

**TAPE # C.C 03, 1 of 4**  
**CHARLES COOK**  
**07.25.02**  
**JIM WHITAKER, Producer/Director**  
**PROJECT REBIRTH**

03.01.01 PICTURE UP

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS)

JW: We just spent the morning watching you play pinochle. Tell me about pinochle.

03.01.07 CHARLES COOK: Well, pinochle can be played with two variations. Uh, you can play with partners or you can play cutthroat, the style that we were playing, and you could play with two decks of pinochle cards or one single uh, single deck. We play with double decks. That entails 8, 80 cards, with no card lower than a 10.

03.02.10 When you play with double deck uh, single deck I should say it's uh, you have (deceses?) in it, which are considered nines. There are two nines of each suit, two tens, kings, queens, jacks and aces. When you play double deck, it's four aces, four everything, but no nines. And uh, we play normally a auction bidding, where you bid and but to speed up the game we normally play, when we was playing, we was playing cutthroat where two guys are always against one.

03.02.43 And this morning was a good morning because they uh, let me take away their little sixty dollars (LAUGHS) And so.

JW: They let you?

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS)

JW: You said they let you?

03.03.23 CHARLES COOK: No, they didn't let me. I just you know, I, I got my blessing from them this morning, that's all. Yeah, but we normally play uh, we'll start sometimes on a Thursday evening, and sometimes we'll play straight through the weekend uh, non-stop, and we'll have. But we sometime rotate a lot of people come up. We play rising flies, whoever, it's somebody's always waiting to sit down and play. But this one person if he's winning he could be there all day. For two or three days not moving. But we normally play summer times we play in the park.

03.03.54 Most of the winter times we of course we're in the houses. (?) we you know, go from house to house. But uh, our friends, their wives, those of our wives and all girlfriends, they all know, if they're playing pinochle, forget about it uh. We know where they at, they know where we at.

JW: Do they call you the Pinochle Man or is that just somebody that (?) actually we're coming to play and film pinochle and said oh, yeah, yeah, Pinochle (LAUGHS)

03.04.21 CHARLES COOK: Oh, no, they wouldn't I wouldn't say they call me Pinochle Man, but I consider I have a descent game. I can hold my own with anybody.

JW: Now and tell me about your friends that (?) uh, tell me a little bit about Miami and uh.

03.04.36 CHARLES COOK: Well, Miami and uh, that's his street name, but his real name is Alfonso. Uh, he's originally out of New Orleans. Uh, we met just casually, we had a love of pinochle and we started a friendship over 30 something years ago or better.

03.04.55 And the other Alfonso, his name is Al also, they're both, that's why we has to separate Al and Miami (you know?) . Uh, he's a very nice person. He's been around the block 99 times. Uh, you know, he's led an interesting life. So, he's always giving wisdom to the younger person, so it's a blessing to be in his presence, so that's all I can say.

JW: And he's, how old is he?

03.05.25 CHARLES COOK: Oh, he's 80 and change. Uh, about uh, (~JW~)

JW: So when you say he gives wisdom to the younger, you mean to you? (LAUGHS)

03.05.33 CHARLES COOK: Of course, I'm only 26. Again (LAUGHS). Jack Benny went to 39. I stopped at 26.

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS)

JW: So you're 26 and he's giving you advice?

03.06.23 CHARLES COOK: Yeah, uh, but you know, that's just a little white lie. Don't worry about it. No but I can't say I'm 26. My brother who's 4 years younger than myself, just uh, he has a great-granddaughter. So uh, you can see how much my 26 is true (LAUGHS).

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS)

JW: It was really interesting to be there this morning and kind of see where you live and uh, the park and the people there and the kind of spirit of a community that I sense there. That's your, those are your roots right?

03.07.09 CHARLES COOK: Yeah, I was born and raised in Harlem. Uh, only time I uh, traveled out of the country was courtesy of the United States Army, 1959, to about '62. I was in Europe. Uh, those years. And of course vacation stuff like that. But other than that, no.

03.07.30 But uh, those are my roots mainly, Harlem.

JW: What was it like growing up? When you were very, very young in Harlem?

03.07.38 CHARLES COOK: Well, when I grew up in Harlem, we were able to leave our doors open at any time. All my friends were, we intertwined. We went from house to house without having to worry about knocking on the door. We just walked in each other's houses, because we were all close-knit families. Uh, I was fortunate enough to be brought up in a uh, with two parents and a brother.

03.08.01 And uh, gave good structure. You know, my father did not spare the rod. Whew, he did not spare the rod. (?) my father was very strict. So uh, it was good for me. I can remember the first time I ever said a curse word, I think I was getting ready to go to high school and I said it. I looked around 'cos I knew I was gonna get knocked on my butt. So that's the kind of thing, you know. And uh, I used to have to go to church at least 3 times on Sundays.

03.08.35 Uh, my father was Catholic, so that made me a Catholic. But (?) my brother came along, my mother said he will go definitely this one will go to my church, which meant he became a Methodist. So I had to go take my brother to church with me to Mass, then go to Methodist church. And then a friend of mine, they had some kind of little Holy Rolly church, and I ended up going to the Holy Rolly church.

03.08.57 So I would go to 3 services every Sunday, so. Uh, I might, if I decided to go to church, I'd go to any church that the feeling hits me now. So.

JW: Did you uh, did you consider your family to have a sense of (?) was it a family (?)

03.09.16 CHARLES COOK: Yes, I would say we had a good spiritual background. Yes. I would say that. Uh, my grandmother had a great influence on me. That was my honey. Yeah, so I would say we were good, we had a great.

JW: How did she have a great influence on you?

03.09.35 CHARLES COOK: Oh, she just, it's jus the things that she instilled in me. She made me uh, she gave me, I got her complete attention, or she got my complete attention when I seen her slap my father, and I knew he was whipping me, so I said, well, yeah, you got my attention (LAUGHS). (?)

03.09.55 So when she spoke, I listened.

JW: Your grandmother was on your fathers?

03.10.05 CHARLES COOK: Yeah, my father's side. My mother's mother died uh, I must have been about, it was in the '40's. I was, I was a young kid at that time. Uh, I was just starting

school, and when she passed, so I never really got to know her too well. (?) but my on my father's side, my grandmother lived to about to be 94.

03.10.37 And uh, so I you know, I spent a great deal of time, plus she played pinochle, and played well. And spanked me in a couple of games (LAUGHS).

JW: Great. So it runs in the family?

03.10.53 CHARLES COOK: Yes, it does. I, unbeknownst to me uh, I started, had the love of the game and didn't realize that was the game that they were playing when I was watching them as a kid, 'cos I used to be fascinated by all the picture cards. And ended up playing the same game that she liked to. And my grandfather uh, he was a railroad man. And one of the first jobs I got was I worked for the same railroad he worked for, Penn Railroad, and I ended up eventually going to work for the city at uh, for the New York City Transit, which I'm retired from now.

03.11.27 But uh, so I did fall in that line, and I went into the service the same way he did. So he and I had similar backgrounds.

JW: That's your grandfather?

CHARLES COOK: Yeah, that's my grandfather. (~JW~) on my father's side, on my father's side, yes.

JW: So your grandparents on your father's side really were quite, had quite an influence on you?

03.11.48 CHARLES COOK: Yes, they did. Unbeknownst to me, yes they did. My mother's people also. Yeah.

JW: And how about your brother?

- 03.12.04 CHARLES COOK: Oh, my brother? He's uh, married. He has uh, uh, let's see. He had 4 girls. One passed at an early age. Uh, one uh, and he has two sons. Uh, I have two sons and a daughter myself. Uh, by marriage.
- 03.12.31 And uh, he's into computers and he's very, very smart. He's very, he's designed a, a software that's, if it comes out, a lot of people gonna lose jobs 'cos it does everything. And so. But uh, my brother and I get along well, I just spoke with him uh, yesterday. 'Cos he left his mouse at the house, so he has to come back and pick it up.
- 03.12.57 Uh, like I said, he's four years younger than I am, but he's a great-grandfather. So he's the one that's old, I'm not.

JW: Now uh, we just go back a little bit. Uh, you know, growing up, tell me if you would what it was like growing up with uh, with your brother in Harlem. What was the kind of spirit at the time and just give me a flavor for it, like a memory that you have that just is in your head. One you know, obviously you're thinking (?) you're playing pinochle and.

- 03.13.38 CHARLES COOK: Oh, back then uh, I went to Catholic school. And uh, I used to uh, be in a lot of fights 'cos uh, my father refused to put me in anything other than short pants, and I wore short pants in the wintertime. They had a snow in '47 and I wore short pants.
- 03.14.59 So I was always wanting to get a pair of knickers. The knickers were the long and, shoot. So finally we, we go down to Cower's to get some shoes and I go into Barney's, 'cos that's where my parents always shopped. And we go down to the store and I just knew I'm gonna get my knickers, I'm just as happy as I can be. Shoot, I ran out, when I came out the store, you couldn't tell me nothing. I had long pants. I (?) graduated from short pants to long pant. Oh, yeah. So I had a good childhood uh, I really did.
- 03.14.29 Just that I used to fight all the time, but I had a good childhood (LAUGHS).

JW: Why'd you fight all the time?

- 03.14.37 CHARLES COOK: Well, my father encouraged it. He, he just, he just encouraged it. He said, I want to make sure that when you get older, you don't fear nobody. And it came to

pass that I don't (?) I fear no man. Because uh, (?) he used to box so he taught me. So I did the same. When I went in the service I boxed amateur, stuff like that.

03.14.59 But I don't fear nobody. No. No.

JW: So would you describe yourself as a fighter?

03.15.05 CHARLES COOK: No, no. I back away. I back away from fights, no. When you're confident you (?) not to fight. It's not necessary.

JW: That's true. So the power of your uh, (place?) kind of makes people not want to mess with you (in a way?)

03.15.25 CHARLES COOK: I wouldn't say that. I'm not no world beater or nothing, but I, you know, people respect you if you get respect yourself. That's all that's about. (~JW~) If you carry yourself in a way, you know, they know, people know what you'll do and what you won't do.

JW: And how is, how has uh, how have things changed in Harlem? How do you (?) seem great, I mean, it's just.

03.15.46 CHARLES COOK: Well, Harlem has, is going through a renaissance. It's uh, when I was coming up it was really, really nice and excuse me. And then in the '60's, '70's, it went down.

03.16.04 But now that they're (?) now that it's come back, they haven't brought back the night life that they had at one time. But it's getting to be more family oriented again, and uh, they re-fixing the buildings. It's just coming up back much better but then now with Ground Zero, uh, people where everybody wants to move to Harlem because it's the fastest and cheapest transportation you can get. You can get anywhere in the city within a few minutes.

03.16.31 (?) if you go out to Long Island then you have to take the Long Island train in, and then take a subway to get to work, and you, you're commuting maybe 3 hours every day. You can go back and forth to work and be in your house within 45 to an hour uh, from Harlem.

Anyplace from the top of it to the bottom of it. So it's not like uh, you know, killing a lot of time. So they're bringing it back.

03.16.57 They had uh, in the '60's they had (like uh?) uprooted all the trees out of Harlem, and uh, the police uh, encouraged it because they said, well, we can't really see crime because all the trees hanging over. Now they starting to replace those trees again, because in doing that, they uh, destroyed the community because uh, the trees gave shade and stuff and so it makes it more homey and so now they're bringing that back. So that's, it's a good thing

.03.17.29

JW: I noticed, I noticed actually there were uh, they (?) cut the trees down because so they could see more?

03.17.39 CHARLES COOK: Yes. (~JW~) they could see. They'd say well, we can't see the streets as well. That was one of the reasons they did it. First they said, well, it's the trees are no good or whatever, they getting old. But it wasn't that. They wanted uh, visibility.

JW: Tell me about your family. Your children.

03.18.01 CHARLES COOK: Uh, I have uh, a daughter who's an (ephrudemologist?) and I have two sons. One just completed college. The other one is, I think he's graduating this in a couple of weeks or a couple of months he's (?) supposed to be graduating. Uh, my wife is a nurse. Uh, at Wyckoff Hospital. Uh, she's the uh, staff nurse there.

03.18.28 Uh, let's see uh, I don't have any grandkids so I keep trying to get one of them to give me some grandkids but that's not happening, so I don't know what's going on there. But uh, that's uh, extent of. So (that cuts in?) my family (?) and I have uh, my niece in Detroit, Taz. Uh, her kids are like my grandkids (LAUGHS). Yeah, 'cos uh, it's strange. My brother, my brother and my daughter look like they could be father and daughter.

03.19.02 My niece, Taz, looks like she could be my daughter. And it's just strange to know. If you look at her and you say, oh, that's Charles' daughter or you know, not Dan's. My brother's name is Dan. But uh, and she's an engineer. She's doing quite well.

JW: Is she really close?

CHARLES COOK: With my brother?

JW: Are you really close to (?)

CHARLES COOK: Yes.

JW: Do you go to Detroit?

03.19.29 CHARLES COOK: Oh, yeah, I just uh, I was in Detroit, I was in her house uh, with her family uh, less than, February. Uh, during Valentine's Day, I just came back. Uh, at the end of February, March, beginning of March I came back. I stayed out there about two or three weeks. I ended up baby sitting and cooking. (LAUGHS) But (?) it was fun. Yeah, I kept saying, I got to leave. But I enjoyed it (LAUGHS). I don't want them to know how good a time I had (LAUGHS).

03.20.01 I kept uh, got me watching these three (LAUGHS) mud rats. But I was having a ball, so. You know, it really was nice. Yeah, but uh, I really enjoyed it. But (?) don't tell them I enjoyed it.

JW: Tell me if you would about the day of September 11<sup>th</sup>, and if you could uh, tell me about it from the perspective of the kind of feeling of the day for you and as best you can remember, and uh, in your mind.

03.20.39 CHARLES COOK: Uh, unbeknownst to me, I was looking at, at found out since then, that I was looking at a documentary. Uh, this uh, particular fellow, was filming rookie firefighters on their first assignments. And this one particular firefighter had not yet been to a fire.

03.21.00 He still was in a rookie stage. So I'm watching it, the TV and as I watched the TV, in the background I could see the plane hit the building. And they said, oh, it's an accident. And I said, soon as I seen it, I did not believe it was an accident. I said, that's no accident. I said, it's too clear, the building's too large for them, that to be an accident. I just didn't feel it was

an accident. And so I watched it for a while. I wasn't concerned about the building falling or anything like that, but I just said, oh, that's no accident.

03.21.34 I kept saying that's no accident. And then I saw the second plane hit. And I felt a lot of rage. I said, we're at war. Which I don't think we've really declared war yet because I always thought you, the president's supposed to go before the Congress and they can ask for a declaration of war and he hasn't done that yet. That's, I don't know why he's holding back on that, but he needs to really do it.

03.21.57 But uh, I saw this and I said, oh, I said, oh, gosh. I said uh, and they were hurt, I put on a scanner and I kept hearing them, they said they need people to uh, you know, for, they was calling all the firefighters to get in and stuff like that. So I sat there. I had no intention of going no place at that time. So I waited a while. And then I heard the building coming down.

03.22.29 I just got up and started looking around and uh, I put on something. I found some old pants, 'cos I knew I was gonna have to do something. And I walked down. Now all the transportation was out. And I was in Harlem at the time. So I walked from 147<sup>th</sup> down through the park of the girl walking down also. And she was going to a hospital.

03.22.58 To check in a hospital. So we got into the park and a police officer said, (?) everybody's coming uptown. I said, yes, I know, I said, I'm going downtown. He said, what you going to do? I said, I'm going to work. He says, you going to work? I said, yeah, I'm going to that hole. Then he said, I'm going to the Trade Center. He said Ok, and now that second building (come by this time?) Uh, so I was able to give her a ride with a police car to her hospital. And I got a ride with some people in the park gave me a ride partway down.

03.23.32 So I stopped at a bank, I said, I better get some money 'cos I don't know I know I'm gonna have to buy some uh, boots and some stuff. And I proceeded and I went downtown. And uh, I got down there and it was chaotic. So I just pitched in. I never did, hadn't gotten the clothes I needed. So I stayed down there most of the night and was down there when they uh, the second, the third building, 7<sup>th</sup> came down.

03.24.00 I stayed there 'til the next day. And I said, let me just come up and get something. So I went uptown and I stopped and got my (?) self a pair of boots. But uh, I got a pair of boots, that was early in the morning, about 9, 10 o'clock. Got right back down, I'm glad I got those boots. And sure enough, when picking up something. I didn't got that far, got, went up to

about 14<sup>th</sup> street, 15<sup>th</sup> street. Came right back in, and a beam fell across my toe (LAUGHS).  
And I broke my toe at that point.

03.24.32 So uh, but I continued to work because uh, it was uh, with all the carnage and the loss of life and limb, I wasn't thinking about a toe, 'cos I knew it had broke, (?) it did happen when one of the EM guys said, oh, there's nothing you can do with a toe but wrap it, I say I know. So I worked. It was (?) painful at first, but you know, you (?) endure.

03.24.56 And uh, I stayed down there. I uh, one of the first things I did was I worked on the buckets. First thing, though, first thing I did was I when, I came in there but some it was somebody was carrying some water and I walked it into the pile. And when I walked it into the pile, I never got out of the pile. And that's when we was digging and looking for people. And of course, with that you've seen a lot of stuff that you didn't really want to see, but I looked at it and I just kept saying, I, I looked at men and I say, men I don't, I'm not just talking about men, I'm talking about female, everybody who was on scene were men as far as I was concerned.

03.25.33 Uh, I looked at it and I kept saying, if they can endure, I can endure. Now I'm claustrophobic, I've always been, all my friends know that. But I looked at it and I said, well, if they're going in that hole, they're no more man than I am. And (?) if they can go down there and endure to do what they have to do, I can do that. And they were men going down there.

03.25.57 They was, it's a strange. This is on like the first day. It was a strange sight to see people with, the street first of all, walking down into it, the street looked like you were at Coney Island, but only thing paper all over the street. Sand and paper. That was, that's the first thing that struck me when I went down. But to see men uh, dusty-looking and in the dusty face you can see the streaks of the tears, you know, dried up tears, but what a determination on their look the face of, that I can do this. And uh, it just give you, those are what I call heroes.

03.26.40 Because you know, that a lot of people say well, they weren't real heroes 'cos they ran up in the building to save the lives of some people. They didn't know the building was gonna come down. I believe this to my heart. And they know the building was still coming down, and they thought they could save somebody, they would have still ran up in there.

- 03.26.59 Because uh, we had like uh, scares uh, where they thought the building was gonna fall (?) and I spoke to one guy, and he spoke to me, he said, regardless the building's coming down if you were be here, I'll come look for you (?) And that's the kind of bonds that were formed down there. It was, it's something that you don't want to ever see again.
- 03.27.29 But there were bonds made that you would never, no amount of money could trade for. I mean, uh, it was uh, I don't know it's just. The things I've seen I wouldn't even want to talk about there, but there's when you, when you see parts of people all over the uh, I've seen a soda machine so smashed it looks like this, was no thicker than this thing like here. That's because the weight of all that weight, the weight of the building on it.
- 03.28.03 I mean, the whole soda machine, you know, that normally would disperse uh, Pepsis and stuff like that. But uh, you gain strength from other people's strength. And you endure what you don't think you can endure. I am, I have a herniated disc in three places, and I was hurting. But I just said, no, pain is good. That means I'm alive.
- 03.28.28 And I continue to do things that I would never thought I could do. And I uh, but I did it. When I got, the pain got too bad, I worked up stairs with the uh, there was a Burger King, I dispensed clothing and stuff. And when it wasn't I'd go back down in the hole. But I, I continued to do it, and you got caught up in it. When I say caught up in it, you could not leave, because when you, you made friendships.
- 03.28.58 If you left and you heard of somebody getting hurt, you would feel responsible (LAUGHS) maybe I could have helped them. So I, that's how I ended up doing 400 days. I just, and then it all of a sudden I just said, I knew it was time to leave when I started crying over the National Anthem and getting angry. I just said, well, this is getting, it's finally gonna come to me. Uh, 'cos I ended up volunteering with the Red Cross at the end. And signing checks for uh, uh, at Pier 94 for some of the victims' families and stuff.
- 03.29.28 So I just, I had to weed it out. But uh, it's an experience that I'm sorry I had to have, but I am, I'm glad I did respond. That's all I can say.

JW: Can I, can we go through a little bit of, so you can get a little bit more clear of an understanding. When you said you went into the hole, you're claustrophobic?

03.29.53 CHARLES COOK: Yes, I went into the buildings, yes, I'm claustrophobic. Yeah. But uh, like I said, uh, I, I had to uh, I just had to do it. I just had to do it. I could not uh, my body, if I wanted to run, my feet would not take me in the running position. You know. I used to always say, I run towards the sound of the gun. That's (?) and that's what I was doing.

JW: Had you always done that in the past?

CHARLES COOK: What's that?

JW: Run towards the sound of the gun.

03.30.32 CHARLES COOK: I've always accepted a challenge, yes. I've never run from a fight, or from something I thought was dangerous. I've never done that. That's (?) because my father what he instilled in me. God rest his soul that was his, that was him. And uh, he told me there's nothing to fear. You know, he said the biggest fear is overcoming your fear.

03.30.58 And so I just put that aside.

JW: But you walked a hundred and forty blocks?

03.31.08 CHARLES COOK: Yes. And I came back and most of the time when I like came out, when I changed, I came, I stayed down a couple of days straight, and then I came back out, and then I got down to 14<sup>th</sup> street, that's the furthestest you could go (?) uh, to a point, then I walked back in. And then I would stay days. I mean, literally days. Sleeping down in the (LAUGHS) Sleeping on the street at first.

03.31.33 When we first get there, we slept on the street. Uh, the first couple of days, it was literally sleeping on the streets. And I ended up sleeping in uh, what's called uh, it was uh, Brooks Brothers (?) uh, they had a rug, so we slept on this, a lot of us slept on (?) and then Brooks Brothers uh, allowed us to, we had to change clothes on (?) a Thursday it rained so hard. I mean, to a man, everybody was soaked. And uh, by that time they had brought clothes and so we was able to change clothes right there.

03.32.03 And but we still weren't able to bathe and then they still hadn't set up those kind of facilities. But uh, I, I really forget when I came out, because it was so brief. But I, within that 100 days, I think I literally slept in my own bed maybe 15 days, if that. 'Cos most of my time was spent down there.

03.32.29 You know, (~JW~)

JW: What did people say when you came out?

03.32.34 CHARLES COOK: Uh, when I came out, it was a feeling of I was embarrassed. Uh, I was embarrassed because people were hugging me. And, and I was trying to get them to stay away because I had the smell of death on me, and the smoke.

03.32.58 And one lady told me, she says, uh, don't feel that way. And I was dog tired. I'd been up like 28 hours, something like that. I hadn't you know, really slept. (?) but I just, I have (?) tinitis, which is a ringing in the ear, so it was bothering me anyway. So uh, she says, don't feel that way. I said, no, but I, she said, no, no, no. be proud that you're there. And you know, and other people were saying the same thing. And they said, well, let the man sit down, 'cos I was really tired, so I sat down and went to sleep, 'til I got home.

03.33.31 But it was a nice feeling, a strange feeling. And then uh, when I was going back in that particular morning, 'cos I only stayed out maybe 6 hours 'cos I wanted to really wash and really wash, wash,. It's not the same thing as washing in some place and you don't have the change like you want to change. So I just washed up, and I came back in and when I'm walking back in, I get a big bag of people that's telling me, please take this in with you. Let it be used. Gloves, stuff like that.

03.33.58 And uh, the outpouring of love that was shown and exhibited made you proud to be an American. It really did. It was really, I've never seen so much love in my life as I saw on those streets on the West Side highway and all the other streets. You know? They had groups of people just standing there. They didn't do anything else but just stand there and clap or say thank you. It meant so much to so many people.

JW: Did you feel different from them when you came out?

- 03.34.33 CHARLES COOK: No, I didn't feel different. No I don't think I felt different. I felt tired (LAUGHS). I was tired. I was too tired, I was too tired to think about feeling different. No, I felt tired. Uh, there was no difference. No. No, I just you know, I uh, I didn't tell a lot of people what I was doing.
- 03.35.01 I didn't tell, I wouldn't tell uh, my immediate family or anything. I didn't want nobody worrying about me. I just uh, and uh, my daughter found out. I had uh, gone up to uh, 14<sup>th</sup> street or something like that, and one of the guys had asked me, go up and pick up some film 'cos I said I was gonna go up and pick up some film for myself, 'cos he wanted to take a picture.
- 03.35.31 And I'm coming back and I'm writing my name on some clothing. A jacket. And I hear somebody say why are you writing your name on a jacket? She said (?) I'm not, I said, oh, they're thinking that the water's gonna break. This was well into it uh, in the hole. And it's my daughter. And she started, well, why do you have to go back there, Daddy? I looked at her, I said, oh, Vicki, I'm so sorry. I didn't know it was her. And uh, I said, well, I have to go in there, it was the reason I explained before, you know.
- 03.36.00 You can't leave. You just couldn't leave. I couldn't leave, because uh.

JW: When my mom passed away about a year and a half ago, and there was a period of time which I was involved in that uh, kind of discovery of her having cancer and then her death in (?) six weeks, very immediate period of time. And there was a great sense of immediacy to everything that I did at that time, even though it was very small things. Getting breakfast, picking up things at the store, doing whatever, you know, the details of which I didn't think. I wouldn't think now, meant a lot. But at the time (?) meant a great deal. And so, and it took me a while to get after beyond that to get sort of through it. So when I was outside of it, I often felt like I was in a bit of a haze, and I wasn't in Maryland? I felt (like I was in a?) bit of a haze. People didn't understand what I was (?) going through. Is there a (?)

- 03.37.13 CHARLES COOK: I, there is a parallel there. I, I've looked at people who were there, and people who weren't there. Those that, like I said, I was in Detroit. They understand what happened, but they don't understand what happened.

- 03.37.34 There was a change here in this country that we can never go back to. And the people that were over here that walked these streets understand it. And those, they understand it on a different level for those who are in it from out in the country. And those that were in that pit, or in that hole, or whatever you wish to call it, they understand it on another level.
- 03.38.01 And for me to express it to you, I cannot. But it's a bond (?) it's a something that we dread that we have. Because it meant nothing but death. But uh, I don't know. You know, like I don't even know why I'm sitting here, you know, to be honest. Uh, there's so many more people I feel more deserving to be sitting here than me.
- 03.38.30 And sure I spent some time there, but other people spent more time. Uh, but uh, and uh. I don't know. I look back at it and I wish I was 20 years old so I can have a rifle so I can go some where and put and look through the crosshairs at somebody (that are?) in all this. But I can't do that now. You know, it's, they need a change.
- 03.39.01 They need to change the laws that they have in this country. I don't know if you wish this on here, but they need to go back 10 years. And if I was the president, I'd go to the Supreme Court and say, I want to go, I want you to start and take everybody who's in this country illegally and go back 10 years from this date. If they had any kids up until that point, they're here illegally, too. (Regardless?) you know, if you're born here you're a resident. I would change that.
- 03.39.35 If you came here (?) illegally, regardless of what you spawned off, that's illegal. So all of that just goes back. I would send everybody back. Because see, this country, in 10 years, if you haven't had a chance to go and get your papers legally, you don't want to do the right thing in the first place. It's not like you didn't have chances to straighten your stuff up. If you hadn't done that in all that period of time, out of here. Get out of here.
- 03.39.59 I would just ship them all right back. Wherever they came from. I wouldn't care where it is. It could be from the Ivory Coast, it could be from (LAUGHS) Jamaica, wherever. I would just, just ship them back. Because it just makes no sense. And I'm not just talking about Iran or someplace like that. Just anybody who's not here and hasn't done the right thing correctly ,just ship them back because they don't do. I don't think they even intend to do the right thing. That's what I would do. Maybe a little harsh, but that's what I would really do.
- 03.40.32

JW: When you say if you were 20 years old, you mean you would be able to fight?

03.40.38 CHARLES COOK: Yes. Uh, uh, yes. Well, I told you I'm (?) 6 years older than that now (LAUGHS).

JW: I understand. Why did you go down that day?

03.40.58 CHARLES COOK: I don't know. Uh, my, my (?)my father must have been pushing me, 'cos I sure went (LAUGHS) but I don't know. (LAUGHS) I was compelled to go, I had to go. I knew there were things that I could do to help. Because everybody's I knew I could look at a body part and not be (?) bothered by it. I knew that. I've seen uh, working for the city subways, I've seen dismembered bodies and trains where people have been killed on the trains.

03.41.37 So that part of it I knew I could handle. And then I was in uh, combat engineers in service, so I knew there were skills that I had that I could apply down there. I knew what to do with a jackhammer or I knew how to use a power saw. (?) Those kinds of things, and cut and uh, and I did all those things while I was there. Down there.

03.42.02 I did some cutting uh, steel which I had done once in service, but I had gotten away from all that. But uh, you know, but uh, you know, I just came back to me. I had somebody push me through it again, you know, crash course I mean. PSI (LAUGHS) so much oxygen and hydrogen and stuff, but uh, you know, I just did what I was able to do, 'cos I knew there was not enough manpower here, and not enough people with uh, knowledge.

03.42.37 I (?) was there and it was, it was uh, like the second day, third day, I saw guys coming in where you from? I'm from Alabama. How you get here? Hitch hike. The outpouring of people coming in this city to get into that place uh, was really something, really something. I felt that was New Yorker's finest moment.

03.42.59 America's finest moment, to be honest. You know, uh, what they did at Pearl Harbor was expected. That was a military base. Ain't nobody in there, no military personnel. Nobody was even thinking about nothing like that. So whatever, I don't know why they're waiting, I would have put the bomb on them so long ago it's a shame. Israel has the right idea.

03.43.29 You kill my son, I'm killing your family. That's the (?) role I would take. (?) it would quickly stop. But we are too civilized for our own good. That might make me sound full of hatred. Uh, but I am. To be honest. I didn't even want to admit it to myself, but I've got a lot of hate (?) for them people.

03.43.59 Not only hate but uh, a lot of disgust. That wasn't necessary.

JW: Is that why you left Ground Zero? You said that one moment you realized that it was time to leave.

03.44.15 CHARLES COOK: No, I realized that it was slowly getting to me. Like I told you uh, what really did it was I told you I started working with the Red Cross. And to be down there working in that pit and you could see a head or you could feel somebody's fingers or a hand or foot, which I've seen.

03.44.39 You saw it in the first days and stuff. That was, I could deal with that. But when I went up to the center uh, I mean, uh, the Family Center up here on 94, and walked and saw those people's faces on that wall, it hit me. In another way.

03.45.01 That it put more meaning to what I was doing, and (?) it caught me up emotionally. So then I had to, I just couldn't go, I didn't want it, I just couldn't deal too much with it then after that. I just, I weaned myself out, and so that's when I knew I had to walk away from it. Because I found myself uh, getting teary-eyed at, at like Ray Charles' getting ready to sing that song and I said, oh, lord, that's (LAUGHS) cut the TV off (?).

03.45.32 So I just knew that it was time, you know, uh, (?) emotionally caught up with me. So that's when I (~JW~)

JW: That's because you realized that you were, it was kind of a job in a way and that you could handle. And then all the sudden you saw the faces and you connected it to people.

03.45.51 CHARLES COOK: Yes, yes. Up until it got personal like that, then it got real personal. And uh, 'cos I seen the people, you know. (?) I picked up somebody's wallet one day and I you know, vouched it, you know, turned it in to them. (?) in the pile and I'd pass it off. And

I'm thinking about, I'm at the pier and I'm saying I wonder if this lady's pocketbook I picked up, you know, stuff like that. And it gets to you, well, it got to me. Can I stop for a moment?

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS)

03.46.29 END OF TAPE # C.C-03, 1 of 4

**TAPE # C.C 04, 2 of 4**  
**CHARLES COOK**  
**07.25.02**  
**JIM WHITAKER, Producer/Director**  
**PROJECT REBIRTH**

04.00.48 PICTURE UP

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS)

- 04.01.33 CHARLES COOK: Like I said, when it stopped being a recovery of bodies, you know, for somebody alive, I should say uh, it must have been about 8:30 at night. (?) about 8:30 at night. Here we were literally on our knees, some of us with hands, some with rakes, some using (?) over there.
- 04.02.04 Uh, and they pull us out of the pile. Said, come on out. And you know, some of the (?) officers, you know, emergency people, we all, we're pulling out, because in most cases. That's who I work for, I work with the emergency people, I just kept working with them, uh, so we'd come on out. And uh, they went right away with a giant crane and just scooped, and I said that's the end of that.
- 04.02.34 That's when they had to put all the buckets, they lined the buckets up, 'cos normally we would have taken the buckets and sift into the buckets for uh, ID stuff, body parts, stuff like that. That's what we were doing. We were taking, take, scoop the, put the buckets in and then we'd sift it out. And when they did that, I just said that's the end of that.
- 04.02.57 I said they won't be finding no more bodies here 'cos uh, they were really concerned about the water coming in at that time and they had to shore that up, so they had, they had to do that. You know, I said, well, most of the bodies will be over in Freshkills, and that's when they said they found a couple of whole bodies over there later on. But that, that it was, it was either shore that up or the West Side Highway would have come in, because what would have happened is the water from the Hudson would have come in under the highway and would have done the backlash thing.

- 04.03.32 It would have swooped up and swooped back out. And then going back out it would have dragged a lot of the landfill with it. And that would have destabilized the highway. And may have even uh, destabilized Battery Park city. So that was one of the reasons that they had to do what they did with it. You know.
- 04.03.59 If there was somebody alive it wasn't worth, it was worth, but wasn't worth trying to look for one more body when that was quite a while into it. And with all the fumes and (COUGHS) excuse me (COUGHS) with all the fumes that was burning, and the fire burnt was constantly burning all the time, the, they it was impossible for anybody to have been there. We knew it and what we were doing, so. They did the right thing, you know.
- 04.04.30 So it was the right move. But that's the day I knew this all over. There was no more sense looking for anything else. You know. It never became a job, I never received no pay, 'cos I didn't go down there with that intention. But it's just that uh, just became more or less uh, what's the correct word? You know, like everything's hasty because you've got to do the right way because maybe there's a chance of somebody, but then that was the day of that's it.
- 04.05.04 Then it's all over. There's nobody that you can possibly find here. You know, it was. It was something you had already accepted, but it was hard, too, because uh, you always want to hope for people. You know, uh, I (?) feel that a lot of those people that were above those floors, they, we'll never find them because I think they were cremated.
- 04.05.30 'Cos they didn't jump. Anytime you can melt metal to make it liquefy, you know that's gonna do to human flesh. So they were, they will never be able to find those people.

JW: Were you ever scared?

- 04.05.46 CHARLES COOK: Never. Even when they said the building, they sounded the horn (LAUGHS). And I started running like everybody else.
- 04.05.58 I passed everybody (LAUGHS). I was in good shape. I was running really good. I was coming back up and I hear one of the guys, man (?) did you see that old man running? I said who y'all talking about? You. I said, what do you mean old man? I say yeah, man we seen you, little old man, you an old man compared to us. I said all right. But I'm, I'm, I've

always been in good shape. Uh, I normally walk upstairs or run stairs. Uh, so it keeps me in shape, so running's no problem.

JW: When did the horn sound? (?)

04.06.36 CHARLES COOK: Oh, it was in the afternoon on this particular day. It sounded a couple of times. It was they put it because they kept thinking that One Liberty was unstable. And you look up there and you see that 70 story building and you (?) your eyes will play tricks on you (LAUGHS) 'cos they're saying it's unstable. Yeah, it do look like it's waving, so you're trying to outrun the building (LAUGHS). But then they came a time when I was down in the pit and the horn sounded and I said, where in the world can I run?

04.07.05 I can't possibly get out of here fast enough, so if it's gonna come, let it come. Just whatever happens, it's gonna happen. And a lot of guys just felt that. We just said, we're not running, if it's gonna come, it's coming. You know. So. That's like when they had told us you should mark your (?) jackets or body parts in case the, when that water they thought that might, it was uh, (?) things were real unstable, so it would be easy to identify you and all that kind of stuff.

04.07.31 So you did that. And I saw men do that. Without any hesitation. And they'd go right down in that, into that danger, not knowing that they were gonna come back out. So, and I was there with them. So we, and I'm just, something you accept. So when I accepted that, that part, I just said, well, the building's coming down, let it come down. No, I was never afraid.

JW: Number 7. One of the buildings, were you there when (?)

04.08.02 CHARLES COOK: I was, 7 came down, yeah. That was uh, further up. That was up by the Post Office. It came down that evening. Yeah. I was down there at that time.

JW: What was that like?

04.08.16 CHARLES COOK: I was too busy where I was at. I heard the noise, but then they said, the other building went down. But in the meantime you're still over here (?) other spot. But they had said they had gotten everybody out the building, so nobody rushed to it.

04.08.32 You know, they were still looking for people in the other buildings. You know, so there was no, there was no need to rush to that. I was down there when the President came. He came, I didn't stop working for him (LAUGHS). Uh, that day. He went over to the West Side Highway, and cut in front of me in his motorcade. (?) All that stuff.

JW: What memories (?) thinking (?) just wondering (?)

04.09.11 CHARLES COOK: Oh, I was just thinking uh, the Corps of Engineers, they put the hurt to them uh, box. The uh, black box. And uh, we went up on the roof uh, upstairs 'cos uh, like I said, sometimes as I was working at Burger King giving out supplies.

04.09.30 So I took them upstairs to (?) you know, and they think they found it over, up closer up on Church Avenue in that area I mean, uh, Church Street in that particular part, up near the smaller towers. You know, it was up in there. I was just thinking about that. That's also where we found some body parts up there. That's what I was thinking about.

JW: When you were underground (?) when you say you went into the Hole, you mean you were going underground (?) deep down inside. Uh, you know, for someone like myself who only saw it from (?) what was that like? Especially for someone who is claustrophobic.

04.10.14 CHARLES COOK: Very intense. Very intense, you know, very, very intense. You know, some guys went further than I did. Uh, they went all the way up in there and (?) walked around in the mall and all that kind of stuff, and came back out.

04.10.32 And at that point then they were trying to shield some of us who weren't firefighters, you know, so or police officers. But uh, it was, it was nice. I uh, it was real nice. I got to uh, uh, I got to make a lot of friends there. It was, it was strange.

04.10.59 I met a lot of guys that were fire department and a lot of guys on the service the emergency police. I mainly worked in that area with them. Uh, it was interesting. So I told them, I kept telling the police officers, remember uh, next time you see me, don't give me that ticket now

(LAUGHS). You know, every once in a while we had something, some little uh, something we could laugh about.

- 04.11.30 Uh, so. And I got (?) I picked up a nickname, 44 Long while I was working down there. And that was uh, I was, like I said, the first couple of days I was sleeping at Brooks Brothers. And so I kept telling them oh, yeah, I'm over there in Brooks Brothers. So one guy kept, one of the firefighters kept saying, I take a 44 Long, bring me a suit, bring me a suit. So I said, so I go into eat (?) and we actually eating right there on Liberty Street.
- 04.12.03 And it's full of everybody, FBI people and the CCI, everybody has a uh, markers on them FEMA people, everybody, police officers. And he hollers in the middle of the camp, there he is, that's my man. I told you he gonna get me a suit. I remember, there was a man that just got arrested for stealing watches down there (LAUGHS). So I'm (?) trying to shake my head, said, why is he trying to embarrass me like this.
- 04.12.30 So the place got real quiet. And he, another firefighter said, oh, yeah, he can get you. Yeah, get him to get us something. And I hadn't taken nothing out of there, right. But they, they're teasing me, kept saying. FBI guy stood up next to me saying, I take a 46 and everybody started putting order (LAUGHS). So when they see me, they would call me 44 Long. (LAUGHS) So that's how that came about. But uh.
- 04.12.55 So there was times for a little break and that was like something to break the stress and other stuff that was going down there. You know, but it was stressful. I uh, ended up marching in the Columbus Day parade, too. Uh, it was something. Uh, I don't know.

JW: Why the Columbus Day parade (?)

- 04.13.23 CHARLES COOK: How did it happen? Uh, I was, I really went to observe. I was in the gear uh, 'cos I wanted to see the parade, and some of the guys they said, come up and see the parade, we're marching. The fire department. So I was standing up (?) I didn't, I (?) was walking along and I stood up by uh, the almost before you get to Central Park. And uh, the parade stopped. And I was up there at the front of the parade, and a couple of guys hollered, 44 Long, 44 Long. And one of the cops said, hey, he's talking to you. Going out there.
- 04.14.00 But I'm wearing the helmet and that suit and coveralls, and I'm all ready to go work. Back to work down there. So I go out there and we hugging it for 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue. He says come on,

march with us. I said no, no. (?) so I ended up, his captain says, yeah, march, you're gonna march. He said, you've been with us all this time. So I marched in front of the fire truck and behind the uniform firefighters. We marched a little about (?) a half a block, and they stopped again, 'cos they're doing a picture, photo, photo ops.

04.14.28 And the head of the uniform fire department had somebody come back and grab me. He says, 'cos you've been down there with us, we want you to march up front with us. So I marched up front which was very, quite an honor. So I marched the rest of the parade out with them. Uh, that was my pay. That was a good payday. Put a big smile on my face and a big tear in my eye. (LAUGHS) That was my payday. You know, that was an honor. I told them so, it was an honor. He said, no the honor is ours.

04.15.00 I said no, that's my honor. And that was my payday. Somebody ask me, did you receive anything? I said, I got paid good time. That was my payday. Really was my payday.

JW: So you made some good friendships there?

CHARLES COOK: Oh, yes. Lasting. Very much so.

JW: Firefighters?

CHARLES COOK: Uh, uh. Policemen.

JW: (?) (LAUGHS)

04.15.30 CHARLES COOK: No, I have no preference. I, I have no preference with people. The race or color. People. You know? Just people. It doesn't matter uh, their religious belief or whatever. It's just people. You know?

JW: Can you tell me about some of the people you met down there?

04.15.54 CHARLES COOK: Uh, like I said, I met one guy walked in from all the way, hitchhiked from Alabama. I met another fellow, he used to do mountain climbing. He put his repelling

equipment in there, and gave it up. His harness cost maybe 4 or 5 hundred dollars. Here, you'll need this. He gave me, gave, offered it to me, 'cos I was going down in the hole. Uh, 'cos (?) at one point they wasn't gonna let everybody, at that point, they just stopped letting certain people go down.

04.16.29 Uh, and do certain things. And they stopped backing it up. And it was just so many people. I mean, so many people you reached out. I met a lieutenant down there named Jay with the police department, a very nice person. Uh, Vinny, a volunteer firefighter who we, we became brothers like, well, we're not alike, but we became brothers (LAUGHS).

04.16.58 Uh, through him a met a young man named Mike Diaz. His, he my heart goes out to him. His brother died in the Trade Center. His sister, his brother was preparing his children for the death of their mother, who had cancer. Now he dies.

04.17.29 The firefighters, (?) took her into their arms and hold on to her. She died shortly after that with two boys. And uh, I happened to go to the wake and stuff like that, so. And uh, you know, you from it you meet people, you know, 'cos uh, I was going to one too many funerals. I've going to a few funerals. Guys that were in the hole there. So.

04.18.01 And I happened to go to hers. Hers was the last one. I said I couldn't go. I'm not going to any more funerals. Uh, so. But uh, this thing just touched you in ways that you never thought you would touch, touch you. I'm getting ready to learn how to ride a motorcycle now. I'm supposed to be doing a cross country ride with America's Ride trying to raise \$50 million for some of the kids.

04.18.30 Or not some of the kids, but the kids of, from the plane, their parents who were on the plane that went down in uh, Pennsylvania. And the Pentagon and the World Trade. And uh, it's my first time on (LAUGHS) gonna be on a motorcycle. So I'm just enrolled in the school. And we're supposed to leave on September 2<sup>nd</sup> and go back into Ground Zero. It's already set up with for the Pentagon and Stratton Pennsylvania.

04.19.00 We seem to be getting a little opposition from uh, they don't want nobody coming to the site down at Ground Zero. But I think they're gonna have to do something because as many riders that are signing up. They might have 10,000, 20,000 riders coming. They're gonna have to open up something. So. I will be riding. I'm supposed to be one of the lead riders. They uh, chose five guys from down at Ground Zero to give a bike to. I don't know if I'm keeping the bike or not, but regardless, it's an honor just to have it, to do it.

04.19.30 So. Uh, so I'm doing it. My brother's teasing me. You know you're too old for that stuff. I said, yes, I can understand that. You know uh, I'm, I'm over that age of uh, sexy, dumb (LAUGHS) but uh, but I understand what he's saying. But I'll try and be careful. This would be uh, it would be more of a controlled ride, because we, we are gonna have, we're gonna have a fire engine leading the way.

04.20.04 And we're just gonna ride. I'm, I'm gonna stay behind the fire engine to buffer me from the wind (LAUGHS). I'll be up front anyway. That's where you put the novice riders, anyway, they say. Well, I'll be right close up front so I won't have to get hurt. I'll be all right. So I'm looking forward to doing that. Then I'm gonna come back and get involved in my pinochle game again.

JW: Was there a lot of people who were in your category down there? In other words, it seems like you're kind of unusual. You, I mean, in this (?) sense you, a lot of people were firefighters who were working down there regularly, or, or trained EM emergency specialists or policemen or what not. Yet, and then there were volunteers. But you, you seemed to be like right in the middle of it. Uh, and yet, while you had a background that (?) was working and you know, obviously was very beneficial, you sort of (?) tuned up your skills. Was it unusual for you to be?

CHARLES COOK: No.

JW: No?

04.21.09 CHARLES COOK: No. It was not unusual. It was quite the norm. See that's why I said, I don't even know why I'm here. Uh, there were many Americans were like that in that hole that had never thought they would do anything like that. Uh, unskilled. Uh, that's why I said, I don't understand, you know, they didn't have no skills.

04.21.32 They, but they knew they had to do something, you know? It's like I, I could not sit and I understood when they said, I just had to be here. You just had to be there. You just, if I was in the hospital with a cast on, I would just have had to been there. It's just something you had to do. And I saw many people when I came out saying I just want to do something. I

understood what they meant. Just, it was a calling that you didn't ask for, but you couldn't refuse.

JW: Did you ever have a calling like that, not like that but have you had other callings in your life?

- 04.22.10 CHARLES COOK: Never. Never. Nothing close. And it was something I couldn't walk away from. You know? You know like uh, my daughter said, well, you've done enough. You've been there enough days. 'Cos she asked me when she finally seen me, how come you didn't tell me what (?) I said, I didn't want to worry you.
- 04.22.31 Well, you had enough, Daddy. And my, and she, her friend had just friend in the building and it was just (?) her best friend's house, her and her husband. She said, you don't need to go back. I said, I have to go back. I said I don't, I said, if I know the building's gonna fall down and I won't make it out of here tonight, I said, I have to go back. I just have to go. Just can't walk away from it. It was that compelling. And I think if you asked to a man or a woman anybody that was there, they'll tell you the same thing.
- 04.23.00 It's not about no courage or anything else like that. It's uh, just something that you just had to do. And I have friends of mine saying, you silly going in there. And I said, call me what you want. I did what I could. So I didn't tell them, nobody, I went. I wasn't ashamed of it, but I didn't want to hear no criticism about it, either, 'cos it put me on a level that they didn't want to see me on.
- 04.23.31 Make me want to hurt them, and I don't want to be doing that. I just kept it to myself you know, 'cos some people had their uh, their political beliefs and I'm in the area where sometimes I run into a lot of people there, Arabs there. This one particular store that people in there cheering that the building went down. (?) Cheering the building went down. (?) I don't know. I could never go in that store again. Ever.

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS)

JW: When people talk about a calling, it's just sometimes it's the connotation or they say it's like a religious thing, almost spiritual. Do you have any sense of that or not?

- 04.24.30 CHARLES COOK: I'm not a spiritual person, I would say, but I believe in the Lord and stuff. I don't know if it was spiritual, but it was just something. I tell you (?) it was my daddy. He was pushing me down there (LAUGHS). You know, my nickname is (?) I hear him saying (?) I'd. there was no doubt in my mind, in my heart that regardless of what was gonna happen to me, that if I was gonna die that day, that I was going.
- 04.25.04 I just was going. I just (?) not that I didn't care. But I felt needed. I felt like I, there was something I could do to help somebody, or there was something I could do, even if it wasn't helping nobody. But I knew there was something (?) uh, some service that I could do and perform, and I was going regardless of the circumstances.
- 04.25.29 So it uh, if you call it religious or what. But I could not walk away from it. I knew I had to go, even though I was walking a lot of blocks (LAUGHS) I just had to go. And the more, the more the blocks I walked, the stronger my conviction. You know, so I don't know (?) if it's whatever it's calling, religious or whatever. But what made the man come from Mississippi and hitchhike?
- 04.26.00 And he wasn't the only one. There were guys hitchhiking from all over the country. How'd you get here? I hitchhiked. How'd you get here? I, I trucked on it, jumped on a train, they gave me a free ride, all kind of stuff like that. So I'm not unusual. I'm, they slapped me in my face when they put that building down. I'd lived in walking distance of the building, (?) come and spit in my face. That's what they did.
- 04.26.29 I don't want to get angry. Uh, that's exactly what they did. And like I said, I, listen, my time on Earth ain't that long, and it's shortened because of the event down at Ground Zero, 'cos I have asthma and bronchial and some other stuff. I got stuff up in my chest that I can never get rid of. I do not regret it. I only regret they won't give me a pistol or something I can go put, do some work. That's the only thing I regret. Knowing what I have, I would go back down there and do it again. Without hesitation. (~JW~)

JW: You say what you have?

- 04.27.08 CHARLES COOK: What's in my body. (?) My chest is hurting me, this is just about the 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> day. It's like I have (?) inside of me. I have not been able to clear my throat. I have to

use inhalers and all this other stuff that I never used. I'm taking about 4 or 5 different medications.

04.27.30 You don't have to put this on tape. This, that's what I'm taking. You know, I got it in that bag over t here. But I don't regret that. I really don't. I have no problem with that. You come to this world to go. It's (?) a matter of how you go. Do you make a difference? Was your life meaningful? I would like to think that I gave some meaning to my life at some time. I always knew I was (?) I always say, that, I tell friends of mine, I'm gonna be the conductor on the Hell-bound Express.

04.28.02 I feel I'm going to Purgatory now, I stepped from uh, Hell (?) going down to Ground Zero. You know, I'm not bragging on anything that I did 'cos there's nothing to brag about. Uh, it was just an act that I was, had no control over. I was not able to do anything else but go. That's the only way I could explain it.

04.28.30 So that's why I say to other people, I, see y'all have taken up interview with. But I I'm not sorry and I'm not ashamed of what I did.

JW: Well, some could argue that the reason (?) for the same (?) reason that you went down there (?) so I don't, I appreciate what you're saying, but I think, you believe in Fate?

04.28.54 CHARLES COOK: Yes. I, you know, I believe that, sometimes when you see people and you meet for the first time, there you have auras. And these auras have met. And they say oh, you look so familiar, you feel so familiar. These auras have met long before you met. So when y'all get to talking, it's just because these auras have met. I believe in that. But I (?) I had something I keep and carry with me, and I kept saying this little thing over. I would read it every day. And it kept me strong down there, you know, especially when I was ready to go down in that hole. It's about courage. If you stop a moment, I'll tell you what it is.

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS)

04.30.18 CHARLES COOK: And that's what I would say every day, that and patience. It's not my original words, it's something that I picked up. Do you want me to say it aloud?

JW: Yeah, I would love for you to.

04.30.29 CHARLES COOK: Ok. Uh, you know, before I did go into that Hole, I did read this thing here, and uh, I had really written this down and one of my kids' books when they graduated. And it says, it's not my words, it's somebody else's words. Courage is not the absence of fear, but taking action in face of it. In other words you're not, it doesn't mean that you courageous 'cos I beat you.

04.31.01 I might beat you because I know, I might challenge you 'cos I know I could beat you, so that's not courageous. But if I go and challenge you knowing that you could beat me, that's showing some, exhibiting some courage. That's what it takes. And the other one is, uh, what does patient mean? And uh, there are 7 emotions. Joy anger, anxiety, admiration, grief, fear and hate. If a man doesn't give way to these, he's patient.

04.31.29 And I would say this last one, 'cos I'm saying, if I get stuck down in this hole, I've got to be patient. I would kept saying that, so. Just be prepared that you might get stuck in the hole some place. So that's why I would read that, and (?) I'd read the one saying about the patience over and before I did anything. And it helped me do the things I was there.

JW: What else do you have in the bag?

04.31.58 CHARLES COOK: Uh, it's some of the equipment that I had to wear and work with. Uh, I didn't know what y'all wanted so I brought the equipment. Do you wish?

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS)

04.32.21 CHARLES COOK: Well, I almost bringed up a pair of shoes which I did, when I had steel so I had to wear these. This is that jacket I was writing my name on. My daughter saw me. (LAUGHS) Was strange.

JW: What's it say on there?

04.32.44 CHARLES COOK: It was just a C.C. when I put my initials there. It was some other jacket I just picked up down there. This of course was (?) hole.

04.32.58 Uh, this is when I broke my toe. That's where the thing cracked on my foot. This (?) and I was given this, one of the first masks I was given by a firefighter (?) of course these are the knee patch you had to wear with the coveralls. Which are you know, since washed. Fearfully, uh, I have a feeling we're gonna need these things again. And you know, (?) That's about it.

JW: (?)

04.33.41 CHARLES COOK: Oh, you never saw the book? (~JW~) Would you like to see it?

(UNINTELLIGIBLE CONVERSATION)

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS)

04.34.01 CHARLES COOK: Courage is not the absence of fear, but taking action in face of it. And the other one I would look at before going in that hole was, what does patience mean? There are seven emotions: joy, anger, anxiety, admiration, grief, fear and hate. If a man doesn't give way to these, he's patient. And uh, these are what kept me going strong. While I was there.

04.34.31 So. (?) I just did what you would have done if you were there, or you. Anybody here in this room would have done the same thing. 'Cos for you to be involved in this project shows your humanity. You would have done the same thing. That's what it's all about.

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS)

04.35.02 END OF TAPE # C.C 04, 2 of 4

**TAPE # C.C 05, 3 of 4**  
**CHARLES COOK / B ROLL**  
**07.25.02**  
**JIM WHITAKER, Producer/Director**  
**PROJECT REBIRTH**

05.01.00 PICTURE UP

JW: What it was like to be down in that hole? And, and I think a lot of people (?) would be. I think you can textural, it gives people a sense. (?)

CHARLES COOK: Ok you want, uh, all right.

JW: I know that may be emotional (?)

CHARLES COOK: All right, I understand what you're saying. (~JW~)

JW: And what's interesting to me, to be honest with you is I talked, I started talking a lot in the beginning about your family, talked a lot about your dad. But I'm really interested in your grandmother 'cos (?) I have a feeling (LAUGHS) she had a really big effect on you. And I can name the people, you know, my dad had a big effect, and my mom had a big effect on me. Uh, I have 4 older brothers (?)

05.01.42 CHARLES COOK: Well, my grandmother did have an effect on me because my grandfather died in Italy in World War II. And she never remarried after that. She, said uh, another man would never touch (?)

05.02.01 And she stayed celibate that way the rest of her life, and she lived to be 93? Ninety-four years old. She died on Thanksgiving Day. So I uh, I loved her and I respected her. Uh, she was my friend. You know, not just my grandmother, she was my friend. Uh, we used to go fishing together, stuff like that.

JW: Tell me about that. You used to go fishing together?

CHARLES COOK: Yes.

JW: Where?

- 05.02.33 CHARLES COOK: Uh, we used to go out of Sheephead's Bay in Brooklyn. Take a boat out. Uh, the last time we went uh, I took my daughter and we went off uh, Lower Manhattan. We took a boat out. And for the first time in my life I got seasick 'cos I, I was up all night and I went to sleep down in the engine room, and the smell when I woke up I was upheaving all over the place.
- 05.03.00 And uh, they caught fish, I didn't catch nothing. But my grandmother was a great fisherman. She'd come in here, all her neighbors, and her name was Helen. Helen done caught all these fish. Unbeknownst to them, if my grandmother had a bad day fishing, she'd buy all the fish that she wanted to give away (LAUGHS) and come in and say, see what I caught? (LAUGHS) so she was a great fisherman, you know?
- 05.03.31 And uh, I know one time, you know, you always have pools for the largest fish and all that kind of stuff, who catch the first fish? And I caught this big flounder once. And we used to put it, cigarettes in their mouth to make them smoke. Cigarettes (?) uh, you know, you'd see them puffing, you know? But I had great, fond memories of my grandmother. I can remember uh, during World War II riding to Baltimore 'cos we have uh, I have a house there now.
- 05.04.00 And riding on the train and she'd tell me, you can't move the curtains, 'cos they had the black out and all that kind of stuff. And she started me to saving the foil uh, tin foil from the cigarettes and stuff like that. 'Cos they were collecting foil and all that for the, for the cause. Yeah, she had a great influence on me.

JW: What would she have thought of you going down to Ground Zero and doing what you did?

05.04.26 CHARLES COOK: She would have expected it. I didn't think about that, but she would expect that. Yeah, I say, I believe she would have expected that of me. Yeah, yeah. She would.

JW: And what would your dad have thought?

05.04.46 CHARLES COOK: He would say, that's my son, that's what he would say. I can see him now, that's what he'd say. He died before my grandmother. Uh, so that's what he would have said. Yeah.

05.05.02 Yeah, that's what he would have said. (?) I was really blessed uh, that I had good nurturing when I was coming up. You know uh, so I could look back and even with the whippings (LAUGHS) that's what I used to get, (?) I deserved them, 'cos I was always into everything. Uh, I, you know, I can't say I had a bad childhood. That's, it'd be far from the truth.

05.05.33

JW: Was it, uh, was it, we were talking about it before, how would you describe it as carefree?

05.05.37 CHARLES COOK: No, I had my responsibilities. Uh, it wasn't carefree. I used to sell the Amsterdam News when I was about 6, 7 years old. Seventy-five papers (a day?) was carrying. I was standing in front of my friends uh, his father, one of my best friends, their family of 7, the Paullings. I'd stand in front of their father's news stand with my papers. And he said, Butch, don't sell your papers here.

05.06.01 I'd sell my papers right there. And all my papers'd go. (LAUGHS) 'Cos (?) instead of the people buying the Amsterdam from him, they'd buy my papers. I'd stand right there in front of him. (LAUGHS) So he started making me stand around the corner. He'd say, here's, here's ten cent. You stand around the corner (LAUGHS).

JW: Were you a good salesman?

05.06.31 CHARLES COOK: Oh, yeah. At that time, yeah. (?) Yes. I've always did some kind of work. My father encouraged that, that (?) work early. Uh, long before I went to high school, I was working, I would work every summer for, I'd make my own money. And after a while, they didn't have to buy me nothing. I'd buy my own, make my own money. So uh, that's when I say uh, I had a good upbringing.

05.07.01 Uh, it made you appreciate uh, what you received and what you had, you know, make you more responsible. You know, uh, I didn't have to be asked for no, not anything. I just went and got what I had to got.

JW: I was describing before about how film can allow you to see things and visualize things (?) people there. What was it like going down into the hole?

05.07.27 CHARLES COOK: Uh, to be honest, it was more graphic up the top than going down into the hole. Because the first couple of days, 'til they got all the body parts up that were around, 'cos they, people would, people have jumped, and those that from the plane and stuff like that. Some from the plane 'cos it was some parts further away from the building, so we knew they had to come from the plane.

05.08.00 Uh, that was more graphic than going in the hole, because after a point, in the hole you wasn't finding as much. Uh, to, to walk on something and think it's a matt and come to find out that was a human being, that's (?) that's kind of heavy. You know, it's, to see them have to cut a fireman out uh, who has a beam across him.

05.08.37 He's dead already, but the way they had to get him out, get his body out, couldn't move the beam because the beam was supporting up something. That was something to see. You know, stuff like that. Uh, there was, there was things.

05.09.01 It's, you don't want to remember. But, you know. But you have to remember. Because in remembering it, makes it so that you don't want it to ever happen again, and you would do anything, and I do mean anything, to make sure it don't happen again. I may not do it, but one of my sons may, or my daughter. But. 05.09.29

JW: Do you think you're an example for them?

05.09.36 CHARLES COOK: No. I have not been, I have a fault, too. I have a fault in my make-up. I have been a womanizer all my life, sad to say. I acknowledge it. I tell my kids.

05.10.00 Uh, well, one I believe a man should have as many woman (LAUGHS) as he can afford (LAUGHS). And if there's anything better than women, (JC took it with him?) (LAUGHS) So I don't know. But in some ways, yes. Other than that, yes. I (could say I?) have been a good example. 'Cos I am not one to curse, I've never used the B word on a woman, I've never, never done no drugs and no respect.

05.10.34 I'm not alcoholic, don't do none of that. I've, they've never heard me curse at their mother, say a bad word about their mother. I'm not disrespectful of anybody. So yes, in that sense (?). And I made sure that they are headed in the right direction. Yeah, so I could say that. Other than that one fault, yeah uh, I like myself.

05.11.02 You know?

JW: You sort of also just said just a second ago that you know, that the going down there and doing it in a way that they might do the same thing, do you think by going down there you set an example for them in that respect?

05.11.19 CHARLES COOK: Oh, my daughter it, yes, that way, yes. My daughter, I told her to stay up behind, away from there. She's a (epidemiologist?). And uh, that's the study of diseases. She works for the city. I told her, please stay away from there, and I gave her a mask at the time. I said you wear this 'cos the air's not that good. No, that's city's (?) I said, I would eventually like to hear that we're having a grandbaby sometime.

05.11.47 And uh, you know, but she's hardheaded. No, we don't want to do that. And she's, she didn't want to do that. But uh, and so I would rather myself be there than my kids. You know, like I said, mine, I've had a decent and fulfilling life.

05.12.07 I've met some real interesting (?) people in my life. Bono with U.2. I was around with him for, I spent like a 2 or 3 weeks with him and got to know him very well. And (?) I've met quite a few people that were nice. I've touched skills with people with money and I've touched skills with people like myself, you know? (LAUGHS)

05.12.30 And I've always could say I could look back and say I haven't hurt or offended anybody.

JW: Do you think (?) you mentioned when you were pulling things out of the bag and you said, you said uh, if you were concerned you might have to use them again? Do you, are you?

CHARLES COOK: Yes, I really believe that that's gonna happen.

JW: What do you mean?

05.12.55 CHARLES COOK: I don't think this is the end of the terrorist stuff in the respect that uh, a major disaster such as Ground Zero, but I think something like this is gonna happen again. I may be wrong, I hope I am. But uh, that's why I haven't thrown it away. You know, that's just why I haven't thrown this stuff away. 'Cos it's nothing really to hold on to. It's all work clothes. You know, it's nothing that I want to pass on to anybody. 'Cos it's nothing but death.

05.13.32 But I haven't thrown it away. I've kept in a bag, thinking I might need it. Uh, I, sad to say I really feel that way. And uh, I really feel that way.

JW: In what ways did the experience change you?

05.14.05 CHARLES COOK: I'm more humble. I am more tolerant. Uh, more emotional. I'm more giving. And I try to be more understanding.

05.14.28 Uh, I try not to criticize people, and those I do have nothing good to say about, I say nothing about them at all. So. I (?) told my kids, uh, the spoken word is the most powerful thing in the world. I could tell you I hate you. If I think it, I can forgive myself for it. But once I've spoken the words, you feel the effects of the words, and it can never be taken back.

05.15.05 Because once said, it can never be taken back. Even if you forgive me for saying it. So I choose now to use only the words I feel I won't regret saying.

JW: You talked about your uh, womanizer tendencies.

CHARLES COOK: Yes. I know this isn't going on the film but ok, go ahead. (LAUGHS)  
I don't mind telling you.

JW: No, no.

CHARLES COOK: You can put it on there.

(SIMULTANEOUS CONVERSATION)

05.15.41 CHARLES COOK: But Wilt Chamberlain had nothing on me. Trust me. And that's, I do not kid.

JW: I hear you. Do you feel like you've changed your perspective on how you live your life with respect to others, not respect to women, but respect to (?) in particular?

05.16.06 CHARLES COOK: Yes. That's what I'm saying. Yes. That has totally changed. Totally, totally changed. Uh, yes. I'm a, I'm a softie now (LAUGHS). (COUGHS)

05.16.28 I'm a softie now. Very much so. Yeah. I'm stronger of character, though. I turn my head and do more flirting, but I don't do more, as much chasing either. So it's changed me in a lot of ways. I value, but I've always really valued uh, what I have and what I have, but I put more emphasis on it, trying to show people more so that you know.

05.17.06 All of that.

JW: Do other, have other people remarked that you've changed? Your friends, the guys you play pinochle with or?

05.17.14 CHARLES COOK: Yeah, some people have seen a change. Personal people have seen a change, yes. Yeah, yes they have. Said, should have been like this years ago (LAUGHS).

JW: You spoke for a brief period of time about your chest and the coughing, and uh, I've heard that there're, they've, people have said that people like yourself that have worked down there as intensively as you did, you may have symptoms?

05.17.54 CHARLES COOK: No may about it. I have it. My doctor wanted me to take that lead test and some other stuff. I just have refused to take it, 'cos I already, he don't have to tell me what I have already know what I have. They were like 27 different things being burned off. There's asbestos uh, benzene, mercury, stuff like that. Uh, the way I feel and the way I feel worse each day. He don't have to tell me. (?) they said most of us, (?) that working down there, if you was down there the first two or three weeks, it's cut your life expectancy off about 5 to 15 years.

05.18.32 So I just say, you just might as well have told me that mine's all over (LAUGHS) (COUGHS) five to fifteen years. I ain't got much time. So I'm gonna enjoy these few days, whatever they are. You know, so. But you know, that's, that's. You know, I never, I, I always said to myself, I never worried about death. I wasn't scared to die. And I'm not. If it's coming, come on. I'm not gonna just give up.

05.19.00 You know, I'm gonna go fighting. You know, when death comes, he better bring about 7 more of his friends with him or something to help when he pull me down. But uh, it's no thing, and I embrace it. I really do. I haven't heard nobody come back and complain about it, so. You know what I'm saying? So it can't be all bad.

JW: Uh, thank you very much. For the interview I really appreciate it.

05.19.34 CHARLES COOK: My pleasure, really. I hope it helps somebody. That's what, that's the reason I'm here. Somebody asked me why I was gonna do it. They said, are you getting paid? I said, no. Why don't you make sure you get some pay? I said, I, none of this was about pay. The (?) World Trade Center, none of this was about pay. If it was about pay, I couldn't sit in this seat. So.

05.20.01 If like I said, if I had never done anything else, I want to do one unselfish act in life, and this, this time and period in my life. That's all. So I hope you know, it helps somebody. I hope it helps heal somebody. I hope a president somewhere hears that we need to tighten up these

borders. I hope it makes some of these people appreciate what they have here and the freedom they have. I would rather them take away some of my freedoms if it meant securing this country.

- 05.20.37 That's how I feel about it. I have no problem with them saying uh, you need to come down and get fingerprinted and an ID card. I'd be the first on the line. The first on the line. I have no problem with that. And I feel anybody that's a true American would not feel that's infringing on their rights. I only find those libertarians.
- 05.21.01 And I thought I was a libertarians or liberal at one time. I'm about equal rights and all that stuff, but you have to. To run a democracy, to run a country, you have to have something stricter than what we have right now. Canada, they allow people to come in there, as soon as they just land and jump on, regardless illegal or otherwise, they all right, they can be a citizen up there. And they coming right down, no check. No background check, they come straight through the country from up there.
- 05.21.31 What in the world is that? That needs to be tightened up. They need to take all these guys that are in jail, now that the interview's over, they need to take these guys that are in jail for smoking reefer, doing drugs, which I feel is a non uh, a crime that has only hurts one person, that's the person that is victimizing themselves, they need to take them people and decriminalize that drug and that stuff, take them and put them up on these borders and save money and say, listen.
- 05.22.01 We're not gonna hold you in these houses. We gonna give you community visits, you can have people come up here so you can live your life, but you will be a prisoner 'til your time is served. But you will make sure that nobody comes in this country. They, there's so much manpower that's being wasted. Wasted. They waste it, they talk about well, we have a water shortage. Why do we have a water shortage? It should never be a water shortage in New York. You need to take the Hudson River water or the water coming from the sea and take it and put in through the pipes and let that be for the hydrants to put out fires.
- 05.22.31 But they take the same drinking water and run it all day long. They take the same drinking water and run it through the toilets system. Where they can filter that water through something. There's so many things they can do. Don't get me started. Like I said, I could talk (?). But uh, these are the pictures that you wanted to see.

05.22.54 (UNINTELLIGIBLE CONVERSATION)

05.23.35 CHARLES COOK: (MR. COOK USES INHALER) You know what I'm talking about. This is Ground Zero stuff. Never sick like this in my life, ever.

JW: You mean you've never, ever had?

05.24.06 CHARLES COOK: I've always been in excellent health, other than having (herniated disc?) Excellent health. (?) stuff like that? Never had no problem with (my body?) This is the time for me to get sick, so. (I guess?) I just got to deal with it. (COUGHS)

05.24.38 I mean that, none of my family would see me take my medicine or even use none of that stuff.

JW: Your family doesn't know you're sick?

05.24.48 CHARLES COOK: My wife does now. She's a nurse (like I told you?) My daughter knows. She's (?) but (?) wasn't telling anybody.

05.25.00 'Til the doctor called up and said he missed his appointment to take his test and (?) he started questioning (?)

JW: You didn't tell them?

CHARLES COOK: No.

JW: When did they find out?

05.25.18 CHARLES COOK: About 3 weeks ago (LAUGHS) (COUGHS)

JW: What was their reaction?

05.25.28 CHARLES COOK: Uh, (?) but I told them don't worry about it. I'm all right.

JW: But you're not?

CHARLES COOK: No. But it's ok.

JW: I have another question to ask you. When you were sitting in the middle of all this, how did you, did you ever think to yourself, how am I ever gonna make a difference in cleaning all of this stuff up?

05.26.05 CHARLES COOK: (LAUGHS) It looked like it would never get cleaned up (LAUGHS). It's, it's uh, it's a tribute to every person that put hands on in that place, 'cos that was a lot of stuff. You, you had to physically see it. To see it from the air, see uh, you had to see it, to see buildings. There's a picture of me, we were cutting steel. I'm eight stories above the ground, we were cutting steel.

05.26.36 If you come to that picture there, you'll see it. You'll see two guys, and I'm in a (~JW~) This is where we found a (?) box at. And we were sleeping under this, this thing. That's part of the World Trade and another building at Liberty.

05.26.58

JW: What do you mean, you were sleeping under what?

CHARLES COOK: That, where that thing is hanging out, that over hang?

JW: You were sleeping under that overhang?

05.27.06 CHARLES COOK: Yes. (?) we didn't realize it. We were just too tired to move. (LAUGHS) (?) you just do what you have to do. Like I said, if it's God's time to take you, it's God's time to take you. Not that you want to rush it, but.

05.27.32 This is the first day that it rained down there on that day. That was that Thursday. (CLEARS THROAT) Oh, we met this girl here, she came down to feed us. You know who that is? Sex and the City girl.

JW: Oh, yeah, Sara Jessica Parker.

05.27.53 CHARLES COOK: See that's the night it was all over. I remember telling you (?) when they put all the buckets together, I knew that it was all over, there was no hope. Oh, I've got a picture of my mother and my brother. Here's a picture of Melvin Van Peebles here, too. (LAUGHS)

JW: Where's your mother and brother (?)

05.28.13 CHARLES COOK: That's my niece with the red hair. That's the youngest boy. There's my son. Uh, that's my mother with the gray hair. That's Melvin Van Peebles there. He's, he also plays pinochle with me. We play pinochle together also. And he's a marathoner, also.

05.28.32 His son, Mario does movies now. Mario Van Peebles. Do I have it here, or did I bring it? I thought I brought all of them. (?)

05.28.59 This is something the kids would give us when we was eating, so I kept that one. You can look at it. Oh, here. That's 8 stories up. There's a drop of 8 stories down. It's 8 stories in front, 8 stories behind. This is a picture of me at the last day ceremony when we marched out.

JW: The last load?

05.29.30 CHARLES COOK: The last, yeah. And that's a picture of me in the morgue (LAUGHS). Of all places. They gave those helmets with the red, white and blue to the guys who were the first volunteers down there. You know, (?) and then everybody else started buying them. That, and this is where I was telling you I was sleeping that time. Then they put it closed it off 'cos they were scared the building'd fall. (CLEARS THROAT)

JW: (Interesting?) I didn't understand. When you were saying they piled all the buckets up. (?)

05.30.16 CHARLES COOK: Uh, when they stopped searching for body parts, and uh, trying to find pieces of people, 'cos (?)we piled the buckets up and uh, like I said, the way I was literally working (?) on my knees digging, 3 minutes after that they had taken heavy cranes and went in there (?) where we were looking for people, so we knew it was all over at that point. That's when they pulled the buckets. They just piled them up and that was the end of that. 'Cos up until that time we were sifting, you know, loading the buckets and shifting and looking.

05.31.01 And finding and looking and finding. Finding. (?) I never took any pictures of any body uh, parts or nothing. I wouldn't do nothing like that. You know, some people asked me. I have, I was asked when I was there, somebody asked me, I'll give you a thousand dollars if you take my camera and take some pictures. I wouldn't do that, 'cos I knew they wanted to exploit the pictures. I threw away the negatives to these. I didn't want nobody else to take and exploit them.

JW: Thank you. Uh, it would be helpful for us to, if you were ok with it, use these pictures in order to help explain your story. But if you don't want to.

CHARLES COOK: Ok, yeah I can uh, go some place and make copies for you or something like that or would you want to do?

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS)

05.32.17 CHARLES COOK: Uh, there's a lot of them in here. There's lots of pictures in here. This is my ugliness, the last day of the parade, when we were getting ready to march. I was getting ready to march.

JW: See this is what I keep, keeps coming back to me. I mean, you're gonna be (?) heading, one of five people that are gonna be leading this America, American's Ride. It

seems to me I know a lot of people came and served, but it seems to me that you had a, a kind of, you were part of the inner circle of people. If that make sense? (?)

CHARLES COOK: Yeah, I know what you're saying, yeah.

JW: Is that true?

05.32.55 CHARLES COOK: I don't know. I keep wondering (LAUGHS) how I'm here myself. (LAUGHS) (COUGHS) I don't know. I don't ask me how I'm here. It's all a wonderment to me. You know, 'cos I don't feel I did anything. I really don't.

JW: I understand.

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS)

JW: Did you work day and night, I assume?

CHARLES COOK: Yes.

JW: How many hours a night did you sleep?

05.33.56 CHARLES COOK: Not that many. I worked on an average, 18 hours a day or better.

JW: You keep mentioning the box, are you talking about a flight?

CHARLES COOK: Yeah, the flight box.

JW: So explain that. You found a flight box.

05.34.18 CHARLES COOK: No, we didn't, I didn't find it. The Army Corps of Engineers heard it for the first time. When they heard it I was with them when they heard it. I did get around (to be honest?) I was all over the place. (CLEARS THROAT)

05.34.46 I went and bought 7 cameras and took shots. That's what the extent of those pictures. Then I gave away 2 cameras to people. (CLEARS THROAT)

JW: What's this, is this just an evening shot?

05.35.15 CHARLES COOK: Yeah, that's uh, that was in the middle where people used to congregate to uh, hear the music, the bell that they had, that globe? That's the globe there. And right down there was a solid, straight drop, a hole. That's what that is. You know, you had those two short buildings as you come into the center? (~JW~)

05.35.33 That's what that's (?) and the globe was right there.

JW: You mean this like the Fritz cone (?)

05.35.40 CHARLES COOK: Yeah, whatever that thing, that sphere, yeah, that's what that is. Uh, a lot of people worked down there, but everybody didn't go down in this section, I was in that section. I worked all, in every aspect of it (CLEARS THROAT) I went 'til they stopped and said they didn't want no more volunteers, and I still stayed.

JW: How did you manage that?

05.36.02 CHARLES COOK: Oh, I'm retired from transit. My ID is Ok. And I went to a construction company, and I was working with those guys anyway, so I said, and I got one of their passes, and I still kept on work, that's all.

JW: You mean you got one of his passes (?)

05.36.18 CHARLES COOK: No, I went through the company 'cos I was working with one of their people. I did that for two, two passes. I got a (?) a white pass and a blue pass from them. I

first got a yellow pass, then a red pass. The (?) Army Corps of Engineers gave you those. The Army gave them to you.

05.36.33 Security, whatever they had. Uh, they asked you what your background is, and that kind of stuff, and they check you out. And then they kept changing because they had a lot of people just trying to infiltrate and was falsifying the passes, stuff like that. Uh, that's how they arrested a lot of these guys, 'cos they changed up on them. Oh, no, go get your, see your pass (?) (LAUGHS) (?) Uh, that's all.

05.36.56 I didn't ever kept my pass, I always turned them over and I should have kept them. Now everybody's walking around like they're merit badges. I'm sorry I didn't keep mine.

JW: What point did you realize you were sick?

05.37.10 CHARLES COOK: The second day. I ingested some stuff and I just said uh, oh, oh. I just knew. I said, I'm not gonna get rid of this, and I have not been able to clear my throat since. My voice went down an octave or two.

05.37.35 I used to have a nice singing voice, real nice.

JW: Not any more?

CHARLES COOK: Not like it before. I can't hold a note that long.

JW: Where's this one taken from?

05.37.54 CHARLES COOK: Uh, this one was taken from, through a window up on that level where the Burger King? I went through there and took this. It's real graphic. That's really showing you. See how dark and dirty, dingy-looking? That's the way it really, really looked. All over. A dingy, dingy look. And in the midst of all that. And now see how in that spot right here, (?) stories up, I was down in there cutting steel. That's (where I was cutting at?)

JW: So on a daily basis, you, you'd arrive and, who'd you report to (?)

05.38.35 CHARLES COOK: I didn't report to anybody. I just went uh, with the flow, wherever I was needed. If I saw a group of people gathering and they was doing something, that's where I went. Uh, but uh, most cases I stayed, like I said, I, I don't think I seen my bed but about maybe uh, 2 weeks. Uh, doing that period (?) days, 'cos I stayed down there.

05.39.02 I, I know I didn't buy a meal for over 100 days. I didn't buy a soda, a piece of candy, or nothing. I ate, slept, did everything right there. That's right.

JW: I heard the volunteers were great in that regard. I mean, people that were helping out.

05.39.20 CHARLES COOK: Oh, god, are they, they were. I said they were (?) men down there. (?) The women were just as much man as the men. To even be down in that circumstance, even (?) if they were in the area, to be breathing that stuff that we were breathing. You knew, if anybody was there knew after a day of being there what they was into. And nobody turned away.

05.39.51 So you can't see me ever complaining. That would be uh, a disgrace to those who have given their lives away, 'cos that's what we literally have done.

JW: And you were right there at last load?

CHARLES COOK: Yes. Yeah.

JW: That's right at the top of the uh, we were shooting from the building that's right at the top. You're right behind Guilianni, aren't you?

05.40.20 CHARLES COOK: Yeah. I, I walked straight out behind the uh, behind the guys in the uh, the kilts who play in the band. I marched right out behind them. (~JW~)

05.40.33 You know, you may see a shot with me down there. I'm in the parade. Yeah. They can say I wasn't there, but I wasn't there (LAUGHS).

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS)

05.41.22 CHARLES COOK: I was supposed to take the lessons yesterday, but the trains and everything broke down. I was on the train stuck almost an hour or something, almost two hours. So my lessons fell through yesterday. So maybe it was a blessing, because uh, I'm gonna go through one up in Yonkers. You know, we'll just go up there and do it. So.

JW: You definitely gonna do that trip?

05.41.45 CHARLES COOK: Only one way I won't go. They dump dirt on top of me. I'm definitely gonna go. Yeah, this, for it to be, it's like uh, for your, it's the same way I'm feeling about like coming here now.

05.42.01 Why was I asked to even go? Why were you asking me for this interview? I don't know. But there's a reason, so God put me in this position to go. And God put me in a position to come down here, so I'm gonna go along with it. I don't know the reason why. But I'm not, I'm not questioning it, but I'm not gonna question it. It's not in my hands, I'll just let it go. I'm just gonna do what I, maybe it's meant for me to serve this way, so.

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS)

05.42.34 ROOM TONE

05.43.38 B ROLL – STILL, GROUND ZERO, DAY (PIPE ORGAN?)

05.45.11 CHARLES COOK AT LAST LOAD

05.47.27 BROOKS BROTHERS

05.48.50 CHARLES COOK WITH FAMILY

05.49.57 END OF TAPE # C.C 05, 3 of 4

**TAPE # CC - 007**  
**CHARLES COOK**  
**08.04.02**  
**JIM WHITAKER, Producer/Director**  
**PROJECT REBIRTH**

07.00.30 PICTURE UP

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS)

JW: So as we discussed, I just have a few questions (LAUGHS). So why, why did you go down there?

07.00.59 CHARLES COOK: Uh, the reason that I went, it's not really clear to me, but I knew I had a duty, I knew something was calling me. I saw our country being attacked. I saw my home being attacked. Uh, it wasn't like it was Korea or Vietnam or someplace. It was in, it was in my front yard. Uh, walking distance from me.

07.01.29 True, I walked 140-something blocks or more, but that's nothing. You know, uh, I met a fellow who had hitchhiked on the second day, he got in there. Come from Mississippi, and he wasn't the only one. Other people coming from distances, so for me to walk a few blocks, maybe an hour or something for a walk or whatever it took me to get walk, 'cos it was a hot day, that's nothing. I didn't do anything.

07.02.01 These are people that I feel have done things. You know, uh, like I said, I don't know why I'm here. Uh, so. But I could not turn away from it. And I had hurt myself on the first day. Uh, we was lifting a piece of steel and the steel dropped on my toe. But I couldn't go and just, they were trying to dig for people and look for people who were hurt uh, at the time they still some fireman and some people trapped up there on (?) in one of the uh, smaller towers. I asked one of the EMS, I said, I hurt my foot. He said, well, he said I think it's busted. I think it's broke 'cos I know how it felt. He said, well, the only thing we could do is wrap it, but he said, do you want me to fix it? I said, no, I'll just take care of it later on. It was nothing else, all you could do is just wrap it. Because he had other people (?) to tend to, and

I was not, I didn't feel I was considered something that you know, from the triage situation, I'd be at the end of the line anyway.

07.03.04 Ok, so I just said, well, I'll just deal with this. It's just a little pain. And I believe in pain, you know, you just take it and put it to the side. I have a thing about pain. Uh, you put it up on the shelf and you come back to it later on. And while it's up on the shelf. Same thing with problems. You put it up on that shelf and you come back to it later. You forget about it, 'cos your mind's not on it. You go away from it. So I was able to endure that, that was no problem for me.

07.03.28 But I stayed at uh, and slept on the street the first night (CLEARS THROAT).

JW: Now what was that like uh, could you literally, put yourself in my position. I want, I want you to take in your mind's eye and I want you to go back to that time and that moment and what it felt like. I mean, I've seen the images on television, everything was white. Everything (?) What was it like to bed down?

07.03.52 CHARLES COOK: It was like sleeping on Coney Island beach, with a fine misty dirt, very, very fine and I think that's why a lot of us have problems with our health now. I have asthma which I never had. And I cough that I'll never get rid of. And it was so fine. And but, but what it made it so much different from the beach was it was filled with so much liter, paper, and every once in a while you would see a human remains or parts of people.

07.04.29 So you knew it wasn't no beach. It was, uh, they had these lights that made it even more eerie, because the lights weren't uh, completely set up. And it's, it's like going into a time zone, like Planet of the Apes when they went back. It's like the earth choked up the World Trade Center and spit it up, upchucked it, and dropped it back down.

07.04.59 But in some parts, most parts of the World Trade Center, under, known to people that weren't, other than people that were there. I stood taller than what most supports of the World Trade was. I was taller. 'Cos it wasn't that high. Most of it was so far below ground. It was, you know, and so I slept on the ground. Wasn't no thing. (~JW~)

JW: Were there a lot of people (?)

07.05.25 CHARLES COOK: Oh, we the hours that we put in yes, was a lot of us that were on the ground. Was, you just got a board and slept. I was, I slept first uh, on the ground for a few minutes, 'cos you're just sitting and waiting 'cos when you're needed then you go back to help or do something. And then I found a board, a cardboard box uh, a couple of us did, and we laid that down, and we slept on top of that for a while. So it was uh, I've been in the Army so I've learned that uh, you know, that's just an inconvenience.

07.05.58 You just make do what you make do with. But by the second day, I knew uh, I had gotten sick. Or had (?) contacted something that I would not ever get rid of, or felt that I did, because that, like I said, that fine, it was so fine, and even when we went uh, the respirators that we were using, but by the time they were getting respirators and stuff like that, they were no good. Because as you dig down and open up a vent, it's more of that fumes coming up.

07.06.29 And they said, oh, we got a bad, definitely wear your mask. But after a few, fifteen twenty minutes, the masks were no good. Then if we went to eat you had to take the respirator off to eat. And the wind was blowing such that it was coving the food uh, and you indigested in it that way. But uh.

JW: So with that, what you were, you talk about your theory of pain and putting it in a box (?) what did you do after the second day? Did you just put that pain in a box?

07.07.01 CHARLES COOK: Yes, I did. (~JW~) I let it stay there. Because it was. How in the world could I complain about a broken toe? There's a building, two buildings, three buildings, 7 down, the other's all mangled. (?) complain about a toe? The (?) stuff that was around was insignificant what I had. I didn't. I had little or nothing.

07.07.30 It was, I was nobody in the scheme of things, do you understand what I'm saying? I was. These people had real problems. They were men there, who lost their sons, daughters, there were men there looking for their brothers, firemen. You know, I saw, what I saw, I saw men, I saw women that were real people (?) Anyway. (PAUSE)

07.08.04 And you know, my little something wasn't nothing. And I got involved and, and I, I felt it was a privilege for me to be helping them. You know? Uh, I would tell them, I said listen, I'm not a firefighter or whatever. But whatever you want me to do, I'm here to do it. And they, they said, don't worry about that.

07.08.29 And they accepted me, and they accepted me, that's the greatest honor I've ever had in my life. So when my friends ask me, why did you stay? And why didn't you walk away? Uh, I couldn't because I bonded with people that the bonds are tighter than my kids. It's something, and I love my children, but it's a bond that is so special, and only those that were there to serve can understand.

07.09.05 Anyway, I don't like getting emotional. I never was a person to get emotional, but this, you look back and what happened and (?) bothers me.

JW: You, you also said to me uh, that one of the reasons you stayed was 'cos you didn't want your son?

07.09.21 CHARLES COOK: Oh, yes. Well, I got down there and I said you know, I can stay. 'Cos I didn't want my sons to come. My sons would have come and I said, no, don't, please don't come because it's not necessary. There's enough people here and they probably won't let you in anyway. And I said, I'm in here and I'm serving for all of us, so just you stay. You know, I've had a good life. I'm not a rich person, but I've had a decent life. Uh, I don't have to look over my shoulder. I have good friends. And if this sacrifice health-wise that I've given up is part of what I had to give up, I'd gladly do it again.

07.10.03 It's, it's really not a problem for me. I you know, knowing that if that would have happened today and knowing I would be sick like I am, having the stuff I have in me, I would still go. Uh, you know, the devil can open his arms and say I got you, but I'm afraid when I get down there, he's gonna let me go, 'cos I'm gonna start a gospel choir and he's gonna have to throw me out. So you know, it ain't gonna be no trouble for me. You know, I used to say I'm (LAUGHS) be the conductor on the Hell-bound Express, but I done jumped off that train.

07.10.32 I'm, I think I made it to purgatory behind this. I'm a little step up now.

JW: That's great. Uh, tell me about leaving, because I, I the only analogy I have I think I expressed to you before when we talked was uh, the idea of uh, when someone's really sick as my mom was (?) you have a period of really intense, intense caring and effort, and everything else in the world seems like it doesn't matter compared to what you're doing at

the time. Then when it stops, you feel a sense of, of uh, I don't want to put words in your mouth, but I feel a sense of worthlessness, or, or what?

- 07.11.15 CHARLES COOK: Uh, what caused me to leave was uh, 'cos what I was doing was, I was staying down there, and I had volunteered also for the Red Cross. So I would go and hand out supplies at Respite Three and Respite One.
- 07.11.32 That was later on, like I say, in November. That's when I started working with them. And I did that up until uh, 'til up around Christmas, which (?) and then I decided, and all these days I really wasn't leaving that much, 'cos most of the days I'd just come in the house with, stay maybe 3 days straight down there and then go home and come back up. And what happened was I uh, went to the Port Authority, and it became very personal for me.
- 07.12.01 I looked at the pictures uh, of those that were deceased, and those that they were looking for had gotten hurt. And it made it kind of hard, so when I went back down there, it was, it became very, very personalized. I, it's one thing to see a limb without uh, uh, somebody's torso or something else.
- 07.12.29 And you don't have no feelings for it because you cut, you have to cut yourself off from that. Uh, in order to deal with it. But when you start, it's like uh, I found some woman's purse and handed it in. All that start, all that started coming back to me. It became personal, 'cos that's was somebody. But I was looking at it, an object not a being or a person. I just had, that's the only way I was able to deal with it, and uh, that's why I said, I look at these people and I take my hat off to them.
- 07.13.04 They, you know, I know in my heart a lot of people criticized them firefighters and them cops? For oh, they would not have been in that building uh, knowing that it was coming down? They don't know the hearts of those men. They would have ran in that building, knowing the building was coming down if they thought they could save some people.
- 07.13.29 I know that, I believe that to my heart. My I go to my death with that, but I believe that. I know it. I uh, anyway. So that's one reason I stayed.

JW: Was it hard to leave?

07.13.48 CHARLES COOK: Yes. See I'm getting very emotional here, yeah, it was hard. (PAUSE)  
So like I said, you know, you bond with people and you get committed. You worry about them, and I was worried about some guys. Like when they told us that they thought that wall, that bathtub effect, I couldn't leave then. I had to be there 'cos if somebody that guy right there was gonna get hurt, I was gonna get hurt with them. We just gonna go together. So. Yeah, it was hard to leave, yes, very much so. You know, uh, and like I said, I'm not emotional, but this is, this does make me emotional.

07.14.31 I've cried uh, twice in my life. And this one of those times. And I uh, got to be a real softie (LAUGHS). (PAUSE) Anyway.

JW: Thank you.

CHARLES COOK: You're more than welcome.

JW: Thanks for coming by.

CHARLES COOK: God bless.

JW: Yeah, I appreciate it.

07.15.00 CHARLES COOK: Hey, listen. Uh, it's like I said, I ain't done nothing. There's so many more people out there. You know, this is a great country, and those that don't know it and don't appreciate it ought to leave and stay away. We have people here that are really be good people. I saw the best of them. That's, that's something nobody could take away. (?) ain't no money. And couldn't put a value on what I saw, and felt in my heart.

07.15.41 Nothing. It's like uh, Columbus Day Parade, when the firefighters saw me, had me march up in the parade with them. And then the (?) head of the uniform fire department. When he was marching, he had, he had me come up and march up front with him.

07.16.00 And I said, thank you for the honor. And he said, no the honor's ours, for you being down there with us. And that was, that was the other time uh, I almost boohooed (LAUGHS). But

uh, no. I am just one little piece. See. I look at the person that was standing out there on the street with a sign saying Thank you.

07.16.33 Oh, I wish I could be in it, the fact that they were standing there, Thank you for what you're doing, to the rescue workers. Thank you. The kids who sent cards, and we'd pick them up and you'd see little cards saying thank you for what you're doing. Those are heroes, because their hearts were in it. That's, that's your hero.

07.16.59 Those that give unselfishly like that, uh, even though they couldn't help. They, the fact that they wanted to help. You're a hero 'cos you're putting your heart into this documentary because this is your way of contributing back. That's your humanity. 'Cos everybody couldn't be there.

JW: Thanks.

CHARLES COOK: Ok. God bless you.

JW: You, too.

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS)

JW: Are you planning on doing this trip?

CHARLES COOK: (?) is hell gonna freeze over? It's gonna freeze over he mess with me.  
(LAUGHS) Yes, I'm doing this trip.

JW: So when do you leave?

07.17.51 CHARLES COOK: I'm leaving uh, Tuesday night to go to Detroit. I'm going out there and get me a little job and work so I can get, by me some rain uh, some gear for the trip. That's what I'm really gonna do. And I'm gonna uh, practice some more, 'cos I know I'm not really street ready. I'm gonna practice more out there. I'm gonna take a 3, a course out there for about 4 days, 5 days more before I go and do in the daytime. I'll have time 'cos (?) I'm

gonna be working at night. I got this uh, and so by about the time I be ready, 'cos I'm not gonna embarrass the memory of the people that I'm representing. I'm not gonna do that.

JW: When do you go, when do you actually take off on the trip? The beginning of September right?

07.18.31 CHARLES COOK: The uh, September the 2<sup>nd</sup> from San Diego.

JW: You guys are (?) gonna move fast.

CHARLES COOK: I know (LAUGHS)

JW: How many miles a day are you doing? (?) Like (?)

CHARLES COOK: It's uh, San Diego to Vegas the first, that's the first

(SIMULTANEOUS CONVERSATION)

07.18.47 CHARLES COOK: That's the first trip. (~JW~) and then we go to uh, all these different places. Uh, Kansas, uh, Denver, oh it's about 10 stops each state and then uh, you know, day by day. And then we get into Scranton, Pennsylvania, and that's where it's gonna split up.

07.19.04 And some are going to Ground Zero, some are going uh, the Pentagon but uh, I was in the motor (?) school today. Uh, one of the guys, instructors said, I'm sorry I had to fail you. I said, I know, I said, listen. I'm gonna pass to morrow, and that's no big thing. I'll just, you know, I'll just, I said I'll be all right. He says, I said, just got a little excited. (LAUGHS) He said, I saw. So he said, but we're gonna be meeting you. They're meeting us in Pennsylvania.

07.19.29 A lot of riders, see the, each state more people gonna come. So it's gonna be a lot of people coming. This thing is gonna be really big.

JW: Oh, I see, it starts out with you five riders?

CHARLES COOK: No (?) us five, it starts out with a lots of riders. But we uh, 'cos I think they're getting (?) certain people from the Pentagon and some for the Ground Zero, and we're starting to come out like that. And they're gonna be leading off with a fire truck across the country.

JW: Interesting with a fire truck.

CHARLES COOK: Yeah, that's what they're trying to get.

JW: To go ahead.

07.20.02 CHARLES COOK: I'm gonna stay behind the truck to get out of the wind (LAUGHS).

JW: Either that or get Lance Armstrong.

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS)

07.21.42 END OF TAPE # CC - 007