

# SCHEDLER HONORS COLLEGE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

## Corey Womack Oral History Interview Transcription

Narrator Name: Womack, Corey

Interviewer Name: Horton, Caroline

Date of Interview: 03/09/2022

Location of Interview: Conway, Arkansas (Remote Interview - Zoom Recording)

Acronyms:

CW = Corey Womack (Narrator)

CH = Caroline Horton (Interviewer)

UCA = University of Central Arkansas

TAG = Travel Abroad Grant

### Interview Summary

The following oral history of a recorded interview with Corey Womack conducted by Caroline Horton on March 9, 2022. This interview is part of the Schedler Honors College Oral History Project where current students and alumni are asked to reflect on their time before, during, and after being in the UCA Honors College.

Readers are asked to bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of the spoken word, rather than prose. The following transcript has been reviewed, edited, and approved by the narrator.

**CH** [00:00:03] This is Caroline Horton with the Schedler Honors College Oral History Project. Today is March 9th, 2022. I am interviewing Corey Womack, who is at their home office in Conway, Arkansas. We will be talking about Corey's experience leading up to, during, and after their time in the Schedler Honors College. Please state your name and age for the recording.

**CW** [00:00:34] My name is Corey Womack and I am thirty-four years old. As of about three days ago.

**CH** [00:00:40] Oh! Happy birthday!

**CW** [00:00:42] Thank you so much!

**CH** [00:00:45] What year did you enter the honors college?

**CW** [00:00:50] Would have been the fall of 2006?

**CH** [00:00:54] In what year did you graduate?

**CW** [00:00:57] May of 2010.

**CH** [00:01:00] And what are your pronouns?

**CW** [00:01:03] He/him.

**CH** [00:01:04] Where are you from?

**CW** [00:01:09] Cave City, Arkansas originally which is a tiny town in northeast Arkansas.

**CH** [00:01:15] Would you say that's a good or bad place to grow up?

**CW** [00:01:19] Well, that is a great place to grow up. Definitely. Looking back on it now, no place is perfect, but I had a good childhood and it was a wonderful community to be a part of.

**CH** [00:01:34] Wonderful. OK. Let's see here. What are your parents' names?

**CW** [00:01:45] Angela Womack and William Reed Womack.

**CH** [00:01:50] And did they or any other person from your hometown community influence your education?

**CW** [00:01:59] Oh, absolutely, I mean, I think your parents have to influence your education. After I was born, my dad got an associate's degree in electrical engineering. And when I was probably in seventh or eighth grade, my mom went and got an associate's degree in education. They lived and worked a lot of their life with just high school diplomas and then had to earn those degrees while they had kids. My brother and I kind of realized that's a difficult road to walk. My parents from an early age, it was "You're going to do good in school, you're going to do as well as we know you can. And if you have the opportunity to go get a four-year degree right out of high school, you're going to go get a four-year degree right at a high school." So it was definitely a household where it was. We want you to have a better life and better opportunities than we have. We all knew that higher education was key to that.

**CH** [00:03:09] What was the experience of choosing a college for you?

**CW** [00:03:19] It was interesting. I was a pretty sharp kid, especially in a smaller community like Cave City. I would say I wanted to stay close to home. I was not a brave kid right out of high school. We only applied to Arkansas schools, a handful of Arkansas schools, and really the deciding factor for me was my brother was a member of the Honors College and he was two and a half years older than me. He had already been at Conway and he knew the campus well and he had had a very positive experience. So that was a big deciding factor. And then also, I was already doing some very terrible video editing by the time I was a senior in high school, and UCA at that time was the only four-year college in Arkansas with a four-year film degree. Those two things kind of compiled together. And then on top of that, getting accepted into honors and all the perks that kind of come with honors, really kind of clinched it. That's how I kind of decided where I landed.

**CH** [00:04:40] Other than the incentive to obtain those honors perks, was there anything else that drew the honors?

**CW** [00:04:52] If I'm being completely honest? Probably not. I came from a small community. I was a kid at Cave City. Cave City was a basketball community. It was a farming community. Before I had a job, I was the kid that went home at night and sat on my bed and read a book every night? But not in my household now. My household very much celebrated reading and learning and stuff like that. But the school at Cave City, my community of friends like being smart was nothing really to tout. I never gave much thought to it. I like to read. That was pretty much it. I like to read books. This idea that the Honors

College kind of presented, it's like, "We're going to teach you how to think critically and we're going to kind of challenge you with all these ideas you've never really encountered." Going into it, I did not think about that a lot.

**CH** [00:06:00] So was it mostly the fact that your brother had gone to the Honors College and the scholarship incentives that drew you here?

**CW** [00:06:09] Yes, I would say. Even less than the scholarships because I mean, I had scholarships to other schools, but I would say more than anything it was my brother had shown up and he had a very good experience. He just really liked it. Yes, it kind of created a safety net for me, right? It was going out on my own, but it wasn't completely unfamiliar. There was that trace of something familiar. But then also, as I said, it was the only school in the state that offered a film degree at the time, which is the only thing I was interested in at the time. I knew I wanted to pursue video editing and video storytelling.

**CH** [00:06:50] Is that something that you ended up pursuing through your major?

**CW** [00:06:55] Oh, yes. I was the first student at UCA to get a double major in broadcast journalism and digital filmmaking, so I pretty much lived in Stanley Russ Hall for the four years that I was at UCA. I was one of those weirdos that on day one of freshman year, I knew what I was graduating with. Then like, you weren't going to change my mind. , I think particularly in honors, I think a lot of kids get presented with different ideas and you see a lot of major hopping, especially in those first two years. You see people changing horses, which I think is great. I think that's proof that the honors experiment works that people are kind of-

They see new things and they're challenged by new things. I was not that guy. I knew what I wanted to do. I was lucky enough to get to do it.

**CH** [00:07:49] So you talked a little bit about the transition from home life to college life. Was that tough? Were you homesick at all?

**CW** [00:07:59] Probably not the first year. The first year I had my— I wouldn't say my best friend from high school— one of my very good friends from high school also got into the honors program and we were roommates that first year. And also, like I said, I had my brother on campus as well. Now, after that first year, that roommate had a lot of family stuff go down in Cave City. He ended up where he left college and he ended up in a seminary somewhere closer to Cave City and became a Baptist minister. But then after that, I kind of played musical chairs with roommates. About every semester they would stick somebody else in there with me. Not being able to really form that long-term kind of relationship where somebody comes in for a semester and then they'd move on, they'd get their own apartment or something. I never really had a close roommate. That's something that a lot of people experience in college that I kind of missed out on just because of the way the cards were dealt. Because of that, I got very close to a lot of the people in the film program. But I will say the dorm life for me was probably lonelier than it was in particular for a lot of Honor's kids, because I know Honor's is built in such a way that they kind of build that community around those dorms, and it just never quite gelled with me. So I dealt with some loneliness, probably not homesickness, but loneliness, for sure.

**CH** [00:09:45] Farris is a relatively new residence hall. Were you living in Farris at that time?

**CW** [00:09:55] I think like my junior or senior year, we were the first group or one of the first groups. It was completed within my four years. When I got there my freshman year, I don't think it was finished yet and it was done by the time I left because I lived in Farris for a year, that I know of.

**CH** [00:10:17] What was that like?

**CW** [00:10:23] I had lived in the old cinder block rooms of New Hall for those first couple of years. That eggshell white on those cinder block walls might have had to do with some of the kind of loneliness and sadder Saturday nights [*laughing*]. I was lucky enough. Gosh, I guess it was my senior year? Yes, it was my senior year, and I was lucky enough to— There was a guy. I think he was like a fifth-year senior and he, oh man, he was Mr. UCA. His name was Aaron Kopf, and he was a member of S.O.S. He was an honors ambassador. That guy did everything. I was lucky enough to get to room with him my senior year. And because of it, it was me and him and another guy named Josh Ballynahinch. And we got one of those sweet corner suites in New Hall with the big floor-to-ceiling windows. Yes, that senior year, I felt like I was living like a king, right? Once again, these two guys were like best friends. They had been together for four years, and I was kind of the new guy coming into their three-man room. But we had fun. It was interesting. But yes, New Hall is a great time. Yeah, Farris Hall is a great time.

**CH** [00:11:53] Going back to the beginning of your honor's experience. The first thing that every Honor student has to do is apply. What was that process like for you? Applying and I squared day.

**CW** [00:12:10] So I think the application process, again, I was a big book nerd and pretty comfortable on paper. The application process did not rattle me a lot. I could write an essay. I can sit alone in my room and churn out an essay pretty quickly. I remember the day we came in for the interview. Donna led my kind of interview with me in like four or five other prospective Honors students. And what I thought was interesting – and they may not do this anymore, I don't know – but like our parents sat at the back of the room. Donna is leading a conversation with us based on an honor's [reading] and my parents are in the back of the room. I was a little rattled. These kids start throwing around some big ideas and I'm like, *What is happening?* I kind of clammed up. I did not engage in that conversation, as I should have. And what made it worse was my dad was at the back of the room and I would look back at him and he'd be like, "Go get him like, like, talk to him!" And I was like *What is happening?* It felt like the Twilight Zone. That was a bit of a weird experience. That interview that day. I probably did not perform well then.

**CH** [00:13:27] It seems as if everything worked out, you were accepted. One of the things that a lot of students, at least in my cohort and the cohorts surrounding us experience, is imposter syndrome. I was wondering if you ever experience something like that?

**CW** [00:13:50] Every moment of every day [*laughing*]. I fear if you give into it now, you'll never grow out of it. That's the deal. I mean, I've been pretty successful after honors and I still am like, *I'm a total fraud!*, like, *I don't know what I'm doing!* And I say that was the challenge of core one, right? I think I completely went into honors with the wrong idea of what they were trying to accomplish. I was going into it as a good student and I wanted to find the right answer, and I did not want to give the wrong answer and then realize that they should have never admitted me, right? Part of that, I think, comes from– kind of my parents in that



hometown feeling like this is a big opportunity. I mean, you're going into this prestigious program, you've been accepted to this very elite academic group of kids, so you don't want to screw it up, right? And I think that was kind of the boulder that I carried on my back through core one. That first round through core one I think I missed the point, the whole point, because I was so afraid of getting the wrong answer or looking foolish. As I said, that's something I still struggle with today. But then I got Doug in court two, and he kind of took a hammer to what I thought Honor's was supposed to be. And he kind of set me straight.

**CH** [00:15:25] So what was your initial impression of honors that Doug kind of destroyed? What did he build up?

**CW** [00:15:35] So I mean, and I will say I had a great core one professor who sadly is not with us anymore, his name was Phil Melton, and I believe he passed away a few years ago. I don't think it was anything to do with honors. Like I said, I was just very— I mean, they asked us a question at the beginning of the semester, “Where's is self located? What is the self?” I wanted to find the right answer. That was where I [was] going to find it. *We're going to find it by the end of the semester!* So every journal I was like, *here it is*, I would read Kirkegaard or I would read Sartre, or I would read Nietzsche and say, “Okay, so here's the self. I found it this week.” Then every week Phil would come in— and we had a P.A. in Phil's class that semester and his name was Justin Snook. And he was a lot like Whit or even Aaron, who they were very much into— I mean, they very much had their hands in honors and were very engaged with it. Man, I would come in like, “I did it! I got it. Check this journal out. I got it right.” And then like Phil and Justin, just come in and be like, “Ah, no!” You basically get sure of something every week and then they come in and they wreck it. Man, by that first Thanksgiving, I was just like, *I am a terrible student. I should not be here. Clearly, I don't get*

*what's going on.* And yes, I went home my first Christmas, and I was like, this is weird. Like, they're just telling me I'm wrong every week. It was just, I mean, that's a shock to a student who had made mostly A's in high school.

**CH** [00:17:23] What image of honors did Doug build-up for you after that first semester in core one?

**CW** [00:17:32] What is core two?

**CH** [00:17:36] Core two is the search for the community

**CW** [00:17:40] Search for the community, right! And of course, that's what I get Doug for, who just has this humongous heart for the community and the world around him. I kind of came in determined, like *I'm not going to play your game anymore like I'm sick of being told I'm wrong.* I kind of came in like, “No!” kind of like Cartman saying, “Screw you guys, I'm going home.” *Y'all've made a game that I can't win, so I just refuse to play.* That was kind of my perspective. Coming at Honor's was a fixed system that was out to get me and make me look stupid. then Doug was kind of there like, “It's not the answer that you're pursuing, like don't worry about the answer to the question, what you're pursuing is the pursuit itself. As long as you come in every week and just keep asking the question, then you get better every week.” that was kind of that recognition of I may not be finding the answer, but week to week, I as a person am changing. And that's the point of honors – kind of find these ideas. [To] absorb these ideas and allow them to change you as a person. I did an honors address whenever we graduated, I was one of them they asked to stand up and talk. And I think the phrase that I spent– that I chewed on for a week and a half was that “the self is in the search.”

That's where the self is located is in the search for the self. And I think that's really what I learned from Doug more than anything.

**CH** [00:19:41] That's really interesting how you found almost the answer to that first question that they ask you in core one like, "Oh, where's the self?" You found that in core two and with Doug.

**CW** [00:19:54] You keep finding it each semester. It wasn't all in core two but, by the time I graduated, I was kind of like, you look back and you're like, *Oh, it's not—it was never one thing. It was all of it put together.*

**CH** [00:20:11] For core two, did you guys do a community service project?

**CW** [00:20:20] Not that I can remember. I want to say we read that book over Christmas, that may have been— This was right after one of the bad hurricanes. It may have been Katrina. I can't remember exactly how the years went – there's a hurricane every two or three years – but we read a book named *Bayou Farewell*. I think it was one of Allison's that she kind of pushed it, and so that was a community we centered things around, but I don't remember a community service project. But I will say, I am not the best honors student. I lived at the film department! [*laughing*] So there may have been a project going on that I just didn't take part in.

**CH** [00:21:08] Honestly think that it's been a more recent addition to the curriculum because other people that I've interviewed or have conducted an oral history with they're like, "I don't think so."

**CW** [00:21:21] I don't think so, I think we just did our journals every week.

**CH** [00:21:25] Due diligently, of course [*laughing*].

**CW:** [00:21:28] Yes, absolutely [*laughing*].

**CH:** [00:21:30] Specifically within Core one and Core two, but if you think of any other readings within the honors classes, were there any that stuck out to you and that you still think about today?

**CW** [00:21:48] I think we kind of read a scene by Sartre, like a play by Sartre in core one. Lord, I can't remember the name of it. I think it's just a guy sitting in a prison cell because of course it is, because it's Sartre. That one I remember reading, and that was a big deal. I remember reading the Kirkegaard reading like five times and being like— I went into that class and I was like, “I have no idea what's going on like this, what is happening?” I mean, it wasn't even the idea that was too big, it was just the way he wrote. Core two, I don't remember a lot of it. As I said, I remember conversations with Doug, but the actual content I can't. Nothing sticks out in my mind. Core three was pretty cataclysmic for me. I did— That's the other, right? Search for the other?

**CH** [00:22:44] Yes. Yes, I believe so.

**CW** [00:22:47] Yes. I did, Rick's —of course, Rick Scott. He probably retired before you got there. Is he still around?

**CH** [00:22:55] No, he just retired.

**CW** [00:22:57] Right. So he used to teach a class on the history of counterculture where you studied like the hippies and the deadheads, even further back than that. I grew up in Cave City and I listened to Classic Rock and I considered myself as much of a rebel as you can be in a town like Cave City. I enjoyed kind of this idea of the people who go against the grain, and then we read some readings by Jack Kerouac, who wrote *On the Road* and *The Dharma Bums*. And man, we read like two chapters of his book one week for the journal, [*snaps fingers*] and I was hooked. I mean, this guy wrote like nobody had ever— I mean, it was a stream of consciousness writing, right? So over that semester, I read every book he ever wrote. So I would say the biggest influence that honors had on the way I write and the way I express myself was probably kind of encountering the beat culture and Jack Kerouac in that core three class.

**CH** [00:24:16] So do you remember what your core four was? And I believe that's the art of the search— I should know, I'm in it right now [*laughing*].

**CW** [00:24:23] Art of the search, hmm. I don't. Did that change? Because, like I thought there was one— Lord, I don't know. I thought my next core class I took was from somebody who was not an honors professor, she was a professor out of the literature department. We basically read novels that got adapted into a film, and then you compare the two. I don't know if that would be the art of the search or not? And then I took an organic gardening class from Allison. Does that still happen? Does she still do her organic gardening class?

**CH** [00:25:21] I don't know if it's specifically organic gardening, but I know that she does gardening classes.

**CW** [00:25:30] So those were the two after— I mean, I believe the one after counterculture was the lit class.

**CH** [00:25:38] We've talked about Doug a little bit, so would you say that he is the honors professor that impacted you the most?

**CW** [00:25:52] [*laughing*] Probably. I mean, at the end of the day, he's just the honors professor that I spent the most time with. Doug kind of helped me with how I saw myself if that makes sense? As I said, I think college is a transitional time for everybody and you get kind of confused about who you are. Oh, you can get distracted by a lot of different [things] and some of it's good and some of it's bad. I think Doug was always a great voice to have around to kind of keep myself centered. But I'll also say— Rick's kind of perspective on the world— I did not talk to Rick nearly as much as I did Doug because I mean, Rick was the director. He had a lot more going on. But Rick definitely opened my eyes to a lot of things. Doug is an absolute sweetheart. And when I need somebody to be hard on me, I cannot count on Doug for that. Like, I write something, and Doug's like, “Man Corey this is phenomenal writing,” and I'm like, “That's not true. It's bullshit. Like it's shitty.” If I needed somebody to be hard on me, Allison could tear a paper apart better than anybody. But those three would be the honors professors that I definitely had the strongest relationships with.

**CH** [00:27:24] Other than the professors, were there any staff members, even just on-campus, that impacted you? I know that Lanita has been a popular answer.

**CW** [00:27:47] I don't know if I ever met Lanita. I don't know if I knew her? Probably not. I mean, as I said, I mean, me and Patricia Smith had some dealings. I mean, I remember when she was just— what is she now? What is her position now?

**CH** [00:28:10] She's the dean of the Honors College.

**CW** [00:28:12] Yes, I was going to say she is really high on the ladder. Yes. And I remember when she was just getting started back in the day. I mean, she was just kind of a staff member... I think her name was Miss Middleton, who was the secretary here for years and like, I saw her retire in my four years there. So she was always a sweetheart, but no other than the professors. I didn't have many dealings with other folks.

**CH** [00:28:39] Were you able to experience anything unique because of honors?

**CW** [00:28:47] Oh, yeah. Do they still do TAG trips? Do they still do travel abroad grants? Yes, those would probably be the other major [events]. I was talking to my wife and I was like, "I don't remember a lot." Like I got to thinking about the literature class or core two, and I was like, "I just don't remember a lot." And she was like, "What about your TAG?" So my first TAG trip, which would have been between what? Between sophomore and freshman or sophomore and junior year? So I just finished that counterculture class, and I just asked for some money for a road trip. Well, I got a really small TAG grant and I drove out to California. So in the book *The Dharma Bums*, Jack Kerouac climbs a mountain called the Matterhorn, which is in California, and it's called the Matterhorn because it looks like it resembles the real Matterhorn in Switzerland. But it's not. I drove out to California and I

stopped at Arches National Park and Grand Canyon National Park. I stopped in Vegas and Death Valley and then got to San Francisco and went to City Lights Bookstore, which is where they first publish all of Kerouac's works. And then I went and climbed the mountain, and then I drove home and so that was my first [TAG]. Everybody needs [to do] it. I mean, man, what an adventure. I literally wrote an essay and they gave me money to drive across the country. That's crazy. Then my second TAG trip—and we may have been the only group that ever did it—we went to Africa. We went to Tanzania and there were just like eight of us. Doug and Allison were the two leaders in the group. And then there was an alumni named Benito, and he was from Tanzania, and he kind of set the whole thing up. But again, what a once in a lifetime [thing]! Yes, I could talk about the Africa trip for three or four hours, right? I mean the first half of the trip, we kind of stayed at a university and took a couple of classes in this major city of Dar es Salaam. We learned a lot. But then also, you just have these weird out-of-body experiences. Like I remember sitting on this patio eating fresh papaya at like midnight with me and these two other guys from the Honors College. And these two guards that guarded these dormitory grounds, and I mean, these guys didn't speak English like we didn't speak the same language. They're just these huge dudes and I mean, they've got these military shotguns and these bandoliers across their chests, right? I mean, it's kind of a —and again, I'm just like this [*laughing*] young white kid from a town in Arkansas with 1500 people and like sitting here sharing this fruit with these—Yes, I don't know. Just crazy, like *what?* It's one of those moments of like, *how did I end up here?* We kind of lived the life of students for the first week and a half. And then the second week and a half we went on a couple of safaris. We saw a bunch of beautiful animals, a lot of beautiful landscapes. We went out to Zanzibar, the island of Zanzibar, and lots of beautiful open-air markets. As I said, I mean, the Africa talk could go on for— I could write a book about the Africa trip. I probably should. But yes, I mean, the TAG trips were a massive moment.



**CH** [00:32:49] Mm-Hmm. I think you should write a book, you could be the next Jack Kerouac.

**CW** [00:32:54] Yes, there we go. [*laughing*] You talk about imposter syndrome.

**CH** [00:32:59] Now kind of like moving on to like the big capstone of honors or your thesis project. What was your thesis?

**CW** [00:33:16] I wrote and produced a short film my senior year, which was like 15 minutes. And it was called *The Last Summer*, and it is nothing to be proud of. It was basically like a short episode of *Dawson's Creek*, but with a lot of F-words in it because I was an artist and I was going to express myself, and so we just put a bunch of F-words in it. The film, I would not consider a grand success of any artistic or cinematic scale. As I said, Doug was my thesis adviser. [There were so] many kids writing like dissertations, these huge papers. Everybody was kind of jealous of me like, "Oh, you get to make a movie, that is so much easier than writing." Which, number one, no, it's not. Making a movie is incredibly hard. But then number two, Doug was like, "You've got to write this artist's statement and you've got to explain all your choices and you have to like talk about why the movie works the way it does." And I would say, no strikes against the UCA film department, but nobody ever really pushed us to engage with our art on that kind of self-critical level, right? It was always, "you're going to make a five-minute movie this weekend. It's got to have two actors. It's got to tell a story." And like, if you checked all the boxes, you got an eight. That's kind of how the film department worked. Whereas Doug, kind of— and the way honors did it with that artist's statement, that kind of forced me to sit down after it was done and say, *what worked*

*and what didn't?, why did I choose to do things certain ways? and were those good choices?*

And a lot of those weren't good choices. I think that was the first time that I kind of learned to hold myself accountable to some artistic level for *what could I have done better?* I'm not just checking boxes. How could I have made this story more powerful? And at the end of the day, that artist's statement ended up being like twenty-three pages. So I didn't even dodge any bullets by making a movie. At the end of it, people were like, "You still wrote the paper," and I was like, "Yes!" That was wild— As I said, I probably could have pushed myself harder on that. But your college kid, you try to make things easier on yourself.

**CH** [00:35:59] Yes, that's true. [*laughing*] Um, so we keep talking about the film department. Were there any professors, other students, or any programs that you were able to connect within that major?

**CW** [00:36:18] Absolutely, yes. I mean, I was probably a much more engaged film student than I was an engaged honor student. They had some professors over there, Mike Gunter, namely. I think he's still teaching over there. He's getting older now. And more than that, just students, just countless students that I worked with who inspire me. And there's a guy named Eric White who was in the master's program while I was in the undergrad program. Incredibly hard-working, individual, and just inventive. Just one of the most inventive— like if you need to see something on a screen, the guy can come up with it. And I speak about him in the present tense because— like I left Arkansas, I graduated college and left Arkansas for six or seven years, came back and ended up working at Arkansas PBS now, and he works in the office next to me, right? I mean we ended up working— And I mean, yes, I can't do any of the work I do today without Eric. I look back at my time at UCA like man, that was foundational and integral to my continued success was my relationship with a lot of those

[people]. And there are several of us at Arkansas PBS that started right down the Hall and in UCA's film program. I'll say, early on I wanted to be an editor. And I was there for a couple of semesters, and I took a couple of film theory classes that I had never encountered at Cave City, right? I mean, you were just on a computer making a movie, just making a funny, stupid, really stupid movie. That's what you did in high school. And then like, I got into film theory and we started talking about, like, "Why does editing work?" Like, "Why does cutting these two shots together make me feel an emotion?" And that was really I mean, I considered to go on and becoming a doctor of film, but I realized I was way out of my depth. But that was really the class that was like, "There is a reason to storytelling, there is a power to storytime, there's a way to manipulate storytelling, to make your audience feel something, feel a certain way." That's what that was, really when I was like, *Oh shit, like, I'm hooked!* Like the power of a story to elicit emotion and to change someone's perspective on the world. So I took a couple of classes in that. There was a guy named Joe Anderson, who had been the dean of the film school for years, and once again, he retired while I was there. I took a couple of early classes from him and he retired. I made a project two or three years ago that got canceled on Arkansas PBS called *Tales of the Natural State*, and it was a digital short series of like eight-minute videos where we encountered folklore from Arkansas. Monsters and myths and haunted places, or just like famous stories that probably weren't true, but for some reason, culture kind of hangs on to. And again, I think what we kind of missed the point of at Arkansas PBS is that they wanted it to be like *Ancient Aliens*. They wanted it to kind of be this big, like sensationalized. And I was like, "No, I want to analyze why these communities hold on to these stories that probably never even happened." Like, what is it about these stories that make them indispensable to these places? And I think part of my brain is super focused on like, *why do we love telling stories??* And I think a lot of that comes back to honors core one. It comes back to the film theory ideas that I was getting hit with freshman

and sophomore years. There's a lot of these things that I'm doing now that people still don't get that I can kind of trace back to *man, I'm still asking the same questions I was 10 years ago as a freshman*, so.

**CH** [00:40:51] Were you involved in any extracurriculars? like any clubs, sports, anything of the sort?

**CW** [00:40:59] Nah, [*laughing*]. With the double major in the minor, I did not really have time to. I ended up sleeping on a lot of people's couches, drinking too much gin, and watching like four movies in a row. I mean, that was pretty much my Friday night. Most of the time.

**CH** [00:41:18] Still sounds like a fine time to me.

**CW** [00:41:24] Yes, I guess we could've called ourselves the film club [*laughing*], but they probably would have frowned upon that.

**CH** [00:41:34] You said that you moved out of Arkansas for a couple of years, what did you do when you were outside of Arkansas?

**CW** [00:41:44] Yes. So I was lucky enough— So one thing I do want to get on the record of my time in honors because, again, I think we only did it once and they never did it again. Something you should talk—and I think I said it last time— something you should talk to Doug about is the Neptune Academy, which was this weird little— This would have been the summer between my junior and senior years. Doug had this idea that we're going to take

academically at-risk eighth and ninth graders, seventh and eighth graders, who were once good students. A plus students and then their counselors and teachers have seen them fall into the C range and we're going to introduce them to a group of honors kids who love to learn. And we're going to kind of do some activities for a week, and we're going to try to kind of reignite this passion for learning in these little eighth and ninth graders. We spent a whole semester planning out this curriculum. Like we read a bunch of books, online education methods. I mean, I was just way out of my depth. As I said, basically, Doug and Allison were like, "We're doing this thing." And I was like, [*snaps fingers*] "Man, I'm in!" And like, I probably should not have been in. They probably needed an education major, right? Then I think [*laughing*] it was such a neat idea. I think where the idea kind of failed was just like any other time this happens, we went to those guidance counselors and they said, "Yeah, here's all our A-plus students. These are the students that make us the most proud. So that's who we're going to send to your camp." When in fact, we needed the students who may not have been the brightest diamonds in the bucket, right? So I think there was a miscommunication there. The charitable or the altruistic idea of the camp didn't work out because we weren't helping the students we wanted to. But man, like we had a heck of a week. It was me and Doug and Allison and a guy named Patrick Russell and a guy named Dietrich. And there was another guy with the last name of Wilson. I can't remember his name. Dean Turberville's wife, Katie Turberville, was one of the professors. So that was one of the few times, probably in the four years, that I just kind of gave myself over to an idea of honors and put myself in a position that I was just utterly uncomfortable. Like I did not need to be there. Most of the time I wanted to kind of stay in my safe zone and be kind of smart and stay near the top of the pack. That's what I kind of wanted to do. Whereas that was a time when Doug was like, "I need you to do this. I need you to trust me." I was just like, "Alright, man, I'll go talk to some kids,"

and I'm still grateful that I did that. That was a really good experience. So now we can move on from honors.

**CH** [00:45:10] No, no. I think that was a very important thing to bring up and especially— Do you think that there can be hope to revive something like that?

**CW** [00:45:22] Yes I mean, the big deal was like Doug applied for a grant, and I think we got part of the grant. And that's also kind of where the thing kind of floundered. I would love to— The idea of honors kids, reaching out to younger students to excite them about learning, I think that is a great mission to be a part of the Honors College. I mean, I think that is. I think Doug was dead on there. The Honors College is this large group of people, young people. Who are eager to learn something new which gets rarer and rarer every generation. More people are just like, “I don't, I don't care about the world around me. I just want my daily life to be as easy as it can.” Whereas every year you're bringing in a group of students that are eager to engage with new ideas. to take some of that energy and share it with some younger kids and maybe set their path a little straighter going into high school? Yes, that sounds like a great plan. Now, I work for public television and I know that even the best plans don't work without money, so. You just kind of got a shrug and hope most days.

**CH** [00:46:54] Looking back on the Neptune Academy, is there anything that you think that you could have done differently? Like a different lesson or talk to this one specific kid more or something?

**CW** [00:47:09] Yes, I mean, absolutely... Patrick Russell, who I hope is a guy and I think he is down in Austin, Texas, and I hope he's a guy that has reached out to y'all because he loved

honors and he would have a lot of stories to tell you. He and Dietrich put together this lesson where we took the kids on a nature hike in the Joel Moore Nature Reserve over there, right? And then we get deep in over there and Doug's with us, but we get deep in over there and there's a couple of benches and so we all sit down on the benches. Patrick was very much about nature, and Dietrich was very much about like kind of zen and centering yourself. We basically challenged all these seventh and eighth graders to like, sit down and be still and quiet within nature and try to perceive something that they've overlooked, right? And like I said, Doug is there, too. We're all just kind of sitting there being quiet and some of the kids get the giggles and it's like, "I don't know if this lesson is working." Then Patrick's like, "What do you notice new?" And one kid is like, "I hear birds singing," one kid is like, "I see some leaves" or something. And then Patric is like, "Well, look over there. What do you notice over there?" We see a pile of leaves... we look closer. I have no idea what they're up to. There [was] this other guy in honors named Michael J. Hines, and this guy was down for everything. He would do anything you ask him to. He could be a little off-putting. He had an interesting sense of humor. But he was a good guy. We sit there for four or five minutes and like, finally, I'm like, "Patrick, like, you got to tell us what you're talking about. Like, you can't just I don't see anything." And then out of the leaves and mud, Michael J. Hines stands up like in basketball shorts but covered head to toe in mud, leaves— and like the kids, lose their minds. Doug, like to this day— you ought to ask again. Go ask Doug about Michael J. Hines standing up out of the mud because he's just cackling and clapping. Just, like none of my lessons had that kind of impact. That was one of those times that I was like, *Ooh, I'm a bad honor student*. I did not plan out my lessons. We watched *To Kill a Mockingbird* and discussed it. Then I showed them how lenses work, how kind of lenses actually flip an image, and that your brain actually has to flip it back to make sense of the world. So mine were very

basic. There were some of those teachers that brought their A-game that scared the bejesus out of us.

**CH** [00:50:08] So that is actually a story that I've heard from Doug before.

**CW** [00:50:10] There you go!

**CH** [00:50:12] Yes, it is. It is one of the many, many stories that Doug has in his repertoire of just interesting, funny pranks done within the Honors College.

**CW** [00:50:29] Yes, that was a big day for me and Doug. That was a wild moment for sure. That's definitely one of the Honors College— and just to be so grateful that like, even within the Honors College, I mean, really that day, there were four of us on that lesson. There are only four people that can tell that. I mean, other than the kids, there are only four honors people that can tell that story firsthand. And I am very grateful that I am one of them, that it's me, Patrick, Diatriot, Doug, and M.J. Hines. Those are the five people that experienced that story. \That's a good one.

**CH** [00:51:13] Do you have any other just fanciful stories like that just come to the top of your head, that you're like, “Wow, I was a part of that,” or, “I was in the honors college whenever that happened.”

**CW** [00:51:28] Hmm. I mean, I think I was in the honors college like when Norb announced his retirement, which was a pretty cataclysmic event. I remember that just kind of shook the organization, which we had all seen it coming to. But that was a big deal. Again, the Africa



stuff. I mean, I will say, like we were in Africa and we drove into a city I can't remember— I mean, we took a bus everywhere and. We had a hotel booked and basically like Benito gets on the bus that night, and he says, like “Some sheik has come in last minute, and rented like the entire hotel.” like, our reservations were gone. They just found another hotel for us to sleep at that night, and those were some pretty rough digs. I mean, that was a pretty— like, the power went off for five or six minutes every 45 minutes. And like, I mean, just go pitch black, which is not something I'm comfortable with. That was a pretty jarring experience.

One night in Africa, where we kind of stayed up late and had dinner and kind of sat around and like, I didn't know Doug's family history, and he kind of opened up about his parents being missionaries in Africa, which was part of the reason he had organized our trip. And like he opened up about it. He told some pretty incredible stories about his mom being a white female doctor in Africa, I don't know what decade it would have been. I would think it would have been the 60s. I'm not going to tell Doug's story for him, but he has some pretty incredible stories about that. There were a few times when tornadoes would come through Conway. I mean, I'll say I was at UCA the night of the shooting, when there was a shooting on UCA's campus, the two young men were shot there in the middle of the campus. And I mean, I was also a journalism student. So I mean, like, I was basically sitting in that dorm room with the floor-to-ceiling windows. And I can remember my mom called me and she said, “I've heard something's going down at UCA.” And then I had to get over to the journalism department because, like, we wanted to cover it. And that was a pretty surreal night. I believe I was there the night a tornado ripped the roof off of one of the dorms on campus. Can't remember it would have been over there near the little footbridge. I can't remember what dorm that is, but the footbridge I go in by crossing that creek towards Reynolds and Brewer-Haigman, there's that old dorm there on the corner, and I'm pretty sure

the roof got ripped off. Yes, there are a ton of small events that you think about. Yeah, crazy. Long four years.

**CH** [00:54:46] Most people go to college in order to prepare for their careers. How would you say that your college experience, more specifically, your honors experience helped shape or prepare you for your career?

**CW** [00:55:06] Absolutely. I mean, no, I think again, it kind of comes back to like what I was talking about earlier, just like. I have a way of thinking about a story that I have realized the further I get into, like the film industry, that I'm kind of unique and a lot of that, I think is because of honors and because of that, like not only like thinking critically about an idea, but also thinking empathetically so many filmmakers and storytellers can only approach a story from a single angle. They can only see a story from one perspective. Whereas I work real hard to kind of flip it and twist it and shape it, and I can kind of make a story, and do a lot of different things. Also, I can think about like, *why isn't it working? Like what? What part of it is broken?* Many people get into film because they like using a camera or because they like setting up the lights or because they like editing. Very few people want to put in that really hard conceptual work on paper before you get to the technical process. And that has made me unique and probably gained my— what stability I have in my career is the fact that I really love doing the part of the process that most people hate, which is writing it all down and figuring it out. Most people want to pick it up once it's figured out and then go, make it look awesome. And I really don't care. Like, if I never touched another camera again, I would be okay. I don't crave that at all. I like making the idea work, and I think the majority of that comes from honors.

**CH** [00:57:00] That sounds like it did have a huge impact on your career. Would you say the Honors College has taught you things that are applicable in your just everyday life, whether it be grocery shopping or something like that?

**CW** [00:57:25] [*laughing*] I don't know about grocery shopping. I would say. Yeah! I mean, I think just the ability to communicate with people. I see a lot of people just walking around frustrated and just mad at other people. I mean, we just live in a very angry time... [I can have] empathy and to look at a situation from somebody else's perspective, I think a lot of that comes from honors and I think that helps me get through a lot of engagements that I have throughout the day because like I have some bosses that absolutely do not have the ability to see something from somebody else's perspective. I mean, they are unyielding. You are going to do it their way. And if you don't do it their way, they're going to think you're bad at your job. If I approach it initially with a perspective or an idea, and it's not the same as theirs, I need to be ready to adapt. Kind of that ability to be nimble and change my way of thinking very, very quickly. I think that comes a lot from honors.

**CH** [00:58:41] You work at the Arkansas PBS, which is right on UCA's campus. You're physically close to honors. Do you feel like the honors community continues to live up to the standards established by Norb and the first-generation honor students?

**CW** [00:59:12] I probably fall short of my view now. I'm not super engaged as an alumnus. I know the people that are still over there and I have faith that they're doing good work. I don't worry about where honors is. I have faith we're still asking the right questions. I do wonder what has honors looked like in the time of COVID? Because so much of what I got from honors was kind of those human conversations and those human connections. And I'm sure

you all have taken Zoom classes for two years or Skype classes for two years. And I wonder if that maybe lets a little air out of the balloon. Maybe that hurts the program a little bit because suddenly it becomes entirely digital, which I think is probably not the best thing for the types of conversations that you have in honors classes. Yes, I wonder what COVID has done, and I wonder what iPhones have done to honors. I mean, they didn't really exist when I was there, and now I just sound like an old fogey at thirty. I think honors, especially for somebody like me that was living on a computer in Reynolds doing all my video editing and stuff, honors was a very human connection. And as we just get increasingly, increasingly digital, you wonder how honors will evolve and adapt. But I'm sure those questions are being asked from inside, too. I'm sure they're being handled as gracefully as they can be.

**CH** [01:01:06] So to wrap up this oral history, do you have any advice for current honors students, aspiring honors students, or anyone?

**CW** [01:01:18]. Yes, just keep pushing. It's hard being plastic and nimble in particular, like— With the ramifications of the ideas that on, I mean, they're presenting ideas that define you down to your core. And then for about two and a half, three years, they're asking you to be very malleable around those ideas. They're asking the core of yourself to be kind of bendable and adaptable. And that's hard! Man, that's hard. But do it. Push yourself, because that's, by bending that much is how you develop strength. I think about people I graduated high school with who just believe the things their parents told them to believe. And man, you just present them with one argument, and those beliefs crack because they're brittle and they've never been bent or pushed in any way. That's all Honors is doing: is pushing you and bending you to develop strength. Don't quit. Don't dig your heels in. I definitely dug my heels in for about a semester and don't do that. Just roll with the punches.

**CH** [01:02:52] OK, well, thank you for your time, Mr. Womack. And this concludes our interview.