still living, thank God for that. I moved to Baytown when I was eighteen-years-old, and there I resided there and married my husband Warren H. Clay. He's deceased. He's been deceased now for thirteen years, and I have four daughters. I never had a son, but my daughter Cynthia gave me one of the most beautiful sons any mother can ask for, so I thank God for him. We adopted him and we raised him. He finished high school, he went to Lee College for two and a half years, and after that is when he got into trouble. Very intelligent young man, I still thank God for him today, because who he was and how he turned out to be such a loving son. In 1995 he got into trouble, and he went to Huntsville in 1996, and when they moved them from Huntsville to Polunsky Unit, which is in Livingston, all the Death Row inmates, so that's where he was from ninety-eight until 2003. March twentieth, 2003, was the date of his execution, and in the midst of that, as I would go and visit him, he would tell me about other inmates. They had families, but they never came to see them, and that they didn't even have the money to buy stamps and their personal items. So, he would share what he had with those who didn't have, and that impressed me very much, to know he had a giving heart like that. After he was executed, I still kept my minister visit there in the Polunsky Unit in Livingston, and I wrote a young man who we had been visiting, his name is Duane Buck. And I asked him— I wanted to continue my ministry, and I asked him to give me an inmate that did nobody come to visit, and so he wrote me about Johnny Ray Johnson, and he gave me his spin number. I wrote the young man, and he wrote me back, and said "I knew your son K.C., he introduced me to Jesus," he said, "and yes, I would love for you to come see me. " So at that time I started visiting him. That was the year of 2003, because in March my son was gone, so I kept my minister visits alive. So I went to see him. The first time I went to see him we introduced ourselves to each other, and he began to tell me about his background. When he was born his mother gave him away, he didn't know his father, so he says he never really had a home, never really had a family. So he said he never knew any of them and was just out there, and after he had been in foster homes, from home to home, and when he became seventeen, he just found his family out in the streets, and that's how he became on drugs, and just lived a life of drugs, homeless under the bridges, he said, wherever he could find.

So when he got in trouble, he said, that was the reason he never had nobody to show

him any kind of love. So we introduced ourselves. The next visit I went to see him, we felt more comfortable talking to each other. So we were talking and he looked at me and he asked me, "I never had a mother. I never had a father, no sisters or brothers, and I never knew how to love," and he asked me, "will you be my mother?" And I broke down and cried and he did too, and I said "yes." He didn't have any books. He didn't have anything to keep him occupied, and when I left I went to the bookstore, and I bought him a Bible and dictionary, all kinds of books, literature that he may read: "The God Given Purpose," to give him hope that his life wouldn't be hopeless. And so when I went back he had gotten the books, and there came a time he told me when they go to rec. their feet cannot be on the ground, so his tennis shoes had worn out. You see, they had to buy all of their personal stuff. They had to buy their underwear, their socks, their t-shirts, and their high jeans, everything, and their stamps if they wanted to write somebody. And so I wrote my sister, and I told her "this man I'm going to see," I said, "he doesn't have any shoes" and I gave her his spin number, and the place where to send the money. She sent him some money to get him some shoes, and after that, the next visit I went, she was with me, because she lived in Baytown and I live in East Texas, and the first day, when he saw my sister, he raised his feet up, and let her see the new tennis shoes that he had bought. He was so grateful for whatever you could do for him. And from then, really and truly to me, I loved him as a son, because whatever he needed, she and I were there for him. So I was able to visit him up until he was executed, February, what was, February twelfth, 2009, this year. And he had asked me, he told me he didn't want his body left there in Huntsville because, he said, all they do there is put you in the bag and throw you in the hole, and he said, "I don't want that." I said, "Well you bein' my son, it's not going to be that way. Now my son, where I live, he's in the Family Community Cemetery, that's where you could be, too." He couldn't believe that. So he said, "This is what I want you to do. I want to be cremated" and I told him "anything that you want to do, I'll see that it's done." So he was cremated, and I held his ashes for about a month, and then we decided to have a memorial service, she and I, and that's when I began to go to work, purchase him a headstone and everything—did I give you a picture?

RAYMOND: Of the memorial service.

BURNETT CLAY: And of the headstone. Keith has his headstone and Johnny Ray has his. They right side by side.

RAYMOND: No, I haven't seen that.

BURNETT CLAY: Well I've got a picture for you. I've got a program for you. I've got something for you before you leave. So therefore we really bonded with him, and we were able to—after I sent him those books. He was so intelligent. He was truly a smart young man. If he had had a chance in life—you know love is the most powerful idea, love lifts you, love draws you, and to know that you are loved—it means a lot. So he never knew what it is to be loved by a father, a mother, a sister, a brother. He found his home out in the street. And he found a family, he says, about seven of them, that did drugs. He told us everything. So we began to go see him, I began to minister, she

began to go see him. And that then, the last three days, she and I were there. They give us from eight to five to visit. They gave us three days. We went all of those three days, and in all of those three days, you would never believe the mood that he was in, and the happiness that he experienced. A man in three days facing death. "Oh," he said, he called me "Mom Dear" and her "Aunt Helen." He said, "I'm ready because I'm goin' to a better place than here." He said, because "this dungeon, they treat like you're not human," and to be treated like that, being a man, that breaks his ego down, that makes you feel like you're a nobody. It makes you feel like you're worthless. But through us ministering to him, he became the man that he—if he had had a chance—he could have been that man. But he didn't have a chance.

BURNETT CLAY: So therefore we did everything that he had asked us to do. And every day I miss him. Because he was a guy that gave you an inner strength, just to see him uplifted—and like he were. And we went the last day, at a quarter to twelve. We had prayer, and the last words he said to us there, he said, "I'm not worried," he said, "because I have two angels. Mom Dear and Auntie Helen, who I know love me." He said, "Now, I know what a mother's love is, Momma Clay." That's what he said. So anyway, they took him away, and we went to Huntsville, and we was down there at the wall, we went to the hospital at the house first. We sit there until it was time for me—me bein' his spiritual advisor—they let me go over to Huntsville to see him for about an hour. And I wanna tell you, we had ourselves a good time. He was so happy because the guards that were sittin' down the hall from us, we got their attention and they just stood up and looked, because he was talkin' about— He said, "I'm ready." He said, "I'm ready to go see Jesus and I'm ready to go see my brother." They called Keith, "K.C." And he said "Momma don't worry about me," he said. "Because I will see you in heaven." And he had a chance to talk to them on the phone. So I had an hour with him, just me alone, and he talked to her on the phone, and he talked to Joanna on the phone, and I think he talked to Gretchen and he talked to my brother. And the last thing he said to her. "I'm eating," he said "but I'm ready." And the warden—the chaplain—came back over to the Hospitality House after he went—after I went. And he came back and he told us, he said, "You know Ms. Clay," he said, "Johnny is ready," he said. "His lawyer called, and he told him, said 'tell my lawyer I don't have anything to say to him, cause right now, I'm having a consultation with Jesus.'" And at six o'clock they let us go over there, to the—I wasn't supposed to witness the execution but he had asked them if I could be there, me being the spiritual advisor. So they let me go; she, I, and Joanna. And when we got there they had put him in the room, strapped him down, and they were administering—they must have administered the first drug because he was kind of sleepy. And he looked through the window, they had a mic where he could talk, and we could hear him. And when he looked over there and saw us, he said "Auntie Helen, Joanna, thank ya'll for everything. I love ya'll." And when he said that, he said "I will see ya'll in heaven." And he began to sing this song and that's when it really got to me then, "Jesus, keep me near the cross," because I had told him the cross represent everything that mankind should need. I said, "At the cross is love, is salvation, and Jesus shed his blood for the admission of sin." And I didn't even know the young man knew the song, but he had a hymn book. He told me "I hate to depart with my hymn book," and so that's what he starts singing. "Jesus, keep me near the

cross." And he sung, I think about the first verse, and got to the next one, and he just went off to sleep. So after that they took him to the Huntsville funeral home, where I had had my funeral home, to be there to pick him up. So for some reason, I don't know if the funeral home got a mix up or not because we went to the funeral home. And we saw him, and he was still warm, right after the execution, because I think it took six minutes to administer the drug and he was gone because the doctor came in and pronounced that that was it. So anyway, we were at the funeral home, and my funeral home man had never got there. And I asked the guy. I said, "Coleman supposed to have been here at six-thirty." And he told me, he said, "He's not coming." I said, "What do you mean?" I said. "He's supposed to be here." So he said, "Well, Coleman gave me the authority to go ahead, I thought, to start the embalming." I said "No," I said, "Won't be no embalming." I said, "You're not going to do anything to him" I said "because it's just the way it is." So he goes back, and he calls Coleman, and Coleman told him "she said three weeks ago she called me, and already took care and made arrangements," which I did. I mean I was right on time to pick his body up. And so when the funeral home man came back in the agency, at Polunsky Unit that day, Johnny took care of his business, I mean he wrote a will. "Everything I have, it goes to Mom Dear, Burnett Clay." And they brought the papers to me to sign that his body would be released to me, and when that funeral home man saw that, he saw the papers, 'cause they sent it with him over there, he brought that body to Jasper. And he made it to Jasper with Johnny's body before we could even get back home because that was just the way. Johnny pleads with me; "Don't let them do nothing to me," and I had already made all the arrangements, and he had all of the papers that Coleman was going to pick his body up, because they give you a pack. And in this pack you've got to release everything you've got to whoever you want to do it. And so it was all released to me, everything was. Even all his material—well I didn't get it all. He had a diary, all the letters he and I had wrote, and they didn't put it in the packet. You know, we don't know what happened. They just gave us some of his books and that was it, but we couldn't question that. I was just thankful to God it worked out the way that he had wanted to. And I'm very pleased with what went down because he got just what he had asked me to do. So therefore, he's gone, but I have about fourteen more guys that I visit, so I am going to keep my ministry, at the Polunsky Unit, on Death Row. I'm going to keep it alive as long as the good Lord blesses me to go and come, because in this I found out all those young men down there that need to know that somebody loves them, because they feel like they are nobody, they feel like they are hopeless. I go down there to tell them Jesus loves them, I love them, and I introduce them to how they can come to know the Lord, and it would make a difference in all their life. And do you not know, a lot of those young men have turned their life around because when my son was there, he was down there preaching the gospel. Yes he was. He was preaching the gospel. She and I would go in there every week to see him, and every time that we walked in, he had this beautiful smile on his face, and he would sit there, and he would talk about God's goodness. And he was ready, too. So therefore, it's a need. I wish a lot of people could just go down there just one time, and visit and see what's goin' on because they treat them like their inhuman, but they are humans just like we are, and they need to be loved just like we are because God loves us all. And I let them know I am no better than you. All sin, all unrighteousness is sin. So therefore,

if you do one thing that's a sin, and do another, God don't look at one sin as bigger than the other. I can't understand that. So, in the midst of that, in the interview I had with National Geographic, I made this statement. I said, "Now, if I go and take somebody's life, they call me a murderer, but if you take my life, they're a murderer, too. How can they live with themselves?" It should be a better way. It's a lot of guys down there that really don't need to be there. Good people, good people. And then the death penalty, God is not pleased with that, no way. It would be better if the government could see that, or if the nation could see that, because a lot of those guys that they take their life, they could have become servants of God through the experience they had there in the prison. So I don't understand that.

RAYMOND: So I want to come back and ask you some more about some things you have said. Before that, maybe I can ask Miss Phillips, what would you like people to know about all these experiences?

HELEN PHILLIPS: You would really have to go to be— to get the experience. It's real interesting, it's interesting, and when you go down to visit these guys, when you leave you're uplifted because they are uplifted. They'd be so happy just to see someone's face, because they'd be in the cell twenty-four/seven, they only get one hour a day to go to rec, and all that other time they're in the cell. And where they visit at, they can't see too much, but they can kind of see out a little bit, and it's just interesting. Then they get to eat some of the things that they don't get to eat. They don't bring— and they'd just be so happy. And it makes you feel good, just to ask them "What do you want to eat?" out of the machine, if it's a salad, if it's beef jerky, all that kind of stuff. They'd just be so glad to get it and it makes you, well, it makes you kind of sad to see them sometimes so hungry and then it makes you feel good to know that you are able to give it to them and they enjoy it. And when you leave there, you're happy because you made somebody else happy, and I think that's what it's all about. It's not about yourself; it's all about somebody else. Because, when Jesus died, it wasn't about him, because he could have saved himself, but he was trying to save the whole world. So it's—when you go about doing things, you forget about yourself, and you think about the other person, because it's not about you, anyway, it's about the other person.

RAYMOND: Well, Ms. Clay, I'm interested in—how did you get—your ministry is so important to you and to these other people.

BURNETT CLAY: It is.

RAYMOND: How did you get started ministering to people?

BURNETT CLAY: Well, I've always been a big part of the church, and was a— I'm a mission president, and it's just I work in the church diligently. That's my life, and after my son was ministering down there, it made me so happy, it pleased me; he began to tell me about other young men there. You'd go to see him, he never was sad, and I saw something in him that pleased me. And therefore my pastor ordained me.

As an ordained missionary, I have those papers in order to do minister visits. So, you have to be an ordained missionary. So after I did that, I just—sometimes she would go see my son, and I would minister other inmates because he would tell me, "I want you to come minister to so and so, because he's so down in the dumps. He needs uplifting." And she would visit him and I would visit other inmates because he said, "I'm not selfish because there are other that need this hope that I have." And I began to just—and it didn't make no difference of the color of the people that I'd visit—I visited some of all kinds; Hispanic, Black, Mexican, just anybody, and I would go minister them. And so that's what really engrossed me to keep this ministry alive, because there's a great need down there amongst those young men. And they got some down there eighteen or ninety years old. They got young men, middle aged men, and old men, down there on Death Row. And some of them lose their minds. It was a guy, he couldn't stand the pressure. He dug his eyes out and ate them. There was one guy, he was going to be executed like tomorrow, when they went in tomorrow to get him, he had hung himself. They said they weren't going to kill him. He was going to kill himself. So it is so—those young guys are treated so bad— I tell you, it feels just like they're not nobody. I go and try to make a difference to let them know that they are somebody. They are just as much as the people in the outside world. Don't ever beat up on yourself because we all have sinned and come short of God's glory. So therefore, I can't reach them all, but if you reach one, and that one reach somebody else, it's just like the word of God—when you plant it, and then you plant it in somebody else, and then it's just, you know, they can make the difference, spreading the word to each other. So it makes a great difference, and I go down there. There are times that I have got up in the morning, I didn't feel like going, but I told the Lord, I said, "It's your will I'm doing. I know you're going to give me the strength," because I have to go about eighty miles one way, but still I go.

RAYMOND:               Eighty miles. And do you drive by yourself?

BURNETT CLAY:       Yes, me and Jesus, honey. People ask me, "you go down there by yourself?" I say "No Lordy," I say, "me and Jesus, we talk all the way down there, and when I come back I sing in prayer all the way in the car coming back, just to know that I have brightened up somebody's day." That's what makes the difference. That's what makes me happy, to know that I have touched somebody's heart, to let them know that Jesus loves them. When Jesus went to the cross, he could have come down, but love kept him there, for the whole world, for everybody. He's not a partiality God. He did it for everybody. So whosoever wills, he said, let them come. But you have to introduce those guys to Jesus, and to a better way of thinking, to better their lives, because they are really hopeless, and we should really make a difference in one's life. We really should.

RAYMOND:               And you also participate in the ministry, or visiting?

HELEN PHILLIPS:     I visit. I still have a little inmate, Duane Buck. I've been visiting him since 2002, and Johnny was so jealous, until—he was so partial until— he didn't want nobody to visit, but my sister and I, and he was such a special person. He was a

special person. He was just so, like she said, he was so intelligent, and if you could read his letters, the words, no misspelled, big words, he put them all in place. He was so concerned about other people, he would tell me all the time—and my husband's name is Gilbert and he never met him but he called him Uncle Gilbert, and I raised one of my little grandsons, his name is Cameron, and he would always say "Uncle Gilbert and Cameron," and he would always give some encouraging words, "tell Cameron to read as much as he can. Just read, and try to get as much as he can out of school, because it's going to be needed, and that'll keep him out of trouble." And on holidays, he would always send cards, like anniversary—they would make someone—I don't know if he'd make them or not but I think they had crafts—make cards, and he would send cards, like on our anniversary, birthdays, and Christmas, and I just have so many cards that he sent. And he just thought about other people, and he was, like she said, he was so grateful for anything that you would do for him, and just like she said, he was so happy. At that time, my sister was in the hospital when he needed shoes, she was sick. I had never met Johnny, so I sent him fifty dollars to get him some shoes, and the first time, just like she said, the first time I visited him, the first thing he did—he had never met me, but he knew who I was because we had been corresponding through letters, and I sent pictures of my family and he wanted to pictures of the house and he was so enthused about family. It was something he never had. He said, "Send me a picture of family, like you're eating around the table, or a get-together" he said "cause I want to see that. That's something I never had." So I sent him pictures. And he raised up his feet, he said "see my shoes?" and he would just smile and that just made me feel so good, just like I said, it makes you feel so good when you can do something for somebody else. But in order to do that, you're going to have to forget self. And he would write letters, and he needed some books, like he wanted books about Obama, *The Audacity of Hope*, and [inaudible], *What I Know About Growing Up*, you know, and I went to the bookstore, and they sent the books. I did get my books back. He told me, "I'm going to be sure you get your books back" and anything you could do for him, he was just so thankful because it made you feel bad to know that a child would grow up, and never had nothing to make him—and I'm thinking that this is what made him do what he did, because he felt like "oh, nobody cares," and it would make you feel good to do something. And letters he would write—oh and his letters, they were so interesting. He would type all his letters. They were so interesting. You could tell that he was very, very brilliant, very brilliant. Just like she said, if he had got out, he could have gone to college. He could have been there, because he just knew—I think he read a lot, I don't know if it was his experience that made him like that, but he was a really smart guy, he was smart.

RAYMOND: Did you keep his letters?

HELEN PHILLIPS: All his letters, I went and bought me a little file, to keep all his letters, and his cards, and all of that, and he said, "Well I've got me a Mom Dear, and I've got me an Auntie Helen." He said, "That's my family," and he said "you all are the only two women, the only two people in my life. It's small, but I got a family." He was so happy, because he had a family, and that would make anybody feel good, to make somebody else so happy. And just like she said, those three days you would think he

would just [inaudible] you know about leaving and all of that, but he said, "I've got to get my fun in on the three days" and he just opened up and told us everything, just opened up about his life, and everything. And I told him, I said, "You're not a bad guy." He said, "You think so?" I said "No!" and I said "you're so handsome!" and that just made him feel so good. He said, "You think so?" I said, "Yeah! You're a handsome young man" and we took pictures with him. She took pictures with him and I did too. And then, down through the time, we would take pictures and he would keep them. But it was just so interesting. And it's still interesting. Just like I said, I'm going to keep going. Maybe I'll find others. I don't think I'll get too attached to others like I have to Johnny, but in a little time I will, but I still visit Buck. I just had a letter from him day before yesterday, you know a letter. He called me his "big sister," so I'm his big sister, because he do have sisters, and brothers. But Johnny had no one, so he called me his big sister. So when he needs stamps or whatever I'll send him money for stamps and they're both gracious people. But I don't know, we just got attached to Johnny. He was just special.

RAYMOND: (to Burnett Clay) You looked like you were going to say something at a couple points.

BURNETT CLAY: Yeah, when she was talking about Johnny, I forgot to put this in. He was down there fourteen years, and when Keith left in 2003, that same year, when Buck wrote and gave me his spin number, and I wrote him, all those years he had been there, not a soul been there to visit him. I was the first somebody. Could you believe that? I was the first somebody that visited him. Because the day—the first time that we talked, but the second time, when he asked me to be his mother, because he never had one, that's when we truly bonded, because I said, "Yes I will," because the Bible says you can be a mother to the motherless and a father to the fatherless. I just played a mother's role, but what made him feel so good, I had my seventy-fifth birthday over at my daughter's house, and oh there were just so many people there, and he asked me, would I send him some pictures of his sisters, my four daughters, and they all took a picture together, and then I took one with them, and I sent it to him, and he said, "Oh my God, I got some beautiful sisters." And he was truly a part of our family, because I talked to the girls about him, and it's just so awful the way those guys are treated down there. And there are a lot of things going on in the prison that's not their fault, that they punish them. They'll put them in lockdown, and that means that the kitchen is closed, they don't get nothing but peanut butter sandwiches, and when you go down there to visit these guys, they've got about eight or nine machines with sandwiches, soda, cokes, cookies, and all of that and they'd just be starved. But God truly blessed me. There were times I didn't know how I was going to make it. I fed them. I went by myself, when she didn't come home. But I was always able to fulfill their needs. Not their wants, but their needs. And a lot of times they would be hungry. They feed them supper about three o'clock, and then don't get nothin' else until the next morning. They never had a balanced meal, that would be good for their health. They just took whatever they gave them. And so, my suggestion to all people, if you have an opportunity, if you have a chance, all you've got to do is go down to that prison, and just look around, and see all of those guys in there. And do you not know, some of

those guys have family. Mothers, dads, and sisters, but they have cut them completely out of their life. They don't even go visit them. And that is hard. How could a parent's love die because a jury got them in trouble? That's when your love should really be there, to help pull them through, whatever they're going through. And it's amazing. And every guy down there, they call me Momma Clay. That's what they call me. Except Johnny, he calls me Momma Dear, but every one of them calls me Momma Clay. I had a little letter the other day from one named Juan García, and he told me, he said, "You've gotta come see me," he said, "because" he said "if you don't, I don't know what's goin to happen to me." Now he has a mother, and he has two sisters. I have their address, I have their phone numbers, and I relate to them for him, and they haven't been to see him yet. And you know I call them up and tell them, I said, "I go see your son, and he need to see ya'll" and those guys that don't have anything on their books about stamps, you know I send them a little money when I'm able because it really doesn't make sense. They are down there, but everything they get they have to buy. They don't give them nothing.

RAYMOND:           How did you find out about Juan Garcia?

BURNETT CLAY:     Through my son, Keith. Keith was his little spiritual advisor and he told me after Keith left, he said "I'm sure glad you come and talk to me, he said "'cause I was strong" he said "but if nobody talk to me about God, his words, I get weak." So next week, the Lord bless, I'm going to see him. I'm going to see him. They just reaching out to anybody. 'Cause they have Miss Wilcox, and Miss Cox, their spiritual advisor, their missionary, they go see them, but I don't know. You know, this happened, I would say, for a reason. Because if it hadn't been for my son, then I wouldn't have been involved in this, but I am so gracious to the Lord that He gave me the opportunity to try to go down there and make a difference in their life. Just to let them know we care, and Jesus loves them, and do whatever I can to help.

RAYMOND:           You said when Keith started ministering to people you noticed a change in him.

BURNETT CLAY:     Oh, Lord, yes.

RAYMOND:           Do you know how that change came about in Keith, or about when he started ministering to other—

BURNETT CLAY:     I'm going to tell you this. My children always went to church. Keith was in the church too, all my children. He always said God had a calling on his life, but he didn't stop to talk to God about it, you know? And he told me one night he was walking—that was after he—I didn't know he was in trouble then—and he came to this church and he said he went and sat on the steps of this church, about one or two o'clock in the morning. And he said, as he sits there that he begins to talk to the Lord about how he knew he had a calling on his life, but he had messed up. And he sit there, and he shed his tears and cried about it. And the first year he was in Huntsville, he began to write me and tell me about his experience with the Lord. And from then

on—he was in Huntsville the first year, he went down there, I think it was in September of ninety-six, and in ninety-eight they moved him to Polunsky Unit. You remember when those eight guys? Okay, they moved them there. I have so many letters, and every letter he ever wrote me, he addressed it "by the grace of God," and he said that's how God got his attention, to put him down there, and then he began to teach his word. And he was so devoted. And they said there was a preacher down there, there was a revival going on. And Misses Wilcox's husband, he's a chaplain down there, and he visited Keith one day. And when me and my sister went down there the next week he told me, he said, "I'm going to steal your son" he said "because he's too deep in God's word, even for me." He said, "He's way above me." That's just how God had implanted his word, so he can manifest it to others. My daughter will tell you, God always had a calling on his life, and he knew it. But, he had to be there to answer to his call. He told me and my sister, he said, "You know, I'm not ashamed" he said "that's the way God got my attention," he said, "because if my life had been taken, while I was out there in this world, I wouldn't have had a chance with the Lord" he said, "but now I do." I got all those beautiful letters and things he had made, and he has a daughter. She's twenty-one, and she'll be twenty-two Christmas Day, and come September this is going to be her third year at Texas University, the college there in Denton, Texas. She's going to be an R.N. She's smart, and he loved her more than life. Crystal's a smart young lady. Beautiful, she sure is. Loves the lord, she was brought up in the church.

RAYMOND: Did she get to visit her dad?

BURNETT CLAY: Oh, did she. She was thirteen, Cynthia wasn't she?

CYNTHIA SMITH: Yes.

BURNETT CLAY: She was thirteen when he was executed. She'd go down there, me and her, she'd summon me and we'd go down there every week to see her daddy. And she went to the Walls with Cynthia and them. She wanted to go. And she said, "Big Momma, I finally found some closure" she said, "because I was able to go and hug and kiss my daddy" after it was over with. And she told me, she said, "You know, he talked to me about some things I'd never tell nobody." But what he instilled in her, it took effect on her life because she finished high school—she's very smart, very intelligent, loved the Lord. So that made a difference in her life.

RAYMOND: And I hope we're going to get to hear from Cynthia.

BURNETT CLAY: Of course.

RAYMOND: Could you tell me about Keith growing up?

BURNETT CLAY: Well, he was two years old when we adopted him, and he always knew who his mother were, because a child got a right to know who his father and his mother is. And after we adopted him, he went to kindergarten. But when he was about

two and a half years old, Keith took sick. He began to have seizures. I was in town one day, and he had one of those seizures and we rushed him to the hospital, and they kept him two days, and he kept on having those seizures until he was about three or four years old. And then they sent him to Methodist Hospital in Houston, to try to determine why he had seizures. Because I stayed there a whole week with him and they put him on a medication. And when he would go to kindergarten, when he would go to school, he would have to take his medicine with him. And he outgrew those seizures by the time he was about ten years old, and thank God for that. So after that he went to school, and he finished school. And what year did he finish school? He was born in sixty-eight. Anyway, he finished high school. I never had no problem with him at school. Very intelligent. And I never had to go to school when he had, you know, cut up or acted up. And he graduated. I was so impressed and loved my son, so when he graduated I bought him a brand new Pontiac Sunbird, a blue car, because his favorite color was blue. And he went to college two and a half years. He sure did. And he got in trouble, but other than that he was a wonderful child comin' up. He really was. He wasn't a hard-headed child. He was just mischievous. So, yeah we loved him. Oh yes, he was spoiled by my daughters. He was spoiled by everybody. He was spoiled by her. He was the most handsome little boy you ever seen. I have a picture of him. I have his program, I'm going to give you one.

RAYMOND: Do you have a picture with you, of him?

BURNETT CLAY: Mmm-hmm.

RAYMOND: In your purse?

BURNETT CLAY: No, it's a brown envelope. I was intending to bring it. I'm going to give you a picture of him and I'm going to give you a picture of me and Johnny. Yeah it's a brown envelope, look in a suitcase in the closet, and it's a little brown envelope. Oh he's showing it to her.

RAYMOND: Oh yes I saw that. I saw the program, but do you have another picture?

BURNETT CLAY: I did have one, at his prom, and I thought I put it in my suitcase, because I went through everything at my house, to find a picture of him, and it was one at his prom, and I put it in a big envelope and I was intending to bring it but see, that's the only thing I forgot.

RAYMOND: Well maybe one time I can come visit you and look at those pictures, with your permission.

BURNETT CLAY: Okay.

RAYMOND: Now, you raised Keith in Jasper? Is that correct?

BURNETT CLAY: No, in Baytown.

RAYMOND: Oh, in Baytown. Tell me about Baytown and what it was like to raise a kid in Baytown, cause I've never been there.

BURNETT CLAY: It was wonderful. They had activities in the schools. I mean, when he made it through his eighth grade, then he went to, well he finished at Lee High School, Robert E. Lee High. He finished school there, and he went on into college. And Crystal, she finished school in Baytown, his daughter, and they have excellent schools. They have excellent programs. At Keith's trial, they had the counselor from Robert E. Lee; they had the principal; they had two more people, as character witnesses. And they made the statement, "His mother never had to come to school on no account that he had got in trouble or that he acted up." And he was working for Wal-Mart, and he was in the domestic department, and they made him the manager of it. Very intelligent, but he just got caught up in a crowd of young men, I guess, experiencing that life, and then he got in trouble. He was a terrific young man.

RAYMOND: Let me just ask, because I'm not sure I understood you. At Wal-Mart he was in charge of what department?

BURNETT CLAY: The tile department. They call it "domestic."

RAYMOND: Oh, they call them Mexican?

CLAY AND PHILLIPS: Domestic.

BURNETT CLAY: Well they sell tiles and sheets and things like that. And he always would work. Oh yes he would work.

RAYMOND: Well, you said he got in with this crowd that—

BURNETT CLAY: They had a young man there, was about three young guys hung around the college. You know how guys there, they hang around the school, and what have you. And he just got in the crowd. His name was Shannon, and they got in trouble together. Shannon, he was down there on Death Row too, and on the sixteenth of October they executed him too, but do you know what? I started visiting him, Shannon, directly after Keith. I began to talk to him because I felt so sorry for his parents, because his mother, she couldn't take it. She just had a stroke and died, and then the father had a stroke because they had him and the daughter. Helen was his mother's name, and she always worshipped that child. She spoiled him rotten; he could do no wrong. And I said, "Maybe, if your child do wrong, you have to chastise him. You don't go for the wrong things they do." And I began to visit him, and the last three days that he was there before his execution, he asked the warden, could I be with him the last three days. And I went to tell him, "You don't have to beat up on yourself." I didn't blame him for what happened to Keith because Keith was a grown young man, and we all have choices. You have choices to take the right road, or you

have choices to take the wrong road. So I began to talk to him, and after they had done what they did they all wished that they could take it back and done something different, but since you can't do it, you go ahead on in life and make the best of it. Don't beat up on yourself. And I began to minister to him, and it was really sad. His mother was gone and his dad wasn't able to be there. He had one sister and I was there, and I was able to minister him. And I talked to him and he just cried and he asked me to forgive him, and I said, "You ask God to forgive you, baby," I said, "it can make a difference in your life." When I went that last day to talk to him he said he had accepted the Lord. And it makes me good when you can go minister them, the word of God, and their spirit be uplifted. That's what makes me happy.

RAYMOND: And Shannon—how did you come to start visiting with Shannon? Did he ask you?

BURNETT CLAY: No, he didn't. It was in my heart to go visit him, because I didn't want him to think that I thought hard of him because they got into this trouble together. Keith was in college, and Shannon wore an ankle bracelet all his life. He had been in boot camp. He was just one of those kids who got in trouble. So one day I wrote him and I asked him and he was so delighted for me to come see him because he didn't have no visitors. He just had one sister, and I don't think her mind was wrapped tight. So I began to visit him.

RAYMOND: So many questions. Do you need some water?

BURNETT CLAY: No, I got some water right here.

RAYMOND: Okay. So you have been to visit people in the last three days at least several times. I mean—

BURNETT CLAY: Yeah. They can have one visit a week. You know that. So when I go I visit different ones because I've got about thirteen guys down there that I have to visit, so I just go one at a time. And all my visits now are minister visits. I'm no more on the list as a visitor; I'm a minister visitor.

RAYMOND: But when you've got to stay for the three days, for instance with Johnny, Mr. Johnson, where do you stay?

BURNETT CLAY: I drive back and forth.

RAYMOND: Every day?

BURNETT CLAY: Every day, baby.

RAYMOND: Eighty miles.

BURNETT CLAY: One way. Yes ma'am.

RAYMOND: That's a long time. And you, [to Phillips] you live in Baytown?

HELEN PHILLIPS: Yes, I have a place there where she lives at the home place.

BURNETT CLAY: You have a summer home.

HELEN PHILLIPS: I have a summer home there. So I go there and we go visit together. And the last three days we went to see Johnny we leave at like six o'clock in the morning to get there. We couldn't get in until eight, and we stayed there the first day from eight to four. The next day we got caught up, from eight to five, he said, "Ya'll better get back. It's gettin' dark. It's gettin' too late for ya'll to be on the road." We got caught up with the time. We stayed until five. And then we couldn't visit Wednesday, but Thursday we were there at eight, and we could stay 'til twelve. So after twelve o'clock, they took him away, and we went to Huntsville, and went to the Hospitality House, and stayed there until it was over. We went to the Hospitality House, and she went over to stay an hour with him at the Walls. So five o'clock was the last time he could talk. He could talk by phone until five o'clock, so he would call. He talked to Joanna and I, and the last time he called he said, "Aunt Helen, it's a quarter to five. This will be my last goodbye," he said, "I just called to say goodbye." And he said "I want to thank you for everything you've done, all your visits," and he was saying, "Tell Uncle Gilbert—" and I said, "What are you eating?" He said, "I'm eating some chicken." I said "it must be good. You just smackin'" And we laughed about it. He said, "I just want to say goodbye." I said, "Remember, sweetie I love you," and I didn't get a chance—when I went over to the Walls, they had him strapped down. He looked over in the corner, and he said "Goodbye Aunt Helen" and then he looked over and said "Goodbye Joanna," he said "I'll see you in heaven." And those were the last words.

BURNETT CLAY: No, he sung his song.

HELEN PHILLIPS: He sung his song afterwards. The last thing when the last breath left him he faded away on that song. He just, you know, he sung it until he just faded away and he's—

RAYMOND: The three of you were watching the execution, both of you and Joanna?

HELEN PHILLIPS: Yes.

RAYMOND: So, what's it like to watch an execution?

BURNETT CLAY: You see, when we got there, they already had him in the room, and they had the I.V. in his arm, and when we first got there you could tell they had administered the first drug to him, because he was very calm. He was very relaxed because when he began to talk, and when he said what he did—First he gave the speech about how it was down there in the Polunsky Unit. He called it a dungeon and

he said, "people need to know how people are being treated," he said, "because there are people down there that are not treated like humans." And when he got through making his speech, then that's when he looked over and said "thank ya'll. I love ya'll," and he said "I'll see ya'll in heaven." And then that's when he began to sing "Jesus keep me near the cross" and when he got to the second verse of it, you could tell that was it. And it was so beautiful. It was no struggle, or anything. You could see the expression on his face as the undertaker man said, "That guy died in peace." He said "the expression he had on his face," he said "it let you know he really died in peace," which he did. So the next morning, she and I got up, and we went to the funeral home, where his body was, because I told her "I'm going to make sure that that's Johnny." And we got to the funeral home and they pulled him out of the cooler, and we felt his face, we touched him, we talked to him, and all of that. So that's how that came about. But he did die happy. He said he never knew what love was until he found it with me and her.

Raymond: Incredible. I'm going to ask us to pause for a minute, because we need to change the tape, but thank you, and then we could continue?

[END OF TAPE 1]

RAYMOND: Those photographs— I wonder if you could tell us a little bit about each of those photographs, and then Sabina will try and film the photographs. We might need to ask you if we can scan them later, but if you can talk about each of the photographs— each of the ones that you have, and maybe show them also to the camera.

BURNETT CLAY: First, I put Keith in a vault. And it was about a year later the vault had [inaudible]. And it was about a year later, I had his headstone special made in Houston, where they could put the picture on and all of that. And I have a lifetime warranty on his headstone for the simple reason that he has the picture there and it's granite. So if anything chip, or if the picture fade or anything, they replace the whole thing. So it was about a year after that, the headstone was installed. And therefore after it was installed, about two weeks after it was installed, I gave a big dinner for the memorial service of the headstone being installed. And it was so many people, we all had dinner and then we went up to the cemetery, everybody. And we had prayer, and whatever. Whoever want to speak about anything concerning Keith and the planting of his stone, we did that. Now that was a beautiful service. So with Johnny, I had told him— he said, "don't do all of that." I had told him what I would do. And that was to do his request, he would be cremated, and I told him, "I'm gonna get you a headstone." Because I don't think nobody should be in the cemetery and has no name because you probably wouldn't know what's your people anyway, after a certain length of time. So I told him I was gonna have him a headstone and I was gonna put his ashes. He asked me what was I gonna do with them. I said, "I'm gonna bury right beside your brother, my son. And that pleased him, I think that's why Johnny was so happy. So I have the headstone, I went and ordered the headstone, and they came and installed it the day before we had the memorial service because I wanted the headstone there for the memorial service so we could take pictures. And that's what

they done, so I went and purchased his headstone, even though they were expensive, but I did what I told him I was gonna do, because you know what, in this life everybody should have a word. A word is your bond so I did just what I told him that I was gonna do. It was a lot of work. I had to do a lot of things. I had to do the ashes and I went picked them up. That was the night I had a nightmare, knowing his ashes were there at my house and I couldn't sleep. But it was just my mind thinking about— he was out there on the porch, and there was someone as I would go out there, I said "Good morning Johnny, how are you?" You know? He right there at the house. Anyway, after the memorial service that we had, all of the people, National Geographic, we fixed them at my house. And when it was over they all came to my house to eat. That was the Saturday before Resurrection Sunday when we had the memorial service. And then we all went to church. And National Geographic filmed our whole church service. And it was absolutely wonderful. It was beautiful.

RAYMOND: What's the church that you go to?

BURNETT CLAY: The name of it is Magnolia Church of God and Christ, right there where I live.

RAYMOND: And was the minister there? I don't know how to say that word.

BURNETT CLAY: Let me see. This was for my children's service. This is the church, his service was held, was there.

RAYMOND: Were they at the same place?

BURNETT CLAY: No. They're different churches.

RAYMOND: Oh okay.

HELEN PHILLIPS: Different pastors.

BURNETT CLAY: Mmm-hmm. Different pastors.

RAYMOND: Here's Johnny Johnson's that you showed me.

BURNETT CLAY: (points to text) That's the name of the cemetery. Magnolia Springs Cemetery. That's right where I live, I live like three minutes from there. They didn't put it on there. Okay, on this here, "expressions" that mean everybody who wanna talk. And the deposit of remains was Reverend [inaudible]. And the Prayer was done by my Pastor, which is Reverend Jeffrey Adam. And everybody wanted expressions, we all talked. And then the deposit of the remain, that's when we all went up to the cemetery, and that's when Reverend [inaudible] did deposit of the remains.

HELEN PHILLIPS: Reverend Jeffrey Adam.

BURNETT CLAY: Yeah I told 'em my pastor was Reverend Jeffrey Adam. He did the prayer.

RAYMOND : Now your pastor, is he the one who ordained you?

BURNETT CLAY: Oh no, darling, you see no, the Lord ordained me. He's not there no more. That church is not existing. Now that's where— you see that little box? That's his remains. No Reverend Jeffrey Adams is my pastor. Because [inaudible] is not there anymore.

RAYMOND: Okay.

BURNETT CLAY: That preacher.

RAYMOND: [Inaudible] is the one who ordained you.

BURNETT CLAY: Yes ma'am. I got my ordination papers. Yes ma'am, he the one.

RAYMOND: And I don't know what ordination in your church involves. How does that—

BURNETT CLAY: You have to be qualified. You see, I have always been a big part of the church. On the Finance Committee, President of the Mission's Society, and all of that. And then they take you through the teaching of what it means to minister. And you go through that and then, they ordained me.

RAYMOND: That's quite an accomplishment.

HELEN PHILLIPS: Yes it is.

BURNETT CLAY: Oh yes it is. Yes it is.

RAYMOND: You must be very proud.

BURNETT CLAY: Like my pastor, he told me, he said, "You could have been ordained a long time ago", because I go to churches to speak. In fact next Sunday night, tomorrow, I got to speak at a church next Sunday.

RAYMOND: What church will you speak at?

BURNETT CLAY: Spring Hill Baptist Church. It's—the church's right across from the cemetery. And the theme would be "Women Doing the Will of God". I have a lot of input.

HELEN PHILLIPS: We all, we all—

BURNETT CLAY: No, what I'm saying, I have the experience since I have become a minister at the prison. And also therefore I have a whole lot to say doing God's will, because God says his will, no man shall perish, but all will come to repent. So therefore, when you— God's word has been established in you, then you can produce it to others.

HELEN PHILLIPS: And we were all brought up in church. My dad was a great teacher. All ten of us, so we all were involved in church. I teach Sunday School, ladies' Sunday School class

BURNETT CLAY: I teach Sunday School.

HELEN PHILLIPS: Mission Bible study on Wednesday nights, so we all were just brought up in church, and so we just have a lot to say because we were taught it at a early age. And then we study a lot, and we just have a lot to say.

RAYMOND: Do others of your siblings minister also?

BURNETT CLAY: Are you kidding?

HELEN PHILLIPS: Oh yes, my baby sister.

BURNETT CLAY: I have two ministers in the family. Well, my baby sister, she's a minister.

HELEN PHILLIPS: And my older brother he's a great teacher. And then I have a brother that's a minister, two brothers that's a minister.

BURNETT CLAY: All of us are teachers. I'm a teacher. I teach Sunday School, I teach mission. I attribute it to our parents.

RAYMOND: Would you tell us about your— I'm sorry, did I interrupt you?

HELEN PHILLIPS: No, no.

RAYMOND: Would you tell us about your whole family. You're sisters, would you tell us about your siblings, who everybody is?

BURNETT CLAY: Okay. (points towards Phillips). She's the oldest. She's eighty-one.

RAYMOND: No, you are not.

HELEN PHILLIPS: Yes I am.

BURNETT CLAY: She's eighty-one years old, my sister here—

RAYMOND: I was thinking sixty.

(laughter)

HELEN PHILLIPS: No, no, no.

BURNETT CLAY: Then I have a brother. He's seventy-nine.

RAYMOND: What's his name?

BURNETT CLAY: His name is N.C. Barnett, we're the Barnett family.

HELEN PHILLIPS: Barnett is my maiden name.

BURNETT CLAY: Then I have a sister behind my oldest brother, she died. She was eleven years old. She died March the twenty-first in forty-two. And then I'm the next—

HELEN PHILLIPS: Her name was Annette.

BURNETT CLAY: Yes, her name was Annette and then I'm Burnett. I was next to her. I will be seventy-six, the Lord bless, the twenty-first which is next Thursday, of May. Then I have a brother who is two years behind me, his name is Wilbert T. Barnett. He is on the program because he's taking us to—he's a teacher too. And then I have one behind him, his name is Ester Lee Barnett. He's a dynamic preacher.

RAYMOND: I don't know what that means.

BURNETT CLAY: Dynamic?

RAYMOND: Oh, Dynamic.

BURNETT CLAY: Yes, he is so engrossed and heavy in God's word. And then behind him, I have a brother in California, his name is Oscar Lee. He'll be seventy on May the seventh. And then I have a brother; his name is Moselle. He's a minister. He made sixty-eight in January.

RAYMOND: And is he in Texas?

BURNETT CLAY: He lives right next door to me. See after I left Baytown, I moved back to the country. I retired, after I lost my husband, I retired and I came back to the country—

HELEN PHILLIPS: The hometown.

BURNETT CLAY: Where I was raised and he lives in the house that we was all raised in, Moselle do. And then I have a brother; his name is Norman Barnett. Now he is a master of music. God anoints him. He is just a master, he teach music, he read music, he'll do music and he is a Sunday School teacher. Then I have a sister, her name is Catarina Adams. She is age sixty-five on the twelfth of April. Her husband is a pastor, and her son is my pastor. Isn't that something? And then I have my baby sister Inez, she live in Atlanta. And she made sixty-four on the twenty-ninth of March.

HELEN PHILLIPS: She's a minister.

BURNETT CLAY: She's a minister.

HELEN PHILLIPS: And Betty.

BURNETT CLAY: And Betty, you'll have to tell her age, here's a picture of her and Johnny.

RAYMOND: Oh, this is a beautiful picture.

BURNETT CLAY: You can have it.

RAYMOND: Really? Thank you. Do you know when this picture was taken?

BURNETT CLAY: Yes Ma'am, it was three days before the execution.

HELEN PHILLIPS: I don't have one of me.

BURNETT CLAY: I think I got one around the house somewhere.

RAYMOND: He does look happy.

BURNETT CLAY: Oh, he was ecstatic.

RAYMOND: He looks happy to be with you.

HELEN PHILLIPS: I think we spoiled him.

BURNETT CLAY: He were, he said he were.

RAYMOND: You had mentioned a couple times how there have been a lot of people at your seventieth birthday and at these different memorial services. You have a big family, but who are these people who are coming around supporting you? Family? Neighbors?

HELEN PHILLIPS: Church people.

RAYMOND: Who are they?

BURNETT CLAY: Supporting me how, dear?

RAYMOND: Well I mean just came to these memorial services?

BURNETT CLAY: It was my church family, my brother was there, I have two brothers in Baytown, and one in Woodsville and he was there. And my pastor were there, and two other ministers was there. And all of the staff that's over the cemetery are deacons at the church I'm going to speak at next week. And her husband was there (motions to Helen Phillips), and National Geographic was there. They filmed the whole cemetery, and it's big.

RAYMOND: Are other people in your family buried in that same cemetery?

BURNETT CLAY: All my people. Mother, daddy, aunts, sisters, my mother got twins that was buried there, she had two sets of twins, each set was girl and boy. My oldest brother's daughter have twins, girl and boy. My oldest daughter has twins, girl and boy.

RAYMOND: Wow, that's a lot. So how long has your family been in that area, right in that town?

BURNETT CLAY: Oh my parents were born there. My dad would be a hundred and two now and my mother would be ninety-nine. They were born there. They were born in the community where we live.

HELEN PHILLIPS: But they died early, my dad was sixty-seven and my mom was sixty-five. They've been gone a long time.

BURNETT CLAY: And all of us is still here. You know God shined his grace up on us. My baby sister, her next birthday she'll be sixty-five. Sixty-five on up to eighty-one, that's a blessing.

RAYMOND: It really is. I have so many different things— Tell me a little about hospitality house because you mentioned being there, were you there twice?

BURNETT CLAY: Now you talk to my daughter. She would tell you about that.

HELEN PHILLIPS: I was there, the Hospitality House.

BURNETT CLAY: No, I'm talking about Keith.

HELEN PHILLIPS: Oh, she said Hospitality House.

RAYMOND: I'll ask Cynthia also.

BURNETT CLAY: But it was beautiful. It was nice because it was three chaplains there with us.

HELEN PHILLIPS: Chaplains.

BURNETT CLAY: Chaplains. And then there was the ladies that run the hospitality— its simply gorgeous. It's a huge place to have people stay over night. They have the facilities for sleeping, they have this big, huge living area. It would house about twenty people if they just wanted to just sit around. And they have food if you want it. Its really nice and they are very friendly.

RAYMOND: And you were there once or twice?

HELEN PHILLIPS: I was there once. I was there the whole time. We got there about two-thirty.

BURNETT CLAY: Yeah, we were downtown then they made a movie of us.

HELEN PHILLIPS: We went down there about two-thirty. And they make you welcome— they have a nice bathroom and it looks a little something like this, (gestures to the room) a little bit. And they have—

BURNETT CLAY: We weren't there around two-thirty.

HELEN PHILLIPS: I said we got there about two-thirty.

BURNETT CLAY: We didn't go to the Hospitality House at two-thirty.

HELEN PHILLIPS: Around three?

BURNETT CLAY: No, we didn't.

HELEN PHILLIPS: We didn't? Then what time?

BURNETT CLAY: We went downtown with Martin had fed us first—

HELEN PHILLIPS: I know baby, but we got there around one o'clock. We were around the Hospitality House around three o'clock.

BURNETT CLAY: No it was after three, it was really late, around three-thirty.

HELEN PHILLIPS: All right.

BURNETT CLAY: They made a movie downtown in Huntsville.

HELEN PHILLIPS: And they make you real comfortable, you could just sleep. There were plenty of couches you could just sit in. And they had food, if you wanted coffee, you wanted juice, they had snacks, anything, they were real nice. I think it was three or four ladies, 'cause Joanna and I and Gretchen, Joanna's friend that's were we where, and my brother. Until we went to the Walls, and the Walls was just a little bit over, where they did the executions. But we were there and it was real nice, the hospitality was real good.

RAYMOND: And you were there for Johnny Johnson's or for Keith's also?

HELEN PHILLIPS: No, I didn't go for Keith's. I only went to visit Keith on the last day. She and I didn't go to the Wall.

BURNETT CLAY: It was his request that I didn't go

HELEN PHILLIPS: So I didn't go, because it was his request.

BURNETT CLAY: My daughter, she is an ordained minister and she was his spiritual adviser. She went.

HELEN PHILLIPS: Because we visited him on that last day, but we didn't go to the Walls. Now Johnny's execution was the first I ever witnessed. It was interesting, real interesting.

BURNETT CLAY: It wasn't sad because he was so ecstatic and happy, and that made us happy. He really was. It wasn't anything sad about it. He said "I'm going to go see Jesus and my brother."

RAYMOND: I want to ask you a little more about Keith's trial and the legal stuff.

BURNETT CLAY: Cynthia— I was at the courthouse but I don't know what happened. I could not even go in, but Cynthia did. I think they even put her on the stand. But I didn't go into the courts during his trial.

RAYMOND: (to Helen Phillips) Were you around for the trials?

HELEN PHILLIPS: No, I wasn't. She was, but I wasn't.

RAYMOND: What do you remember, not being in it, but what was that time like for you, that he was on trial?

BURNETT CLAY: I was at a low point because he was so loved and he knew he was. It was just like God gave me the son that I never had. I always wanted two boys and two girls. I ended up with four girls.

HELEN PHILLIPS: And no boys.

BURNETT CLAY: And he was worried about how I was going to take it. But love can overcome that. We was always bonded. I prayed a lot, and then I put it in God's hands. It was all I could do. And then, when they took him away, I went to Huntsville to visit him. But it was nice to be in Livingston, because I didn't have to come across all that water. They have a big bay that separates Livingston from Huntsville.

HELEN PHILLIPS: Oh yes.

BURNETT CLAY: So I never went to visit him, that wasn't okay, because to see him be so ecstatic, and so engrossed in God's word, and it just— you could see it on his face. When we walk in, he would say "here are my two angels!" and I would ask him, I said "Are you going to eat anything today?" He said no, he had this little bottle. He said "Today, we are going to feast on God's word."

HELEN PHILLIPS: He didn't eat anything.

BURNETT CLAY: So we'd sit there and we talked. And then he said to us, this is what he told us. I had sent him a hymnbook. He said "You know I really can't sing," he said, "but I have a song. I'm going to sing it today." And I told him, I said "Oh baby, it's what's in your heart. It's not the song, the tune," I said "but if it's in your heart, then it's real." And he broke out on this song, "I know I've been changed." And he was sitting on the stool when he began to sing that song and all the people there—we were in the visiting area— all the people visiting their people. And he stood up and he sang that song "I know I've been changed, because the angels in heaven did sign my name," and he sung it. Yes he did. And you know it always did make me feel good. He uplifted me as I would go to see him. I would go down there and encourage him, but he was encouraging me. And that's why I take it as well as I did. Sure did.

RAYMOND: Sabina do you have any questions?

HINZ-FOLEY: Let's see here.

RAYMOND: You've been so generous, sharing—

BURNETT CLAY: She reminds me of Cathy.

RAYMOND: Who's Cathy?

BURNETT CLAY: One of the members of the [National] Geographic, she was doing what she's doing.

HINZ-FOLEY: I don't know. I was just curious to know about some of your experiences with the people you work with now. You mentioned working with thirteen people and going to visit them.

BURNETT CLAY: Yes, ma'am.

HINZ-FOLEY: What is your relationship like with all them?

BURNETT CLAY: Wonderful. They'd be glad to see Momma Clay come, and they write "Momma Clay, it's time for you to come see us." Mmm-hmm.

HINZ-FOLEY: What do you typically do when you go visit them?

BURNETT CLAY: Well we talk. I'm at— when have my ministering visits, that's all I have, I take my Bible with me. And then if there's anything they want to know about God's word, I'll expound it to them, and if they want something to eat out of the snack bar, then they eat. And we just talk and every one of them will open up to me why they are there. Sometimes it's just good to open up to people and not keep it bottled up inside of you. So they began to tell me. I know this little Garcia, he said "You know Momma Clay," he said "I didn't shoot that man" saying "somebody else has done, that man said I did it," he said "but I am innocent." I said, "well you know, and God know, and you know how to work with your conscience and work with God." And it's just a joy. You know they tell you about their family and they tell me "you know my parents don't come to see me because I messed up." I said "but love [inaudible] a mother to her folks. Even Jesus loves us. We've got our folks, but love can overcome all things. And you know I just open up and talk to them, every one of them. One guy I go see, his name is John Adam, he a white guy. Man I enjoy talking to him because you can get a lot of experience from talking to them, just like I talk to them. You know, they just tell it like it is and it's just wonderful. One guy's been down there twenty-seven years. Why would they keep him there that long, to go through the agony that they go through? That's not right. And there were guys that were executed that was innocent. Yes ma'am. Sure have. One guy they executed they found out later he didn't do the crime. Just like one guy, his wife would come all the way from Arkansas, and she and I would sit out there in the area and we would talk to each other. And he was supposed to have raped a twelve-year old girl, malicious, vicious, raped her. And you see, it's no justice in our system. It ain't going to be no justice in our system until Jesus come. They kept him down there thirteen years and somebody in Atlanta got his D.N.A. and matched it with that. Come to find out the man didn't even do it. He was fifty-two years old. I went down there the day they released him. He got his little stuff, and he sat, and he was [inaudible], he said "I'm going to sell everything I got in Houston," he had homes and this and that, he said "I'm getting the H out of Houston." I don't never want to come back. And they went to Arkansas together. I was so happy. You know it's hard being shut up for something you didn't do. You accused falsely. That's hard. Nobody have ever been able to overcome things in their life that they was falsely accused of but Jesus. They accused him of lots of things he didn't do. They really didn't know who he was but like he say, he came to do the will of his father. He didn't

tell nobody who he really was. He didn't demonstrate his power, but oh when he got up, he declared that all power, heaven and earth, is in my hand. He got that because he did the will of his father. So it's really hard to be down there for a crime you didn't commit. Some people lost their sanity. Just because of the people, of the system that they have sending.

HELEN PHILLIPS: Do you remember this guy, this little Spanish guy. He was like nineteen and Ms. Wilcox was his spiritual advisor. And the little boy didn't even commit the crime, and they didn't find that out until about, oh maybe a week after he was executed. They had a big write up about that too.

BURNETT CLAY: Oh lord they did. And they killed a retarded man down in one of them mean hovels down there. That man touched my heart. I mean he was like a lunatic. And after they did that, it was a big write-up in the paper and there was a big debate over it, and now they got a whole new— they don't kill retarded people. I don't see how those people have down there— you have to have a hard heart to treat the people like they do, and then go and execute them. Have you really thought the number of times the man down there took peoples' lives down there. Where's he think he's going to spend eternity at? You know you think about all of those things. You really do.

HELEN PHILLIPS: And the Bible says, "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you." So if you don't want it done to you, don't do it to others.

BURNETT CLAY: And the system allow them to do that see because Jesus [inaudible] weren't supposed to take life and give life. That's been since the day of Abel and Cain.

HELEN PHILLIPS: Don't take nothin' that you can't give back. You can't take a life because you didn't give it at first.

BURNETT CLAY: God didn't even kill him when he asked Cain "where's your brother?" He put him out and made him go out on his own. He didn't take his life. He had the power to do it.

HELEN PHILLIPS: [inaudible]

HINZ-FOLEY: I was just curious, you mentioned having four daughters. Can you talk about your four daughters?

BURNETT CLAY: They just beautiful.

HINZ-FOLEY: And how they got along with Keith?

BURNETT CLAY: Oh that's who spoiled him.

HELEN PHILLIPS: They just spoiled him.

BURNETT CLAY: They spoiled him rotten.

HELEN PHILLIPS: And I think I did, too.

BURNETT CLAY: But they had a hard time especially Gwynn. She's my third daughter, and my baby daughter Annette. They had a hard time accepting it. They really did, but like I told them: I knew Keith. I knew what was in his heart. And they knew him, too, because every time they would go on vacation, wherever they went, when he was a little boy they would take him. He was spoiled rotten, like Cynthia said. But it was hard for them. But they were surprised at Mama, because I don't even think I shed a good tear. I rejoice. I rejoice because I knew he was going to a better place. That's what made my heart rejoice. Everybody was worried about me. My brother in California called, "Y'all take care, hon. Watch out [inaudible]" What am I supposed to say? They didn't think I was going to be able to stand it. It probably was going to take me out but it was just vice versa. And I have all these beautiful memories to cherish of him while he was down there. The attitude that he had and the character that he had— you never saw him sad. Every time you seen him, there was a glow on his face. Isn't that something?

RAYMOND: Was there anything that you would like people to know that you haven't yet said today, or things that we should've asked you that we didn't ask you?

BURNETT CLAY: Well, if you ask if we feel like there's something that would help us.

HELEN PHILLIPS: I think one of the things people would like to know is just if you have one visit, it will change everything. It's interesting. One visit to see those guys, brought in there with their hands behind their back, and they put them in this little booth, and they have to sit there. When they come back together— and it's just interesting. If you just do it one time, it'll make you want to go back because you can be some help. And they'll tell you what they want to eat, like the salads and whatever.

RAYMOND: Excuse me. Here.

BURNETT CLAY: Oh, it's just that I had two back surgeries and my knee surgeries, I had two of them and it just [inaudible] (Burnett Clay leaves).

RAYMOND: I'm sorry, I didn't want to cut you off.

HELEN PHILLIPS: It's okay. I'm fine. I'm fine.

HELEN PHILLIPS: She's afraid of those.

RAYMOND: If people went to visit once, tell us again because we started talking—

HELEN PHILLIPS: I tell my husband all the time, if you just go one time, you can see the need. A need that you can give, just to go there and kinda uplift them, and just see their faces, and talk to them. We tell them about the Bible. When they feel so—like they're not loved, and you can tell them all day that Jesus love you if nobody else does. And then I tell them that Jesus loves you if nobody else does, but he put us here to love one another. He put us here to do the things that he don't come down and do because he works through the angels of men. And that makes them feel better, if someone cares. Or, like through letters. And when you get ready to leave, and it's just so— they do this (hugs herself), they call this hugging you, and they do that (blows kisses), and you do it back to them. It makes them feel good. It's just like I say, if you just go and visit one day and leave somebody happy, then you can be happy. My sister and I, when we leave there, we talk, we get home so quick and then we talk about how uplifting it was. They'll ask you sometimes, they said, "We want a salad, if you're able to get it." The things are so expensive. But if that's what they want, then you go to be prepared. A lot of times, my sister goes and she's been [inaudible], and she says, "I'll feed them today." You know, you'll be prepared to give them what they want. You can put the money in there but they take it out, and you can't touch the food. They take it out and put it in a brown sack, and they go and put it in. You have one time to do it so you have to get everything at one time, because they don't go back the second time. So sometimes it makes you feel kind of sad. They want two drinks because they hunger for things that they don't get. The little inmate Buck, he's just so greedy. He want two candy bars, he want two beef jerkies, and he want a salad, and he wants a granny apple, and he wants a delicious apple. They just want this stuff, and they have two hours to eat it. They can eat while you're visiting. So he just get everything that he think he want, and they can't carry it back. They have to eat it while they're there. So they just eat and talk. It just makes you feel good. And if you can go one time and make somebody happy, it'll make you want to go back over and over and over again.

RAYMOND: Could you describe for someone who's never been, what's the process? You drive up to the Polunsky Unit. Tell us. Describe to us what it's like, from driving up.

HELEN PHILLIPS: Well, when you drive up, you have a security to go through. They make you pop your trunk, and they get your I.D., open your glove compartment. It's really security, to make sure that you're okay. When you go in, that's in the parking lot, to get to the parking lot. When you go in, there's a little room you go in, and you have to pull your jacket off, and your shoes off, and they have to search you and make sure that you don't have anything on you. And really now, it's really bad, 'cause you have to almost— one day we told Johnny— we laughed, we say it's good we came here with clothes on, cause they almost stripped us. They make you pull your— they have women to go through— and your shoes, and everything. And then after they search you, you go through they search you, then you go to the window and

you tell them who you're going to visit. You have to show your driver's license, and if you have anything criminal, you can't visit. You show your driver's license and tell them who you're going to visit, and then they give you a little necklace to put on with the inmate's number and everything. Then you go through another big gate. No, you go through a little gate, a little door that they open by electronics, and then you go through a big gate. Then you have to walk maybe from here—

BURNETT CLAY: To get to the stairs?

HELEN PHILLIPS: No, to get where we visit at.

BURNETT CLAY: You didn't tell them about that big locked gate with all that barbed wire on it.

HELEN PHILLIPS: Yeah, they have a big locked gate with the barbed wire just doubled, doubled, doubled, doubled. I mean tall, and they have to open that gate. And then you have a piece to walk before you get in the building where you're going to visit. Then when you get there, they have another door, electronic door. They open that and you show who you're going to visit. Then you walk in and they have a warden sitting there. You have papers in your hand. They have a warden sitting there to verify who you're going to visit. And then you go— they tell you what number booth, like twenty-three, twenty-seven, and you go sit to that booth until they notify the inmate to come down. Sometimes it's fifteen minutes, sometimes we've waited thirty minutes for them to get them down. And then after they get down, you have two hours to visit. You go through the same procedure going out.

RAYMOND: What's the room like that you visit in?

HELEN PHILLIPS: It's nice.

BURNETT CLAY: Oh, it's huge.

HELEN PHILLIPS: They have booths on each side, little booths on each side.

BURNETT CLAY: It's twice as long as this living room.

HELEN PHILLIPS: On each side, and then you have a middle there, and then you have a place over here where the machines are, and the booth. You just go and visit in whatever booth they tell you to go in. They bring the inmate out and that's where you visit. They have two chairs, and you do it by phone. There's mirrors.

BURNETT CLAY: See, they have a screen in the glass there, like see that was taken at the prison, that picture.

HELEN PHILLIPS: They have a screen—

BURNETT CLAY: Johnny's screened there in the booth.

HELEN PHILLIPS: He's in the booth.

BURNETT CLAY: And I'm on the outside talking to him. They have two phones on the wall where you could talk to him.

RAYMOND: So with the phones, you can here?

HELEN PHILLIPS: Oh yeah, you can hear. He has a phone and you have a phone, and you can hear through the phones.

RAYMOND: And when you go, are there a lot of people visiting?

BURNETT CLAY: Sometimes.

HELEN PHILLIPS: Sometimes, it'll just be overcrowded.

BURNETT CLAY: There's some times it doesn't be many. I think people come according to their work schedule. You have people come all the way from west Texas, anywhere. And where they do executions, they have people from all around. And some of those people, they had to come a mighty, mighty long way. Some of them eight hours driving. They give them a four-hour visit, when you got to come over three-hundred miles.

HELEN PHILLIPS: And it's interesting. You meet people from Paris, people overseas, and it's just interesting. And those people have a whole week to visit, but they can go every day.

BURNETT CLAY: It is so many people that comes from overseas, United Kingdom, Paris, France, all over the world. Those people come down there and visit. I have a lot of friends. I still stay in contact with them that came from God knows, so many places.

HELEN PHILLIPS: These are the inmates' pen pals. Their pen pals.

BURNETT CLAY: They don't believe in the death penalty. They come— Rachel, and Anna— one time they came, I took them into my home, they just sat down and we just had a good time. You meet some really interesting people that care. People that's against the death penalty, and they voice their opinion. That's why they come, to let people know that they're not for it.

RAYMOND: Could you tell us a little bit about the thirteen men? I don't want you to tell anything private that they would not want told, but the thirteen men that you visit?

BURNETT CLAY: One of them is Cooper and one of them is Bridget, one Adam, one Eric, one Whittaker. I had it wrote down in my— all of the—

HELEN PHILLIPS: Garcia.

BURNETT CLAY: Garcia. I had all of their numbers and their name. They are open about what they done. But now little Garcia said he didn't do it. And he look like he's about sixteen or seventeen years old. He is the cutest little thing you ever seen.

HELEN PHILLIPS: He's so handsome.

BURNETT CLAY: He is so sweet. Yes, he is. They just open up to you. John Adam, he said he was a gang member. He a hoodlum. He just told me all what he was. And he was there in the prison; they still have gangs. When he first went there, he was part of the gang, but he said, Mama Clay, I had to get that over. I had to give that up. That was too dangerous. I said, "But that's why you're here, son. Because when you was out in the free world, you got caught up in the gang." They have a lot of things going on in that prison. They have drugs. They have cellular phones that they escape in there. And if one somebody they catch that's still messed up, all of the guys have to pay the penalty. They lock 'em down, and when you're on lockdown, you don't get no mail, they just lock 'em down, put them in solitary. You remember the James Byrd statue in Jasper? Well, that's where I live. And the two guys came, and that other guy, they're down on Death Row. He lost his father last year; he died. I had a chance to see him and there is not a spot on his body that you can see through the tattoos. He has them all over his face, all over his arms, all over his whole body. He even got that white supremacy knots, different signs on him. It's ludicrous. But he stayed there in solitary a long, long time because they could not let him mix because they were afraid people was going to attack him. He's still there, and his other little friend is still there. And Brewer, he's still there for this, I bet they gave him a life sentence. But that was something sad.

RAYMOND: You were living in Jasper when this happened?

BURNETT CLAY: That's where I'm living now. I'm about fifteen minutes from Jasper. I was living where I'm living now when that happened.

RAYMOND: Did you know Mister Byrd?

BURNETT CLAY: I knew of him. They had three daughters. Well, he had three daughters and a son. He did. Oh, but you should've seen the trail. Jesus. If you could've seen that big old chains that they chained him with and drug him down the gravel road. Part of his arm fell off him, part of his body fell off of him, all down the road, pieces of his body. It was horrible.

HELEN PHILLIPS: It was horrible.

BURNETT CLAY: That crime reached the whole world because it was unbelievable. People has so much hate. You know, hate is destructive. Hate will destroy you and others, too. And others. But see, love conquers it all. Love has a drawing power. Love has an uplifting power, and love tends to make you happy. It's just not enough love in the hearts of the people nowadays. If it was, it would be a better world and people would be better off. But like I tell them all the time, there would be no justice until Jesus come because a lot of people is accused unjustly, they treated unjustly, and you got to stand before him and give an account of every deed that's done in your body. Every work that you have done, you've got to stand before him and give an account of it. And that's going to be a day of reckoning. It's going to be a sad day for a lot of people. But that's going to be a day of reckoning. You have to think about that. You have to say to yourself, where do I want to spend eternity at? And it's not but two places, so it's your choice. And I'm so glad God gave us choices 'cause, see, I can't compel nobody to accept him or nobody not to or what have you. It's your choice that you do that. But those guys on Death Row don't have a choice about anything—better conditions, better circumstances, being treated better. And I don't know why they have that tendency to mistreat those people. They are human beings just like you and I.

RAYMOND: Well, do you have any ideas about— well, it's hard to fathom, but do you have any ideas about what it is in the system, or why we have the death penalty in the first place and why people are treated the way they are in prison?

BURNETT CLAY: I think they've branded them as a criminal, and I think they treat them the way they think a criminal's supposed to be treated. And then a lot of it has to do with these guys' attitude and their character and how they perceive and carry themselves while they're there. Some of them may act up and they may put them in lockdown, or they write them up and they have to go before the people, and whatever they do to them. That's what they've got to abide by. But I've often said, Lord, and you know they're in a better place. It's a harsh death they give them, but death is death. A lot of them is better off not being there. But that's the time I told all those guys I go to see, you still have a chance to live, even after you are executed.

HELEN PHILLIPS: Life after death.

BURNETT CLAY: I said because you have a chance to accept Jesus, because in him is life. Even though you going, but you still have life. We out in the free world, we don't know when our time is, but we got to make sure where we going to spend eternity at, and so you know I tell them that. I could understand some of them acting up because all of 'em don't have the same mind, don't have the same character, they don't have the same nature in them. I could understand that, twenty-four/seven in his little old cell with a— What did Johnny call it?

HELEN PHILLIPS: I don't know what he called his bed.

BURNETT CLAY: He said—

HELEN PHILLIPS: It's a dungeon.

BURNETT CLAY: He said it's a dungeon. And it's not a mattress about like that, and it's iron under the bottom. They'd get two hours a day rec. That's when they would go to exercise and they let 'em go, not all at once, a certain amount that they would take to rec. at a certain time. But to sit up in there day in and day out, twenty-four/seven, except for two hours. You could lose your mind.

HELEN PHILLIPS: If you're not strong.

BURNETT CLAY: Your mind, you know, and you can beat up on yourself. You can hate yourself because you're the cause of you being there. Now there's a lot— some of those guys, they have been proven innocent, but a lot of the time it's been after they execute them. And what can one do when that occurred? Nothing. The damage been doin'. You can't go back and turn that clock of time because that's it. It would really touch anybody that have any love in their heart. It would really touch your heart to go down there and talk to one or two of these guys. That's why I can't give it up, because it's a need. It's a great need there.

HELEN PHILLIPS: It's interesting.

BURNETT CLAY: It's a spiritual need, it's an encouraging need, it's a need to give them hope. It's a need to let them love themselves and don't beat up on themselves because sin is sin. That's what I have to tell them. And in the beginning with Cain and Abel, that was murder, I said, so you can't condemn yourself because that happened in the beginning. After God created our [inaudible], he created Adam and Eve and blessed them to have children. You can't give up on yourself. It's not the first time it happened.

HELEN PHILLIPS: And it's so unhuman when you have to— I'm trying to say— you have to wash your own sheets

BURNETT CLAY: Uh huh.

HELEN PHILLIPS: And you have to do that, in the toilet, like you know, and you're there with the toilet with no top on it. You sleep there.

BURNETT CLAY: Everything.

HELEN PHILLIPS: Everything is in the one cell. And he said that he had a fan that, while he was at rec., he's dry his sheets. And sometimes he said they get— somebody mess up and they turn the air off and you just have to sweat. It's so hot. And then in the wintertime you so cold. So it's just— it's awful. It's awful. And sometimes, just like she say, when they're gone, the circumstances, it's better. It's better.

RAYMOND: You said Keith told you this? Or Johnny?

HELEN PHILLIPS: Johnny.

BURNETT CLAY: But you know really, laying our jokes aside, well they all said down there that he was an unusual inmate. They said they'd never had one down there that [inaudible].

HELEN PHILLIPS: Keith never complained.

BURNETT CLAY: He never complained. He was always trying to build us up to accept that he were there. But he never complained about nothin'. And every letter that he ever wrote, he would put the time and the date. There were sometimes, two A.M. in the morning, he'd be writing letters. Sure would. Be writing letter. And every letter that he wrote, there was a sermon on it. Because we showered him with love, he never knew what it was to be without anything that he needed. When it come to his blanket, his fans, or his clothes, because we kept money on his books. And it got so bad one time— you can't go to rec. if your shoes are out on the bottom, and Keith told me, he say, he asked me, he said "I sent about fifty dollars to buy some shoes," [inaudible] said, "because he can't go to rec. they're going to give me—" so I did. And he told me, he said, you know what he wrote and told me— that's why I told Helen, you be very, very careful how you bring your children up. And if you gonna bring them up in the Christian family, you make sure you walk the walk and talk the talk that you live by. There was a lady out by where we lived, she had eight children. Somebody killed the husband and so a lot of the time they didn't have food. And I would go to the store, I would go to my freezer, and Keith would help me. We'd take food down there to the house, and she's sick. One time they cut all the light and gas out. Well I was workin', I always worked, and I gave her two checks. I say, "You go to town, that woman got children," I said, "You have him— you tell them to turn the stove back on." And he wrote me a letter one day, he said, "Momma I never realized how unselfish you were, when I see you do all these things for other people" and that learnt him something. He learnt from tha because the whole time he was down there, if guys didn't have stamps, they didn't have this, they didn't have that, he helped them with that. So I said this to, said this, when you raising your children, how you live and how you portray yourself. And he said he learnt that to not be selfish, he said, because you are an unselfish mother. So a lot of the time when you do these things you don't even know how it's going to affect your children. So just always do the right thing. I miss him, but he's in a better place. He's in a better place.

RAYMOND: You both have talked so strongly about what you get from visiting these men. Have you persuaded anybody else to start visiting also?

BURNETT CLAY: Yes ma'am. I tells my brothers. I tell the ministers you ought to go down there to the prison.

HELEN PHILLIPS: Just one time

BURNETT CLAY: You just go down there and see what's going on. And then you would have something to tell the people about.

RAYMOND: And has anybody gone? Has anybody taken your advice?

BURNETT CLAY: I have a cousin who went with me, and I have a brother than went down there. And I tells my sisters because they can go with me. I would enjoy the company. But since I have been going alone, I still enjoy the company because the good Lord is with me.

RAYMOND: Well I'm sure the men appreciate both of you so very much. And we, well I and I know I'm speaking for Sabina too, very much appreciate your time.

BURNETT CLAY: You know I'm surprised at myself. It really all got started with my son being there, and he began to talk about the guys he knew didn't have nobody, family don't do this, and he said, "I'm going to have them— I'm going to give you their spin numbers. You write 'em." And they would put me on their visiting lists at that time, and see you could just go and visit. And I began to visit those guys while she would visit Keith. And I just— they just captured my heart. Just listening at them talk about how they're treated. Talk about their parents don't come see 'em and this and that and the other. And I said, "how could a parent not love his child when he get in trouble. That's when your love is more stronger than ever because you want to let them know even though you messed up, we mess up all the time with Jesus, we all mess up, but yet and still he still loves us. And that's the way we supposed to be by our children. It sure is.

RAYMOND: Well thank you. Thank you. Unconditional love is something—

BURNETT CLAY: That's it.

RAYMOND: to work for.

BURNETT CLAY: That's right.

HELEN PHILLIPS: And then to do something for someone you never knew, but you knew the need was there.

BURNETT CLAY: That's right.

HELEN PHILLIPS: And it's not who they are. If you can minister to the need, you do so.

BURNETT CLAY: That's right.

HELEN PHILLIPS: For me it's just forget about the self, and just think about somebody else because that's the only way you can do it. You can't do nothing when self is in the way. You just forget about self and say, "this person need me and I'm goin', you know, regardless." They need you.

BURNETT CLAY: That's the story of my life. Being there for others, I do what I can to help them.

HELEN PHILLIPS: That's right.

BURNETT CLAY: A lot of time you think you have to do a big thing, but a little thing is more appreciated than a big thing.

HELEN PHILLIPS: And those guys are so appreciative.

BURNETT CLAY: They are.

HELEN PHILLIPS: You get the letters, and they'll say thank you many times. I just— and sometime I got a letter from a Brother Buck the other day. He said, you know, "When you visit, you— I thought about it, you visit, I just couldn't go to sleep. I thought about your visit." And they'd just be so happy to have something to feast off of.

BURNETT CLAY: That's right.

HELEN PHILLIPS: Instead of sitting up there feeling sorry for themselves. I don't have this— and Brother Buck, he was one that loved to eat. He loved— I called him Brother Buck, because he called me his sister. His name is Duane Buck. He called me his big sister.

BURNETT CLAY: He called me Momma Clay. All of them do. And the lady that works there, she said, "How can you come down here and your son is gone." I said, "There's a greater need than ever, because my son is gone. There's a greater need for me to come down here and minister to them, those young guys. And I enjoyed it."

HELEN PHILLIPS: You just get so attached them.

BURNETT CLAY: You do.

HELEN PHILLIPS: So attached. They have big smiles on their face. And Johnny— We visit Johnny and he'll go back and write a letter, a big long letter, talking about your visit, your visit, your visit.

RAYMOND: Thank you so much. We're just about out of the second tape, so I just want to say thank you very, very much.

HELEN PHILLIPS: Well you're more than welcome.

BURNETT CLAY: It makes— it gives me joy to just even talk about it to you all because it's so real within my heart, until it motivates me to keep going. Have you ever been so motivated to something that you has to do it. There are times I get up in the morning. Five o'clock, get ready. Some mornings I don't feel like it. I said but in your name Jesus, I'm going. And I go, sure do.

RAYMOND: Great. Well thank you so very much.

BURNETT CLAY: You're more than welcome. This is a privilege and an honor.

RAYMOND: Thank you.

HINZ-FOLEY: Thank you. We appreciate it.

[END OF TRANSCRIPT]