

TAPE # LC 094
Larry Courtney
JIM WHITAKER, Producer/director
PROJECT REBIRTH

01.00.30 PICTURE UP

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS)

JW: How's it feel to be back in New York City?

01.13.49 LARRY COURTNEY: It feels great, actually. Yesterday I had planned to do a whole bunch of stuff, you know, but it was raining and I didn't feel like getting all wet all day, so (CLEARS THROAT) I pretty much stayed in, but I would go down for my cigarette breaks, and I just watched the people, you know?

01.14.11 Which is always fun. And 'cos it's so different, you know, than California. Everyone's in a hurry. And even in the rain, you know? But yeah, it's good to be back. I'm gonna do some things today. And got some arrangements for dinner plans with Ollie and with some other friends.

01.14.34 Going out to New Jersey to see a friend's new house. Going up to Connecticut sometime during the week. See my friends, Bob and Rosanna. They're, they've got things going on, so they don't have time to come down, which is understandable. So.

01.15.00 It's, I got a good week planned for New York, and then I'm gonna go down to Baltimore. (CLEARS THROAT) on Saturday, next Saturday. And be with my son and my granddaughter for awhile, for a few days. So that'll be great.

JW: Is that emotional for you?

01.15.28 LARRY COURTNEY: Yeah, a little, because I haven't seen my granddaughter now in almost 3 years. And you know, she's gone from this gawky little 13-year old to this

beautiful 16-year old, and I don't really even know her anymore. So that'll be, that'll be great, you know, and my son is, it's always so good to see him. He wants desperately to move to the West coast. (CLEARS THROAT) but as long as Katie's still in high school, you know, she's got all of her friends and everything, so.

01.16.08 We'll see what happens when she goes to college, depends on where she goes, I think. I'd like to get her to come out to Stanford and then she'd just be, you know, 20 minutes away. But I don't know what she wants to do yet. She really enjoys the theater and the arts, so she may try to go to a school that really specializes in that.

01.16.35 So it'll be interesting to see what happens.

Q: How's Ollie?

01.16.39 LARRY COURTNEY: Ollie's great. Great. I haven't seen him yet; I actually see him tonight. He's doing something with a youth group today. But I've talked to him on the phone several times, and he's, seems to be doing really good. So I'm looking forward to spending some time with him.

01.17.00 He's got a, an HIV-awareness conference at Riverside Church tomorrow. And so I'm gonna go up to that, and, and spend, spend time there with him. And then we're probably gonna have dinner again tomorrow night. So. I get to spend some time, and you know. It's always good to catch up with him. He's always got so much going on. He's like you.

01.17.29 He's just, he's, he'll be in Michigan next weekend, the United Church of Christ synod is that weekend, and so he's the president of one of the ministry teams, and so he really wanted me to go as a representative, but I couldn't work all the timing out, you know?

01.18.01 So. Even if I hadn't been here, I would have been involved in Gay Pride, because it's, it's that weekend in San Jose (CLEARS THROAT). And my church always gets very involved, and so I would have been there instead of the synod meeting anyway, so.

JW: How are things in California?

01.18.30 LARRY COURTNEY: Great. Great. Love the weather, you know? It's been in (?) the upper 70s all last week. And you know, I just, I like being there. It's, it's just very calm and relaxed compared to the energy that's here, you know? I miss, miss my friends, of course.

01.18.56 I have most of the friends I have in California are involved with the church, in some way or other, 'cos I spent a lot of time volunteering in, there. But it's kind of a little different social dynamic, you know? But it's, it's a good, good place. San Jose is a nice place to live. You're close to everything, you know, you got 45 minutes from San Francisco, you got 25 minutes to the beach.

01.19.31 And I go up to Truckee, which is up by Tahoe, as often as I can, because my son and grandson live there. So you know, you got the mountains and, and you've got the best of all worlds, really. So. I really, I really (?) enjoy it.

JW: How's the church?

01.19.58 LARRY COURTNEY: Church is great. We've got a lot of exciting things going on. Well, summer we kind of scale back a little bit. But we have been doing a lot of great things and the campus has, we're just totally remodeling. Bringing it up to date. You know, the church, a church sanctuary itself was built in 1960.

01.20.28 And the other buildings are older than that, so you know, they put solar panels on the roofs, and new windows, and just updating a lot (?) and putting in ramps and changing the bathrooms so that they're disabled accessible, and. And remodeling the kitchen, which needed it terribly. So (CLEARS THROAT).

01.21.05 But we also had a, is it, it's in October, we're gonna have an adult mission trip, which I don't get, I don't have a chance to go on. But they're going to Arizona and to the borders. And what they do is they help immigrants, illegals (?) who have no water or no food or you know, have crossed the border illegally.

01.21.42 Not that we're doing, trying to you know, smuggle in illegal immigrants, but so many of them come across the border with nothing but, but their clothes on their back. And they don't realize, you know, what that desert is gonna do to them.

01.22.01 And so last year, our kids went down and spent two weeks, and this year the adults are going. So we do things, you know, like that. We're, we're, United Church of Christ is a very, I

guess you'd call it liberal and cause-driven, and our particular church is what they call open and affirming, which means that everybody is welcome, no matter (?) you don't have to be of any faith or have any faith at all.

01.22.38 You know? You're just welcome. So I really, really enjoy that. You know? Our minister team is superb. So. I enjoy being involved with that church, you know? Keeps me going (LAUGHS).

01.23.08 Other than that, you know, I spend time with Heather and David. And just I'm a dog (LAUGHS).

JW: How's Toby doing?

01.23.28 LARRY COURTNEY: He's doing very well, very well. He's (CLEARS THROAT) a little over a year old now. And he's just my, you know, my companion. And he's the sweetest-natured dog I've ever seen. He's, he's never barked at anybody without his tail wagging or, you know, he's, he's friends with everybody on the blocks where we walk and he's just, he's a, a great, great dog to have and he's good-size for an apartment, you know?

01.24.07 So yeah. I, I like my dog (LAUGHS). He's sweet.

JW: Heather?

01.24.16 LARRY COURTNEY: Heather's doing really well, doing really well. She's, she's working really hard on her pop art creations. She's got, they have a Barack-in-the-box Jack-in-the-box.

01.24.34 And they had it manufactured (CLEARS THROAT). She did all the artwork for it, and then they had it manufactured, and they sold 1200 the week before and after the election. And then they've, they've had you know, the sales kind of go up and down depending upon. you know, how much Barack is on television (LAUGHS).

01.25.01 So but they're, they're continuing to sell. I don't know how many boxes they have left, but and then she does her custom boxes. And so she's been doing great. And (?) David has been really busy with his video business. He's, he's doing so many videos that they had to tear out a wall in the studio so that he had more room to work (CLEARS THROAT).

- 01.25.39 And then he, he's still doing depositions, court depositions. But he's trying to phase that out because he has so much video work, so. So they're, they're doing great. They're, I went up with them two weeks ago to Truckee.
- 01.26.00 Because it was my grandson's 6th birthday. And Heather and David's fifth wedding anniversary. So we went up and spent his birthday with him, and, and just had a ball. The, the ride up, we were able to, you know, really catch up and everything. And then getting up there, and I went directly to the pizza parlor where the birthday party was going on, or going to be going on.
- 01.26.35 And there were like (LAUGHS) 15 kids, about 6 years old, running around. It was mayhem, just absolute mayhem. And David was the cause of most of it, because he was chasing these kids around and playing and you know? So we had a really good weekend.
- 01.27.01 And that, we had to, we couldn't stay longer than the weekend, but once I get back, I'm gonna go up and spend a week or so, 'cos he's, he's growing up so quickly, you know? And so I want to spend as much time with him as I can. You know, I missed out on so much of my granddaughter's life because living in different cities and everything.
- 01.27.29 And I'm trying not to do that, not that I you know, meant to miss out on her life, but it just circumstances, and, and so. I want to be around, and I hope to be able to spend more time with her, you know, once things gets all settled down as to where she's gonna be (CLEARS THROAT). But. So that, anyway. Yeah, they, they're doing great, Heather and David are doing great.
- 01.28.01 And keeping very busy, you know? I actually don't see them an awful lot, because they are busy. They work 7 days a week. You know? And so we get, we get together for barbecues and stuff like that, but it, it's, they're really, got a lot going on. So we connect when we can, you know?

JW: What are you thinking about?

- 01.28.45 LARRY COURTNEY: You know, you always think you'd like to have more time with everybody, you know? I'd like to be able to spend more time with my friends out here, I'd like to be able to spend more time with the kids.

01.28.58 You know, but everybody's got such busy lives, you know? And so it's, it's just, there are times when I think, you know, I just should get in the car and go over and just sit and talk while they're working, you know? But I don't want to distract, you know? 'Cos it, like when she's sculpting a face, you know, she has to pay attention to what she's doing, and so.

01.29.29 But otherwise, you know, it's ok. It's ok.

JW: What's the feeling of being back in New York for you?

01.29.47 LARRY COURTNEY: In (?) a sense, it's like coming home. You know? Because I spent so long here, and, and I love New York just (?) still, love New York. And I miss it quite a bit.

01.30.04 But I haven't had (?) really a chance to get into the city yet, because of the rain yesterday and everything, so. Today I'm, I'm looking forward to you know, visiting and going over to Times Square and seeing what they're doing there. And going to the, my old building to see if any of the people I know are still there.

01.30.33 And I tried to get a hold of (CLEARS THROAT) some friends I used to work with, but I called the office and the number's been disconnected, so I don't know whether they merged or phased out that, that aspect of the company or what they did. 'Cos I haven't been in contact with them.

01.31.00 But you know, (?) (LAUGHS) it was getting on the subway for the first time Thursday when I got in from the airport. It was so strange to be on the subway again, you know? And I realize how efficient New York can be. You know? When it's at its best, you can get anywhere you need to and, and it's just so easy.

01.31.30 Whereas in San Jose I got to drive everywhere. You know? And yesterday, no Thursday, I just, I could walk up and down and I had to, you know, get a few things that I had forgotten on the trip and (?) go to a deli and, you know, and they were all right there within two blocks. In, in San Jose, you know, you drive a mile, two miles before you find you know.

01.32.05 And you just keep driving unless you go to some main mall, you know, which I don't like to do. So I like it, I, I like New York for that reason is that you've got everything (CLEARS THROAT) all around you. You know, you, you can find what you need very easily and within walking distance, you know? That's what I used to love.

- 01.32.31 When I loved over on 8th Avenue, because if I went down to 9th Avenue, you had the butcher and you had the, the vegetable stands and you had the, you know, the (?) bakeries and, and so, you know, you don't keep a lot of stuff in your refrigerator, you went shopping every day. Whereas in California, I go to the grocery store, and shop for the week, you know? So, so I, I like that about New York.
- 01.33.01 And I like, it was interesting to fall right into it on Thursday when I got here. Because it, it just is, you know, I guess it's something you're not gonna forget, but it's something (?) that I really enjoy being able to, to do and to do it on foot and not have to get in a car every time you want to go somewhere. That's (?) one of my main problems with San Jose is that, you know, it has very limited transit system.
- 01.33.36 And well, California in general, you know? But New York is, it's right there, you know? Subways are almost on every corner, and, you know, then you've got the bus service, and so I like being able to get around in New York. I don't take taxis much. I, I think taxis are almost slower because of all the traffic.
- 01.34.05 I know coming in from the airport, (CLEARS THROAT) our flight got in at 6. And so by 6:30 I was through baggage claim and everything. And then I had to wait about I guess 20 minutes for the bus. But I didn't get (?) into, down to the apartment until 9:30 because the freeways were all clogged, so the bus driver got off and went through Queens and down through (?).
- 01.34.40 The (?) that's why I don't take the buses and taxis is because of all the traffic, and I'd rather, I'd much rather do the subways. And (?) people are always, you know, when, when I lived here and we had visitors, they were always afraid to go down into the subway. And they'd heard such horrible things about the subways.
- 01.35.01 But I never have a problem with it. I don't, you know, I just think you just be aware of what's going on around you and you're ok. At least I have been. I've been lucky, I guess. But. So I think (?) transportation-wise and availability appeals to me in New York because you, it's, you know, it's right there.

JW: What's appealing about San Jose?

- 01.35.40 LARRY COURTNEY: Well, just the opposite. Is that, you know, you're not walking all, all over the place. You're not taking (?) rapid transit. But you've got expanse. You can, you can you know, you're not, since I don't live in downtown San Jose, you know, I don't have, I don't feel that immenseness of, of the New York skyline, that kind of thing.
- 01.36.15 You just, you can see the mountains on all sides, and, and the weather is, is fantastic in, in San Jose. So I.
- 01.36.30 You know, they're just, they're like diametrically opposed to each other. You know? That California lifestyle versus New York, it's just, they're just very different (CLEARS THROAT). And I (?) enjoy both, and I think, you know, it's nice to be able to come here for a period of time, and be involved in it.
- 01.36.58 But then, to be able to go home and have that calmer, relaxed life, and as I get older, the, you know, the California life appeals to me more and more. And I don't have the energy that all of these people in (LAUGHS) New York have to, you know, anymore. I, I loved it when I lived here, and I, and I did fine. But maybe I've gotten lazy, I don't know.
- 01.37.29 But it's, it's just nicer to go at a slow pace, you know, or a slower pace, I should say.

JW: What did you think about waking up this morning for your final interview?

- 01.38.02 LARRY COURTNEY: Well, number one, my alarm didn't go off, but I had it set for PM instead of AM. So I was rushing, but I, actually I thought about it a lot yesterday. Because, you know, this has been a long time, and I've gotten to know, you know, everybody involved in the project, and it's sort of - what's the word I want?
- 01.38.40 Well, I don't know how, how to really feel about it. I mean, I'm, I'm glad that, that the project is going to be finished and, and be able to be seen and, and everything, which was the goal. You know, but then I'm, I'm sad because I've been working with you guys for a long time, and you're such fantastic people and it, it just, it means that that's coming to an end.
- 01.39.11 And I think that probably, there won't be as much reflection on my part in the coming years as there has been in (?) the past.
- 01.39.30 You know, as I kind of try to take how I'm doing now as opposed to how I was when this project first started. And I was thinking about that yesterday, well, all week as a matter of fact, coming in. And.

JW: You have some things to say?

- 01.40.03 LARRY COURTNEY: Well, I think that I've thought back on the interviews, particularly. I mean, aside from all the special events that happened and, and were filmed and what not. But the interviews particularly. And even though I can't remember them perfectly, I can, I can see a progression, when I think back on them.
- 01.40.37 And how, you know, I'm able to talk about things now that I couldn't. When we first started. At least I'm able to talk about them without being so emotional, you know? And I'm sure that, you know, that's, it's, that's part of the grief process, I think, is that it's, it's still there, you know, everything, all those feelings are still there.
- 01.41.09 But you're able to deal with them better and better as time goes on. And actually doing these interviews has been extremely cathartic. I think that in, in a lot of ways, this has been like therapy, you know? (CLEARS THROAT)
- 01.41.37 I know when I first went to California, they, you know, I had a new doctor and, and so they were looking at the medications I was taking and, you know, the physical and all of that. And they prescribed, after we talked for awhile, they prescribed a mild, mild anti-depressant.
- 01.42.00 And in order to, to prescribe it, you, you have to see a psychiatrist. For a, counseling and an interview. And I talked to him and I, you know, we did fine. And he said that as far as he was concerned, we didn't need to continue sessions unless I wanted to.
- 01.42.28 It just, it was my, up to me (?). And I remembered while I was talking to him that that was nothing like doing the interviews, and getting feelings out. And (?) thoughts and looking, like I say, looking back and, and seeing where I've come from and what, what has happened in my life.
- 01.43.06 And how I've internalized it or expressed it, or dealt with issues that I wouldn't have probably.
- 01.43.28 If this, if this project hadn't happened to me. I, I would, I probably - well, I can't say for sure because you don't know for sure. But it probably would have taken me a lot longer (CLEARS THROAT) to get where I am emotionally and spiritually, even, to, if I had not been involved in this project. Yeah, I think that, I definitely would have done that.

01.44.05 And so in, in a sense, you know, I'm, I'm gonna miss that. But hopefully, I'm at a place that I can be honest with myself all the time, and or as much of the time as possible, and you know, validate my feelings at the time, you know?

01.44.31 And, and continue to grow. I know that I've come a long ways from that first day and from that first, you know, the first moment, even.

JW: How do you think of that first moment? How do you think about the day of September 11th in retrospect?

01.45.07 LARRY COURTNEY: It's, it's still very painful to think of. But I talk about it more, and I actually saw the footage of the towers coming down for the first time in 2007. I may have told you that already. But I had never seen it.

01.45.27 And people had protected me so much that I, you know, I never got to see that. And when I saw it, I thought how did I feel that day when it was all happening? And it was just total disbelief and denial on that day.

01.46.03 And for awhile afterwards, you know? I just (?) I denied the fact that he could possibly have died, you know? I, I there had to, he had to be in a hospital somewhere. And then when I knew it wasn't, he wasn't coming home, it just kind of, I guess went, I basically went into shock because I, I can tell you I don't remember probably the first couple of months.

01.46.41 I just don't remember. I know that things happened and I participated in them. But I think that (?) I just, I was on autopilot.

01.47.03 You know? I wasn't really there, I wasn't you know, so I mean, I dealt with, you know, three deaths in such a short period of time, and so I, I'm not sure that I had time to mourn one before the other one happened, and so they all got kind of lumped together.

01.47.28 And so I think, it, it took me longer to sort out, you know, who I was grieving for and why and, and. You know, processing all that pain. I think I, well, I know I did, I, I shut down for awhile.

01.47.59 And (CLEARS THROAT) my office had me take off a month, because I, I was so non-productive. I, I was there, but I didn't really you know, I, I really wasn't there. So they had me take off a month and get myself together, and, which was a good thing. It was a really a

good thing. But I know that that particular day, I wouldn't have made it through if, if my boss hadn't been there.

01.48.36 I mean, she was just fantastic and strong and, you know, do this and do this. And you know, we'll get you through it, and, you know, we'll find out what happened. And so I give her a (?) lot of credit for me not falling apart.

01.48.59 They, she actually came home with me that day. The stock market closed, you know, at early, so of course we closed early. And she lived in New Jersey, and there was no way to get there. 'Cos everything was, the tunnels were shut down and the trains and everything. So she actually came home with me, and she spent the night. And just was, that's the kind of person she is, anyway, a take-charge kind of individual.

01.49.33 But she really just, she was extremely gentle, but just this is what you need to do, and now you need to eat. And you know, and so. That day is, is pretty much a blur. As are the, well, like I say, the next couple of weeks particularly.

01.50.00 But then for awhile after that. And I know that I also wouldn't have made it through without Rosanna, because they came down as soon as they could, from Connecticut. And she kept me very strong, very strong throughout. And helped plan what needed to be planned, and do what needed to be done.

01.50.32 And, and we were on the, the phone constantly for several months. You know? So.

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS)

01.50.46 END OF TAPE # LC 094

02.00.56 PICTURE UP

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS)

JW: What brings you the most joy these days?

- 02.02.58 LARRY COURTNEY: The most joy? Good question. I don't have an answer for that. I (?) guess maybe, and I don't want to sound like a religious fanatic, but I guess working with my church does.
- 02.03.29 It, I enjoy working with the people. Then it's, it's like a big family. Like we had on the 31st, we played hand bells in church for our last time for the season. And then that evening we had a party, a bell, bell party, potluck party.
- 02.04.04 And just, we had such a great time, and the people that I'm involved with in the bells, we've become close. You have, you know, 'cos you have to depend on each other. And so it's (?) times like that that are really, really great. You know, I enjoy. I enjoy life, but I enjoy those, those moments, you know, when, well, when I'm working in the office.
- 02.04.35 I only volunteer for half a day once a week. But I'm available for whatever else, you know, and I'm on a couple of committees. And I enjoy seeing things progress and being a part of it. And like I said earlier, most of my friends are from the church, you know?
- 02.05.01 I haven't met a lot of people outside. That's one, it's harder to meet people, I think, in California (LAUGHS) but. That's (?) I think that's what it would be, aside from my family, which is always a joy. You know? Seeing my grandson on, any time, or seeing my granddaughter, which I'm so looking forward to.
- 02.05.32 I think, you know.

JW: What is it about working with and through your church work that gives you joy?

- 02.05.51 LARRY COURTNEY: Being, being part of service. Doing, doing something that is satisfying, number one. And it's, it's a ministry of, to me. I may not be a preacher, you know, I may not stand in the pulpit, but I think everybody has a ministry or a calling to do something. Yours is obviously film. You know, and, and your passion for that.
- 02.06.29 And I, I just enjoy being able to -just a simple thing like taking a phone call at the office and being able to answer the question or direct that person to, maybe - we get calls a lot of time for you know, can you recommend a shelter or, you know, a battered victim shelter or, or even just, do you have any food?
- 02.07.05 And I like to be able to help those people. You know, and we do have a food bank at the church. So if people come in, you know, we give them a couple bags of food and you know.

So I like, I like being able to just do those little things, you know. I'm not Billy Graham so I can't go on crusades and, you know, and change the world.

02.07.29 But just one little act of kindness or, or one, seeing the, the faces on, on the congregation when we play the hand bells, and, and seeing how much they enjoy it, you know? And just doing those kind of things are, are a great inner joy. You know.

02.07.59 They're not big aha things. They're just the little things that, that maybe, I mean, anybody could do it. But when I get to do it it's, it's really great. It's really a good sort of a, not a pat myself on the back kind of thing, but a, a really a nice internal feeling that maybe I've helped somebody somewhere, you know?

02.08.36 That's, that's a joy. For me.

JW: Your journey has definitely been changed through the church?

02.09.06 LARRY COURTNEY: I think so. I've always belonged to a church, except for part of the time when I was in New York. Somehow when I, you know, I was just too busy and Gene was not in, not interested in, in church. And although he was, he was deeply spiritual, you just, he didn't need to go to church.

02.09.34 So. But this particular church, with their openness, their willingness to accept everybody, and to teach that acceptance.

02.10.04 It's been - the other churches that I've been involved in have been fairly dogmatic. And you, you know, this is what you do and this is what you do. And then, you know (CLEARS THROAT) this is a sin and this isn't, you know, that kind of thing. This church is not like that. It's not, not judgmental.

02.10.30 You know, (?) you're not, certainly not encouraged to sin, but you, you know, we preach forgiveness. So we, we understand that, that you make mistakes, and, and you learn from them. But this church has, has been very beneficial in me finding that, the core, the kind of the, the inner peace.

02.11.03 I had a really hard time a couple of months ago. A good friend of mine at church committed suicide. And he and his wife, much younger, much younger, and their children are 5 and 2. And the little boy actually found him hanging in the garage.

- 02.11.33 And it, it was extremely difficult for me. He, he lived on life support for two days, and so I spent most of those two days at the hospital. But it was really hard for me because I thought, what could I have done?
- 02.12.03 What didn't I do? Because I knew he had, he had problems. And he had depression and he wasn't working. And he used to have a drug problem, and, and you know, and I had tried to help him (?) and the family with some of these issues and what-not. And I thought, I spent a lot of time thinking what didn't I do.
- 02.12.34 What should I have done, what could I have done to get through to him, that, you know, life is too precious and he has these two beautiful little kids. And I was really having a hard time with that. And actually our music director, who's just a great person, and, and very pragmatic.
- 02.13.01 And she sat me down and she said, you know, you can't do this. You can't take that kind of guilt. You know, he, what he did was what he did. You know, it was, he just had so much, so many demons, basically, that he was fighting that he finally gave up. And she helped me through that a great deal.
- 02.13.34 To see that, you know, it wasn't my fault. That it wasn't something I hadn't done, or he was, this was what he was going to do. So that's the kind of ministry you get at the church, this particular church.
- 02.13.56 It's not just what you get from the preachers (CLEARS THROAT) you know, which is great. But it's what the family around you does. You step, we step in and support other people who are hurting. You know, we've had a lot, we have a lot of elderly people in the congregation, and so we, we lose someone every so often.
- 02.14.35 And we're always there to help support the survivor, you know? Or somebody who's ill or whatever. Or just somebody who has a problem, you know? Well, and it's not like I said, it's not just the, the ministry staff.
- 02.14.59 It's someone may, may talk to you and they see that you're down or whatever. And you get encouragement. You, you know, you're not, you're not alone is what, is what happens in this congregation. It's just a very loving, supportive group of people. And, you know, (?) nothing's perfect, but they are, you know, have become my second family for sure.
- 02.15.42 And their support has just brought me to a better place in my life, to, to a greater acceptance of myself, and a great acceptance of being alone.

- 02.16.02 Because I'm (?) not alone, and even though, even though it can be very lonely to live alone (LAUGHS) I don't know if this is convoluted, I guess, but (~JW~) And there are time when I wish that I had somebody in my life to love that way, the way that I had Gene.
- 02.16.33 And, but I, this church has made me see that I'm not alone in it. You know? A lot like, well, a lot like this project, you know? Just knowing that there are others going through the same thing.
- 02.17.01 And, then seeing it in, in a church where others are struggling through many of the same issues that I've been through, and maybe I can help somebody along the way. And you know, I'm trying to make sure these two little kids are not severely damaged by this. And that they get, you know, support and that they know that they're loved.
- 02.17.32 And so I, you know, I think (?) that support from everybody has made me stronger; has and make, made me able to give more, to give of myself more. To, to be there for other people.

JW: Did the incident with that person remind you of your own despair?

LARRY COURTNEY: Yeah.

JW: Bring back those?

- 02.15.24 LARRY COURTNEY: It made me so grateful that I was able to work that out. Rather than go the way that Jason went. And it made me realize that I had help, you know, I had support, that I probably didn't realize at the time. And (?) you know, I did reflect a little bit on, on how I felt at that period of time.
- 02.19.02 And how much more he must have felt, how much despair he must have felt to, to actually take his own life. You know, I never felt in, in my darkest times, that I could do that.
- 02.19.28 I think always in, in my mind and in, and that was one of the things the psychiatrist asked me, when I had to go for that interview. Do you ever think of suicide? And I said no. I may get depressed, but I always know that I have children, you know. I, I couldn't, I couldn't put them through that, you know?
- 02.20.01 And so.

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS)

JW: You were doing a slow time that was intense?

- 02.20.38 LARRY COURTNEY: Oh, compared to that, on a level of one to ten, I'm a ten now. That, that was a dark time, and, and I was, I was, you know, it wasn't too long after I moved to California, and I had, hadn't started going to this church.
- 02.21.00 And I felt, you know, the only people I ever saw were Heather and David. And I just, it just was not, all (?) I had to do was think about how, how depressed I was, basically. And that's, and it just, it just fed on itself.
- 02.21.27 And by getting involved in other things, and, and it didn't have to be the church; it could have been something else, you know? But by getting involved and being out there and feeling like maybe you're helping somebody else, it stops, you stop thinking so much about yourself. You know. And I think that's what was going on 3 years ago, was that, that's all I thought about, was Gene's gone, I'm lonely.
- 02.22.06 You know, I'm by myself. And you know, it just. I just let it eat me, eat at me and, and everything. And so by doing other things, by, be, getting involved in something, you, it takes your mind off yourself, and you realize that you're not in, you're not in a bad situation.
- 02.22.34 You know? And 3 years ago I was in a bad financial situation as well. And I always get depressed (LAUGHS) if I'm in a bad financial situation. So that kind of, I was able to you know, work it out and I don't have lots of money but I'm, I've got, I'm doing fine, you know?
- 02.23.03 And I do have something to look forward to all the time. And, and 3 years ago, I didn't. You know, I just, I just sat in the house, basically, and, and that was it. But now I'm, I have people that I care for.
- 02.23.29 I have people that care for me. And I have, I feel like I'm contributing once again to Life, rather than just nothing. And so it, it seems like that period of time is just gone, you know? I went through it, I'm moved on and I, I feel it's like you know, coming out of that valley and getting up, up to the top.

02.24.08 And, and you know, I'm not where I probably should be or want to be, but I'm in a good place. I'm in a really good place right now. And I feel good about myself. I have good self-esteem at, right now.

02.24.29 And so it, it's, it's really quite a difference from where I was.

JW: Your strength is apparent to me.

02.24.38 LARRY COURTNEY: Yeah. I, and I feel, I do feel it, you know, and (?) I feel better physically. Certainly emotionally. And I have, I just have (?) a much more positive attitude about everything. Not that I don't have my moments of doubt and despair, but you know, they're so much easier to handle now.

02.25.08 You know? And.

JW: Why do you think that is?

02.25.13 LARRY COURTNEY: Well. Part of it is that I got back in touch with my spirit. Basically. I got back to where I used to be as far as recognizing my I, I guess my Christianity, my, my motivation.

02.25.53 That's always before, that, that's been the, the one thing that I could hold on to, you know, and I sort of lost that in, in that for a period of time. But now, I can it's not that I run around preaching or spend hours on my knees in prayer, but I, I feel a connection now with a Supreme Being that I had sort of let slide.

02.26.32 You know? I sort of didn't, didn't feel that connection anymore. And I definitely do feel it now, do express it, do embrace it.

02.26.57 And it, it's empowering, you know? So (?) I don't know. I remember an old analogy about, that, you know, you have to plug yourself into the source, you know? If your light's going to shine. And that's, that's kind of how I feel. I, I've gotten myself back and I've re-plugged in, you know?

02.27.27 And so I can, I can do, do things for other people and for myself that I wasn't empowered to do when I didn't feel that connection, you know? You know, it, people call it a lot of

different things. But I just feel I just call it that connection, because that's, I think the best explanation for it (CLEARS THROAT).

JW: What's the feeling you get when you are participating?

- 02.28.25 LARRY COURTNEY: Well, you know, as far as the hand bells and things like that, I, I consider that part of the ministry. That's you know, that's part of presenting the gospel to the congregation. Just worshiping in the service and being in an attitude of prayer and spirituality, it, that's kind of the, the re-energizer that, you know, every.
- 02.29.06 Every week I feel like I get that kind of jolt to help me get through the, the ups and downs of the rest of the week. And it's not, and it's not just that week, not just on Sunday morning, because anything, you know, when you go to hand bell practice and you're, and you're dealing with spiritual music and you're dealing with a, you know, the camaraderie.
- 02.29.37 And it's (?) all uplifting, up-building, you know? So I, I feel. It's hard to put into words, you know, acceptance, love.
- 02.30.07 And a ministry of being able to give something of myself, no matter where it, what it falls in. But that's, it just, it, it feels that that's what I'm supposed to be doing, you know? I was, I was not called to be a preacher, I was not called to be a music director.
- 02.30.33 You know, many things. But I am called to be the best person I can be, and to project that to others so that I can help them become the best person they can be. And you can do it in big ways and you can do it in little ways. And so I, I think that that.
- 02.31.01 That connection, again, is what, is getting me to a really good place that I can, that I can be of service, I can do something to help someone else. I may not always be successful, but at least, you know, I, I can feel satisfaction that I've done the best I can do.
- 02.31.28 And (?) so that's, you know, that's basically it, is that I just want to be the best person I can be. And this, this whole church and, and community have helped me realize that. And, and strive to do that.

JW: Do you also go out to classrooms?

- 02.32.05 LARRY COURTNEY: Yeah. That actually is not through the church; that's through P-FLAGS which is parents and friends of lesbians and gays (CLEARS THROAT). And they have a speakers' bureau. And we go to classrooms and just talk to people about our life experience.
- 02.32.27 And we do it in a, if you have a, a 45-minute or a 55-minute class, you know, you don't have a lot of time. And so usually there's a panel of 3 people. And we give our little bios in like 5 minute, so that we can open it up for questions, you know? And so I tell my story and, you know, part of it is the fact that I was married and have three children, but I'm gay and, and also had this relationship that ended tragically.
- 02.33.06 And, and then we all do that, and we open it up for questions. And depending upon the age group that we're in, I've, I've been to high school freshmen psychology courses, or human, human sexuality course I think is what it was.
- 02.33.28 And then I've been to college senior psychology courses. You know, all the way in between. And so depending upon that age group, you get different, different kinds of questions. They're similar, you know, they all have, you know, and some of them can be extremely personal. You know, I, I've, and what we do is we answer, or we, we invite any question, no, none is, nothing is too stupid to ask or too (?) too personal.
- 02.34.07 You may not get, we may not give you a really personal answer if your question is extremely personal. And we may just say I, I'm sorry, I don't feel comfortable talking about that. But we try to tell kids, you know, tell, tell people it, it's all right to, to be who you are.
- 02.34.40 We're not encouraging anybody to be gay or anything like that. That's not, not the purpose. We're just saying that be tolerant of the people around you, and look at yourself and, and be who you are, no matter, you know, gay, straight, transgendered, whatever.
- 02.35.04 We have one, one woman who is transgendered. And so she speaks from a lot of experience, and then we have (?) a parent of a transgendered child. We have, like myself gay, a gay man with children.
- 02.35.29 We have (?) people, parents with gay, gay children, you know, and, and so our stories is, our stories are acceptance. And, and how we can, you know, this is what I am, and (?) you have to respect what other people are.

- 02.36.00 What you know, I, acceptance and respect I guess is, is basically our message. And, and the kids get it. And they, they ask intelligent questions most of the time. I've had some very personal questions asked of me, which I answered as discretely as possible.
- 02.36.31 And there again, you have to, you have to gauge the age of your (?) you know, I mean, you don't talk to a 14-year old the same way you can talk to a college senior. I mean, you don't answer some of those questions. So that's been, it's been very rewarding for me, also. And, and I do look upon it as part of my ministry, even though it's not related to a church or any, any church.
- 02.37.04 But it's, it's a way of reaching out again to people and talking about acceptance and love and, you know, being realizing who you are and being that person. And then accepting that person besides you, who is also realizing who they are. You know?
- 02.37.29 So I'm, I'm very happy to be working with it, with that particular group. We don't do too much in the summer. A college summer course maybe, but. It, it's you know, it's good to see the kids. And we're not, we're not allowed to talk to the kids outside of the classroom, (?) away from their teacher, unless, you know, unless they're college age.
- 02.38.05 But that's something that we feel, we feel that, you know, with young, really young people, they need this, they need to have this adult presence. So and with college, like college kids, that's you know, but not, not many people approach you after the, the formal session.
- 02.38.34 You know, maybe, maybe they'll come up on the way out and say thank you or, or something like that. But, but it's a, like I say, it's a ministry that, that for me at any rate, I don't know how other people involved feel of what they're doing but that's to me, that's part of a ministry of, of acceptance, again.
- 02.39.00 And realization of who you are, and who I am, and I'm ok with it. You know?

JW: If you had to describe your journey from 9-11 to now, what would you say about it?

- 02.39.27 LARRY COURTNEY: Extremely painful. With moments of real joy. And realizing where strength, where your strength is.
- 02.40.04 Sometimes relying on other people for that, and being able to get to the point that you are, you can rely on, on yourself. You know, I made a lot of mistakes along the way since September 11th, trying to come to see who I was, deal with my feelings, my depression.

- 02.40.55 But looking back on it, I think they were mistakes I needed to make to learn something from. Not all of them (LAUGHS). But there were a couple of people in my life that I should not have had in my life. Because they were destructive to me. And it took me awhile in each case to see that.
- 02.41.32 And once I was able to see that it was leading, it was, it was. Well, a destructive, destructive influence. And once I was able to see it and, and then I could deal with it, and, and take care of it. And those people are no longer in my life because they, they were like weights.
- 02.42.06 And I realized, I now realize that there are times when you have to cut and run, or at least just say this is not a good thing.
- 02.42.33 It is not a good thing for me. And therefore, it, I have to stop it. You know, sometimes, sometimes you have a friend, even, who does nothing but bring you down all the time. And it's a destructive force. And so (~JW~)
- JW: Are you speaking of someone in particular?
- 02.43.07 LARRY COURTNEY: Well, I'm thinking of a young man who I tried to help a little bit. He was homeless. And I said ok, you can come stay with me - for awhile. Until you get a job and, and get on your feet.
- 02.43.29 What I didn't know is that he was also an alcoholic. And a terrific liar. And had I, I think, I, I could never prove it, but I think he had some drug problems. And rather than getting a job or searching, even, I mean, he lied to me about going on appointments.
- 02.44.07 You know? Which I know he didn't, never did. And it ended up that he just stayed in my place and used my computer, used my, you know, and used me. And I finally had to say that's enough.
- 02.44.31 You know? I'm sorry, but I cannot deal with this anymore. And then he hit me. And beat me up a little bit. And I had to call the police, you know, and have him forcibly removed. A terrible mistake in my life. You know?
- 02.45.02 And I regret it, but I did learn from it, you know? I did learn from it. I, I learned that I can't save everybody. You know? I think that I was, I had this maybe god-complex at the time that I can save you and I can, you know, turn you into a healthy human being and, and all of this.

- 02.45.34 And when I, when I saw that what I was doing was just enabling him to continue to slide, you know, then, then I realized that, that there are some people or some situations that I can't fix. You know, I'm not God, I can't, I can do what I can, but I, but I can't allow myself to be in, in that kind of a situation where I'm the fixer.
- 02.46.12 The music instructor, like I said, after my friend committed suicide. One of her councils were, was that don't put yourself into that situation to where you are like the substitute father figure.
- 02.46.37 Because you're not. You know, they still have a lot of problems to work out, and you can't be the person who fixes it. You know? So don't rush into that. You know, help is fine, but don't, don't do what, and she didn't know obviously about this other situation that I had been through years ago, but basically that's what she said.
- 02.47.08 Don't, don't try to think that you're their (?) salvation, that you can, you can fix all their problems. Because you can't. And what is going, if you try to do that, you're gonna be involved in this spiral that is not healthy for you. And so that's what I'm doing.
- 02.47.27 I'm you know, I'm subtly helping. I'm, I'm there for them. But I'm not inserting myself into the (?) mix. That's something they have to work out themselves. So.

JW: You bottomed out here, in New York. And then emerged?

- 02.48.02 LARRY COURTNEY: Yeah. That's, I, I think that's very good, a very good analogy. I do think that (~JW~)

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS)

- 02.48.24 END OF TAPE # LC 095

- 03.00.20 PICTURE UP

- 03.00.40 LARRY COURTNEY: Well. Seven years, almost 8 is a long time, and yet it's actually very short. You know, it's just seems like a few weeks ago that we started this whole thing. And

right after September 11th, there (?) there was a period of numbness, of just, like I said just existing and, and.

- 03.01.13 Then kind of having to come to terms with what had happened. And being alone and, and living in New York as a single person, but still with those friends who were very supportive and loving.
- 03.01.45 And then, going to California it was a much bigger adjustment than I expected. Going to California and being totally feeling totally isolated.
- 03.02.07 Not, I wasn't, but that's how I felt. And going into this slump and not, not even realizing it, not even noticing it, you know?
- 03.02.32 And then, I guess coming to terms with, with the loneliness, with being alone. And that took a long time to decide that I could do that.
- 03.03.08 I always thought that I would have to find someone else because I enjoy so much being in love and having that person love me back. That, that was just an incredible thing.
- 03.03.33 And I felt that to be happy, that's what I'd have to have. I went on a month-long, actually two, two times, month-long trip with my older brother. And (?) in his RV.
- 03.03.59 And we went through the deserts of Arizona and then we went through Death Valley at another time and things like that. And (CLEARS THROAT) you know, he had lost his wife two weeks after Gene died. And so we were talking about being alone, you know, in our life. And we finally both of us came to the conclusion that, you know, it wasn't so bad. It wasn't so bad.
- 03.04.38 We were at a point that, and he's 12 years older than I am, but you know, when we put something away, it was, it was there when we went to get it, you know? Nobody had moved it, you know, it was, you know, so you, so.
- 03.05.03 You had order in your life, even though you were lonely. But we could deal with the loneliness and we, and we both, we both concluded that. And a month after our last trip (LAUGHS) he met a woman and they ended up getting married, you know? And we had both said we didn't think it would ever happen again.
- 03.05.29 So that kind of depressed me. I mean, I was really happy for him, very happy for him. But it kind of depressed me because we had just kind of reconnected over those couple of years and, you know, we had planned other trips and things like that. Well, obviously that wasn't

gonna happen now. But I like his wife and so I, you know, and he is happy. That's all that, that matters to me. He is happy.

03.05.57 But it kind of set me back a little bit. And then, I had, then (?) again I had to come to terms with being alone all over again. But this, you know, it was much less than where I had been before. So then I, I got a roommate.

03.06.29 Which I had never had before, never had a roommate. And that was interesting dynamics to. You know, I knew the, I knew the guy, he, I had known him from my daughter. He was a good friend of my daughter's. so I already knew him so it wasn't a complete stranger. But you know, you have to get used to other people's foibles and you know, the fact that they can't seem to close the cupboard door once they've opened it or push a drawer all the way in.

03.07.04 You know, things like that. But, but at least there was someone there in the house. You know, I wasn't alone in the house. And then shortly thereafter, I started going to the church, and realized, you know, that I, I could, I could act as a single person and be fine with that, but I was not a single person in (?) the community, you know?

03.07.42 I now had all kinds of support. And, and it took me awhile to see that support. You know, I mean, any time you're, you become involved in a group, you know, it, everybody has to kind of fit or feel, feel everybody out, you know.

03.08.03 And, and so it took me awhile to, to feel that. But it, it just continued to grow until, you know, I'm at the place where I am now. And, and I look back at all the experiences, from Day One. And the, the numbness to the despair, to the, to the loneliness, to dealing with all of those things.

03.08.40 And it's a path I had to take to get here. To get where I am now. I didn't always enjoy that path, you know? But I think, for me, and I, I couldn't say this about anybody else because I, you know, but for me, that's, I had to go that way to be able to come out where I am, you know?

03.09.15 It's like you have to go through the Holland Tunnel to get to New Jersey, or, you know, but you have to do it. And I don't have, I have a few regrets about some things, but not too much. Because (?) even though it wasn't always pleasant, it was still a learning experience.

03.09.44 And you know, I've learned along the way not to do, not to expect so much of myself that I can't be myself, That I can't (?) I can't expect myself to be perfect.

03.10.11 I can't expect me to be able to fix everything or to, to help everybody, or whatever. But I can do what I can. And, and that path has brought me there, that I can, I can now see that this is what I can do.

03.10.32 Not that this is what I have to do, you know? I can get to there because I don't have to set that expectation that I can save the world. You know? I can just, I can be me and, and be happy in who I am. Be happy and not feel that desperate need for you know, companionship.

03.11.04 I wouldn't turn it down, but I'm not, it's not something that I have to have to be a, a complete human being. I can be complete just within myself, you know, where I am. And if that changes in years to come, as all things do change.

03.11.32 But I mean, at this moment, I am a very happy person. I feel good about where I am. And, and that I don't have to be perfect.

JW: Is that acceptance?

03.12.06 LARRY COURTNEY: Yeah. Yeah. I am, you know, I accept who I am, I accept my faults, I, I can try to work on them. And I accept my strengths. And I can try to perpetuate those strengths. So yeah, it's, it's, that's exactly what it is. It's acceptance of who you are.

03.12.29 And knowing that you can be a complete human being. There's always room for growth - always room for growth. But to be able to be happy where you are on your life's journey and, and expecting what's ahead, I look forward to what's ahead now.

03.13.04 I didn't use to. I dreaded what was ahead, because I didn't, I couldn't, I couldn't see anything good at one point. Now I just, you know, I, not that bad things might (?) happen. But I'm, I'm much more equipped to handle them now than I was several years ago.

03.13.32 But I also expect good things to happen, you know, and I want to be a part of that. I want to be - I, I'm enjoying my life again. Like I did before Gene died. It's different. You know, totally different.

03.13.58 Different location, different surroundings. Different (what's?). Well, the difference between being in a loving relationship with someone to being alone.

03.14.32 So there's, there's all these differences, but there's still hope and being able to look, look forward. And I'm glad to be in that place. I'm glad to be in that place. And my, my hope and is that it will continue, you know, and it will, it will.

03.15.02 I can be that whole person and, and not feel you know, less of a person because I don't have someone in my life, but I can be that whole person and, and do what I can. And so that's, that's kind of where I am at this point.

JW: What are your feelings about the site?

03.15.35 LARRY COURTNEY: Well, I haven't been down to see it since I've been back. (~JW~). But I did see your FaceBook page. Heather is a big fan, by the way. And I was glad to see the memorial is finally going up. I was, that's always been a real disappointment to me, that that was not the first, the major concern.

03.16.00 Yeah, I knew that, you know, the site had to be cleared, etcetera. But then there are all of this. I mean, it's now 8 years. And that, a memorial is still not finished. You know? So I'm disappointed about that, but I'm, but at least I'm happy to see it's actually being worked on. I don't know much about the building. I don't know where that, what the status of that is.

03.16.28 But I am going down this afternoon and, I haven't been there in 3 years now? And the last time I was there, the last time I was there, I actually read names. That's the last time I was there. And, which was a really emotional thing to do.

03.17.00 And so that was, that was a very emotional day, and Ollie and I then went down the ramp and, you know, put flowers. And that, so (?) it'll be interesting to me to see how I feel today when I go down there, to. It's, it's always, like sacred ground to me.

03.17.33 And I know we talked about this once before, about how people visit that site with real reverence. And you ask me, do I, do I do the same thing at Gene's place of internment, in Oregon? And I realize that I had not been to Oregon as often as I had been to New York.

03.18.04 You know? And I remember commenting that (CLEARS THROAT) even though I view it as, you know, a very special, like I say, sacred site, do we revere the site where people died, or do we revere the site where, you know, their remains are?

03.18.32 Or can we revere both? And the last time I was there, I, that's how I felt. I could, I could revere this site, and, but then a couple of months after I was there, I actually went up to Oregon for something else. And I went to the cemetery and realized, yeah, I can revere this site.

03.19.00 So I'm looking forward to, to going down to Ground Zero today. I don't know how I'll, I'll feel, you know, being in that spot. And I don't know, that, that'll be interesting. But I am happy that, that things are progressing down there.

JW: Do you feel that Gene is here or there?

03.19.50 LARRY COURTNEY: I think he's both places. You know, I don't know what genetic material, I hate to say it like that, but what, what they found when they identified his DNA. And (CLEARS THROAT) the coroner asked me if they found more, did I want to be notified again, and I said no. Once is enough, you know, and, and so I was able to take whatever it was, which I never, you know, I don't know. The funeral director picked it up from the coroner, and then was cremated and, and so (?) it's in an urn in Oregon.

03.20.48 But we don't know all, you know, I mean, his spirit is, is still you know, I shouldn't say present, but there is a presence down there.

03.21.08 I think of all of those who died that day. And even after the buildings are done and, and everything, I think that presence is always going to be there.

03.21.25 I mean, if, in a lot of places you drive, you're driving down, you know like highway or, or something. And you'll see, suddenly come upon, over by a tree or something, you'll, you come upon a cross and some flowers. That's where somebody's loved one died, you know, in an accident. And so, so they honor that place, or (?) we see it on television when, you know, someone is shot, or whatever.

03.22.00 Their, they make a makeshift memorial at that spot. You know, and that kind of thing. So I think I've come to realize. Well, I realize isn't, isn't a good word because it's just me, it's not, I don't expect anybody else to, to think the way I do.

JW: This is about you, though, and it's interesting to know how you feel. What do you think of as you contemplate Gene's spirit?

03.22.42 LARRY COURTNEY: Well, I think being a Christian and knowing that Gene was a Christian, I believe his spirit is in heaven. But that doesn't mean his presence is erased from the Earth.

- 03.23.06 And so that's why I still feel that there is a presence of him at Ground Zero. And a presence at the cemetery. But there's a presence here in my heart, too. Maybe, well, I guess I should rephrase that, because you said spirit, and I, I believe his soul is in heaven.
- 03.23.32 That, as a, as a Christian, that's you know, part of my belief. And so I, so then I would guess I'd have to say that instead of the presence, it is his spirit. An essence, sort of, of a person, there and there, and, and in my house and in, in my heart.
- 03.24.04 And it, it would be, you know, I can. I can revere his memory no matter where I am. It's just you feel it very strongly when you're in one of those two places.
- 03.24.32 And at, at home, I still have the urn that the city gave us. And when Gene's DNA was detected and (CLEARS THROAT) they actually put his ashes into that urn with the dirt from Ground Zero. And the ash from Ground Zero. Now, I don't know, you know, whatever was there at Ground Zero that they took that and filled those urns with.
- 03.25.05 So, then when I took it to Oregon to be buried, they transferred that into another urn that fit into the, to the spot. And so they left some of that, that material inside the little wooden urn. And so I have that little wooden urn at home with his picture.
- 03.25.30 And I don't know, but maybe there's a bit of him in that urn, you know? But his, but the spirit I feel is very, very strongly at Ground Zero, very strongly at the cemetery. Very strongly at the house, but really, everywhere. I (?) when I talk about him, you know.
- 03.26.01 It's, it's, I can feel that spirit, I can feel him you know. When I, whether it's at church or just talking to another person or, you know, here it's, he will always be with me. There's, and I can, you know, (?) I attribute that to the spirit being I don't know, everywhere, basically.
- 03.26.31 You know, if I went to Paris, we had been there four times together. And I, I would feel him in all of those places that we went to. You know? So it's, it's just something, I think you carry it, carry it with you. It's just at times or places that you feel it stronger than others.

JW: What's your hope for Ground Zero?

- 03.27.05 LARRY COURTNEY: I'd like to see it become a thriving hub again. Like it used to be. I'd also like to see the memorial be beautiful and moving, and.
- 03.27.38 Reverent. You know, at one point, I would have liked to have seen the towers rebuilt, because I thought that would be appropriate.

- 03.27.58 And then, you know, as it became evident that that was simply not gonna happen, I thought, well, at least, you know, make use of that space and make use of it commercially, but also.
- 03.28.33 I've used the word before, reverently. I, you have to have that memorial, that memorial is so important to me. And I hope that, that people will be able to come to that spot from all around the world. And see that, in the midst of destruction, we can, we can come out of it. And it's kind of like what I've gone through.
- 03.29.06 Is that in the midst, you know, even though I was not destroyed in that way, but it's been a path of redemption, maybe? And that's what I'd like to see down there at Ground Zero, is that people who come there for whatever reason, can feel strength, and hope.
- 03.29.51 And knowledge that something good can come out of something so bad. So I (?) really look forward to it being finished and useful. And, and.
- 03.30.20 And not, not, a, not an open wound but a healing scar, maybe.
- 03.30.41 Yeah, I think that's what I'm hoping for, for Ground Zero.

JW: What were you just thinking?

- 03.31.20 LARRY COURTNEY: Just. Thinking about what I just said and (?) how will I actually feel once I'm down there, you know? And I'm pretty sure that (?) it's gonna be a good, a good thing to go. I haven't been there, like I said, for so long so I don't really know what it looks like anymore. But.
- 03.32.03 Just to know that there's progress and, and something's happening. And, and so I don't think I'll be disappointed. I think I'll, you know, it, I was disappointed that it hadn't happened earlier, but it's happening. You know? So, so I'm, I'm just looking forward to seeing it and, and realizing that it's, that it is happening.

JW: What do you mean by a healing scar?

- 03.32.41 LARRY COURTNEY: Well, it's you know, we had this big open wound when it was just a hole and, and it was horrible and, and, and when you, when you have a, a wound like that, say you have a, a gunshot wound or whatever.

- 03.33.06 Eventually, you know, it heals and you'll have a scar. And I, I think that that, that analogy is gonna always be that, yeah, there's a scar, and once it's done, you know, once it's been healed, there'll be still the fact that it was a wound, and it was very hurtful and very painful.
- 03.33.34 But just like a scar, they fade over the years. And maybe become not so noticeable. But you know it's there. You know? And so I think that that's probably how I feel about that site.
- 03.34.00 And, and I'll be glad, you know, as years go by, to see it fade even more. But I will always know and (?) everybody will always know, that once there was a wound there. And it takes a long time for the healing, so. I think that's, that's how I see it.

JW: How is that physical analogy applicable to yourself, personally?

- 03.34.44 LARRY COURTNEY: Oh, definitely. I mean, looking back, you know, I could, I can, I can see the wound. I can, I can see it as clearly as though it were today.
- 03.34.59 I can (CLEARS THROAT) I can see how broken I was. How, and how it has taken me so long to heal that, and, and to, to see it mending and, and becoming a scar. It's still not there. I mean, it's still, it's, it's still a work in progress.
- 03.35.30 But I can see it happening. And just like that cream they have now that you can put on your scars to make them less noticeable - over time, it will be less noticeable, less painful.
- 03.35.58 But any time you've had that kind of wound, you'll remember it. You remember the wound itself and the healing process. And you, you just continue to heal, you just continue to go through that process. Which is basically, I guess, Life. You.
- 03.36.36 Hopefully you learn along the way and become better. Become kinder.
- 03.36.56 And out, out, you don't outgrow it, but I mean, grow out of the pain in, in a sense, in that you can now, you know, kind of put it in one spot and it, it's not all-consuming. It's, it's manageable.
- 03.37.26 And it's (?) just, it's there, but you, you it's not, it's not the only thing in your life anymore. It's, it's a small part of your life. And so hopefully that's, that's what is, has happened to me and will continue to happen to me as I continue to heal.
- 03.38.02 And, and (?) be a whole person.

JW: What, today, does 9-11 mean to you?

- 03.38.28 LARRY COURTNEY: Nine-eleven O-one? Or just 9-11 in general? Well, 9-11-01 is horror. Unbelievable. And 9-11, I have it on my checks, you know, we will never forget 9-11.
- 03.39.08 It's like Pearl Harbor, you know, December 7th. It's a date that we will always remember, and the horror that surrounded the day.
- 03.39.39 But it's a date that we deal with better and better over the years. I (?) deal with, I should say, better and better.
- 03.40.03 Just as I'm sure people who lived through it, dealt with Pearl Harbor afterwards, or D-Day or any, any eventful day such as that, where it was just horrific on that day.
- 03.40.30 As the years go by, that day becomes less painful, not less important. But you're able to deal with it emotionally better, I think. And so September 11th (~JW~) will always be a very painful day to go through.
- 03.41.14 Still today it's extremely painful. But it's not as hard as it was a year ago. And it's certainly not as hard as it was five years ago.
- 03.41.34 Or seven years ago. And, and there are, you know, it's just like anything. There, there are times when.
- 03.41.56 I remember one year on September 11th, I was completely alone. I mean, the, the kids were doing something and, you know, everybody else (?) and I was just completely alone. And that was a really bad day for me, because I allowed emotions and things to, to come out that I hadn't, I didn't know were still there.
- 03.42.29 You know? And so but I've learned (?) to deal with it better and it has gotten less intense, I think. You know, to my dying day, September 11th will be the darkest day in my history.
- 03.43.01 But it's not, it's (?). It is in my history. It's not today, it's not. I, I've come along way from that day. And every year it's, it's important.
- 03.43.33 It's to be revered. It's, it's a very spiritual day for me now, and I, I am able to handle it much better every, every year. So I. You know.
- 03.44.01 Some people say, you know, well, it's another day it's just another day. Because I have this, you know, I, I have this loss every day. You know. But on September 11th, you feel it. You know, you, it, it's like Memorial Day for, for many veterans and, and their families and what have you.

03.44.38 You feel it a, just a little stronger. And, but I'm not, I'm not in the place I was before. You know? And I think part, you know, part of my being able to handle it better and is the fact that my spirituality has grown.

03.45.08 I handle it on a more spiritual level now than I did years ago. And I can place it sort of in the context of Gene's life.

03.45.30 The life that ended on September 11th, and the life that began on September 11th, for him. And my faith is knowing that he's in a better place and, therefore, I can deal with it, I can deal with the loss much better.

JW: That's the change that happened for you, isn't it?

LARRY COURTNEY: Yeah (~JW~)

JW: When did that shift happen for you?

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS)

03.46.33 LARRY COURTNEY: It was. It's not that I have ever lost my faith. But I realize that, at some point, that I was not exercising it. Like anything, to be able to grow, you have to exercise it, you know? And I had kind of let it go dormant.

03.46.59 And so when I, yeah, after about Year 4, I began to take a look at it and to realize that it was not, it was not just a loss, it was not something at Ground Zero.

03.47.37 And I do think we discussed this before, in the fact that I felt when I went down and put the roses in the water that year, that his soul was not there.

03.48.03 And (?) to realize that, as a Christian, I now knew that his soul was in heaven, and therefore, I could feel the loss but I certainly had no right to wallow in it.

03.48.28 To let that, let the pain overwhelm me, because even though that pain was there, there was also a flooding of joy that I had not felt for a long time. Because just to realize that his life was not in vain and he was in a better place, and is in a better place. And that helped me start putting things in perspective, for the rest of my life.

03.49.01 And I think when I began exercising that faith, to, and it took me small baby steps to, to start, and to work on it. But (CLEARS THROAT) That's really, yeah, that really is the essence of what has happened to me.

03.49.30 To enable me to exist and be that, be the person that I, I want to be and to grow to be that person. The basis of it is faith, that - and I don't mean to sound all preachy, but I, I, the, I realize that I am a child of God and as such, I am loved. I am taken care of.

03.50.12 And I have responsibilities to share that, and to accept God's healing in my life. And to look forward to the path that I'm on now.

03.50.36 To, to embrace it, you know. And to be pro-active. And (?) I'm, you know, I'm so happy that I have come to that point. That I, that I actually feel like (?) like my old self. You know?

03.51.05 But new. You know? Improved. With still a lot of work to be done. But as. And Project Rebirth has been so important in that process.

03.51.28 I can't tell you how much, I really can't. The fact that, you know, I have been able to talk to you and pour out my feelings at least once a year. And not feel any judgment, not feel any, any condemnation, has been extremely helpful to me. Like I said (STOPS)

03.51.53 END OF TAPE # 096

04.00.37 PICTURE UP

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS)

JW: Was the moment of dropping the rose a turning point?

LARRY COURTNEY: Yeah.

JW: What happened in that moment?

04.02.20 LARRY COURTNEY: Well, you know, I had, the memorial service was beautiful and, and you know, I had been extremely emotional and, and everything during it.

- 04.02.30 And then afterwards, you know, when they release you to walk down the ramp, and I was walking down the ramp and I was looking at, at all the policemen, you know, who line the ramp. And there were the English bobbies on one side and (CLEARS THROAT) I was looking at all of those people and, and I was thinking about, at that point, about all the rescue people who had rushed into the building and had died.
- 04.03.08 And so by the time I got down to the bottom, and went over to the reflecting pool, I knelt down by the, by the pool and I had the roses.
- 04.03.31 And, and I was, I was just praying there, and praying that he was safe and, and so then I, I put the roses in the water. And felt as though - I mean, it wasn't like a shock or anything, but I, I had a feeling come over me that he was safe.
- 04.04.08 You know? And in that, in that, that time, in that period, I won't say it was an instant realization or anything, but during that time down there, praying that, at some point, I felt, you know, that I could release him.
- 04.04.38 It's like I had been holding, holding on to him so tight because I was in such pain over him being gone. And at that point, I knew he was safe and so I could release that, my feeling of having to control the situation.
- 04.05.02 I was no longer in control of the situation. I could turn it over to God and let Him handle it because that's His job, not mine. And I really believe that that's, that day and we had, we had our annual interview either that afternoon, I think it was that same afternoon, after the - oh, I know it was.
- 04.05.37 I know it was. And I was able to tell you that there was just such a release. And I've seen, because I've been able to put my role in this whole thing in perspective, as far as holding onto Gene's spirit.
- 04.06.06 So tightly. That knowing that he's in better hands than mine is, has been a real relief, really. And (~JW~)

JW: Do you think that was the beginning?

LARRY COURTNEY: That was definitely the beginning (~JW~)

JW: Of your healing process?

04.06.36 LARRY COURTNEY: Yeah. Yeah. I don't think I had truly begun to heal until I was able to get out of God's way, is how I like to put it. Let Him deal with it. And just continue to love Gene and to miss him and, and still feel pain. But knowing that I had released him and accepted the fact that I wasn't in control of that.

04.07.18 And then that's when I began to realize that my, my faith had, had (?) been dormant.

04.07.31 I, I had not relied on my faith during that period of time, and I had to do something about it. And that's when I started, really, climbing out of that hole, you know? And like we talked about before, that's when I realized that you have, I had to exercise that faith. I had to, to build on it and, and that.

04.08.00 That really, that prayer time that year was, was the turning point and (?) I know it, you know? And I think that I expressed that, that year that there was a very different, you know?

JW: You did, but like all things when they're happening, you are better able to express the journey over time?

04.08.46 LARRY COURTNEY: Yeah. Actually. Because yeah. I mean, when you, when you come to a point, say a fork on the road (CLEARS THROAT) you experience it at that point.

04.09.00 But you don't know what's on up the road. Well, now I've gone on up the road a little ways. And so I, I can put that experience in that path, you know. So yeah, there's, there's a, a farther distance for me to go, hopefully (LAUGHS). Hopefully. I don't get by a bus today.

04.09.27 But the, I expect that growing and, and growing in my faith is a never-ending process. And that that growth is what has helped me and what is, keeps propelling me to go forward. And to looking forward to what's up there, you know?

04.10.04 So I, I'm (?) a long ways from that moment. But I'm not, not at the end of it yet, you know? I just, I can look back and, and see that that happened. And know that that happened.

04.10.32 And now know that I have built on that, and will continue to build on that. And, and feel good about it.

JW: Where are you as you see yourself in the healing process with respect to Gene?

- 04.11.02 LARRY COURTNEY: Well. I think I'm, I'm doing very, pretty good. I have my moments. But something did happen on Mother's Day. I, I called my sisters, you know, to wish them Happy Mother's Day, and I called my daughter-in-law and to wish her happy Mother's Day.
- 04.11.31 And I was sitting watching television, I remember. I don't remember what was on, it didn't matter. But for some reason I started thinking about Gene. And I got to thinking about the damaged relationship with his family.
- 04.11.57 And so I called his little sister, to wish her a Happy Mother's Day. And we talked and we had a great conversation and we promised we'd, we'd keep in touch. And that was, that was a real healing moment for me. Because we, we were very close. And after Gene died, we were, we were very close for awhile.
- 04.12.29 And then things took a turn and we didn't have any contact at all. And (CLEARS THROAT) I thought that taking that step was a demonstration of growth. Being able to call her and talk to her was, I couldn't have done it a year ago, probably, or certainly not two years ago.
- 04.12.58 But I'm glad that I did, and, and it just, it. It demonstrated, like I said, it demonstrated growth and I'm, I don't know where that's going to lead as far as me and the family. But it's, it was at least a step. And we'll see how that develops. But.

JW: Did the rift occur due to Workmen's Compensation?

- 04.13.34 LARRY COURTNEY: The, it was the federal thing. I tried and tried to get them involved in the, the federal compensation package, or whatever it was. And they wouldn't have anything to do with it. They, they wouldn't answer my letters, they wouldn't answer my calls.
- 04.13.58 And then one of the brothers became very belligerent. He actually wrote me a letter from prison - he was in prison - and accused me of taking advantage of the system and, and all I cared about was the money.
- 04.14.29 And, and so then the court would not appoint me as the, what'd they call it? Oh, it was like executor, to, to be able to file this paperwork. Well, I filed it anyway because I had made it, you know, it was this thick and it had all of his bank records and all of this stuff in it.
- 04.15.03 And, and so I went ahead and filed it. And then I never heard from the federal government, one way or another. You know, I was expecting a letter saying I'm sorry, you're not you

know, eligible, which was fine. I, I didn't, it wasn't that big a deal to me. And but I was encouraged to file it by Lambda Legal.

04.15.29 And so, so I went ahead and filed it. And finally, I don't know, there was, there was a point where final decisions were made. And that then (?) it was, there was no more. And I can't remember what. But after that point had come, and I hadn't heard anything, I finally called them. And 'cos they kept their office open for another year or so, I guess.

04.16.01 Because there's no appeal for that. And so I called, and I just asked, you know, I gave them the numbers and all of that. And just asked if that had been settled. And they said, yes a payout was made. So I'm assuming a payout was made to the family. And I never heard another word from them. So I, you know.

04.16.31 I didn't get the money, I didn't care, you know, I was doing fine. And if they got money, then good for them. You know? At the time I resented it. Because this was based on his future earnings. You know? (CLEARS THROAT) And they would have had no part in his future earnings.

04.17.01 You know, just like they had no part in, you know, since we'd been together. And so at the time, I resented it. But then I, I'd just come to, like anger, resentment takes energy. I don't have energy to do that. I don't have energy to hold a grudge. And, and you know, be upset with people. It's just wasted energy.

04.17.29 And so, you know, no matter what happened with that, there's no reason for me not to try to reestablish ties. You know, they were an important part of my life. For so many years. And you know, if they choose not to be, then I understand that, and that'll be fine.

04.18.00 But at least I had to make the effort. And so we'll see where that leads us.

JW: Any other thoughts on where you are in your healing?

04.18.19 LARRY COURTNEY: Yeah. And I, I see you know, little areas, I don't always identify them, but I can feel that oh, you know, that's something I learned. Or that's, that's a place I could be, you know, that's, that's a possibility. That's, you know.

04.18.47 And I see that as growth and, and I look forward to more of that, you know? If, if you stop growing, which I did for awhile, and you stagnate, then really you're not, you're not living, you're not, certainly not living up to your potential.

04.19.10 And I think that I am called to live up to my potential. I don't know what that is yet. I may never know, but I need to strive for it, I need to look for it, and pray for it.

04.19.28 And I'm very happy to be doing that. I'm very happy to be, to know I'm on that road. To know that I'm going, I'm not stopped. I'm actually moving. And that's a very empowering feeling. So yeah, I'm happy to be there.

JW: Are you on a mission?

04.20.04 LARRY COURTNEY: Yeah. I'm on a mission. I mean, Mormon men have to do a 3-year mission, I think, at some point in their life. I remember when, right after high school, one of my friends who was Mormon went, started his 3-year mission before he went to college.

04.20.31 I believe that (CLEARS THROAT) if you are practicing Christian. If you are - or just a person of faith. You don't have to be a Christian. But a person of faith, then your life is a mission. You have - I'm not on a mission to convert.

04.21.01 I'm on a mission to support, to love. To grow. To be a better person. And to reach out to others. To - as much as possible, in, in any way they need. It doesn't have to be spiritual. You know, if I can.

04.21.30 If, if you're hungry and I can give you a meal, you know, or you know, you can't pay your rent and I'm able at that point to help you - or if I can talk to you about my faith - I'm on a mission to do that, and continue on that road and, and continue to grow. And right now I'm just extremely happy where I am.

04.22.04 And, and knowing that I'm, that I'm still moving, that I'm still growing. And I look forward to, to seeing who I'll be when I am 75, you know? I have a good friend in Washington, DC, who just turned 84. I look forward to seeing what kind of a person I'll be at 84.

04.22.35 You know? It's, it's (?) it is now an interesting journey for me. You know, a few years ago it was not. Now I am involved in that journey instead of just letting it have, happen.

04.22.59 Now I, I've, I have some initiative in that journey. And I'm, I'm looking forward. The pain is always there, but I don't always have to look back at it. You know? That's, that's, now I can look forward. (LAUGHS)

JW: What are your thoughts on your new apartment?

LARRY COURTNEY: Yeah. Yeah, I'd like to have my house.

(SIMULTANEOUS CONVERSATION)

- 04.24.01 LARRY COURTNEY: Dreamed of winning the lottery and building my dream house. I, I drew it when I was 18 years old, and I have modified it several times, over the years. Love to have that house. But you know, (?) it just probably is not meant to be. And so I moved into this apartment. After my roommates left.
- 04.24.30 And the apartment is owned by somebody who goes to my church. So I, it's an upstairs, it's only a second level. And it's a, it's a good apartment. It's, it's got nice space, nice light. Nice ventilation.
- 04.24.58 I been there since October 15th. I still don't feel at home there, though. It, I haven't, always before in my life, within two weeks after I move into an apartment, I have the pictures hung, the curtains the, you know, I'm done. I'm done.
- 04.25.30 I still have boxes sitting in the second bedroom, which I've turned into an office. I have like a pathway to my computer. Because I haven't figured out where things go yet. And I haven't, I still have pictures that I, I haven't hung. And I just, I don't feel, I don't know, yet. I hope that I, you know, that I do. And the apartment is, is wonderful.
- 04.25.57 It's very nice. The only problem is, it doesn't have a yard. So I have to take Toby out, you know, he has to go out three times a day at least. So he has to go on the leash. And which is, which is probably good because it makes me get out an exercise a little bit. And, and he's, he's quite content in the apartment.
- 04.26.27 He's you know, he's, he (?) loves. I have a bar. It's a, and I used to have crystal decanters on it. Well (?) I had to move those because he kept trying to look out the window. And the windows are, are about like this, high. And so he would jump up in the chair and put his paws over on the bar and look out the window.
- 04.26.58 Well, I realized that crystal wasn't gonna last too long if I left it there. So I moved the crystal into the office, and I put a pillow up on the bar. So he can sit now and watch out the window, which he does a lot of the time. So I'm still trying to make it home. You know? It's kind of, it was probably built in the '50s.

- 04.27.58 So it's got this yellow tile in the kitchen that I'm not real fond of. And it's got this weird aqua tile in the bathroom. That I can't get anything to match, to look good in there. So (LAUGHS) you know, I, I think there are those things and, and it's got a paneled wall in the living room like you used to have in the '70s.
- 04.28.02 And so I'm still kind of - I think when I get home I'm gonna do some rearranging in the living room and maybe I've kind of been looking at it and thinking, you know, that would really be better there, and if I do that, and then I feel sort of satisfied, then I'll be more apt to, to finish and get things really put away, and I've got too much stuff, you know?
- 04.28.38 And I thought I had gotten rid of a lot of it. I did get rid of a lot of it when I moved out of that house. But it's amazing how much stuff is still there. And getting ready to come to New York, (CLEARS THROAT) I could not find any suitcase.
- 04.28.57 So I went over to Heather and David's studio. And they have some storage space up above. And when I had moved, they put some things up above that I was not gonna need, like a lot of my tools are up there. My Skillsaw and my drills and things like that, because I'm not gonna have room for them in the apartment. So anyway, that's where my suitcases were.
- 04.29.29 Two big suitcases. Well - so I got them home, and lo and behold, in the office there was the suitcase I actually wanted. And I hadn't seen it. I had, I had looked high and low for a suitcase. And it was sitting right there. I had just walked right by it. So now, not only do I have that suitcase to find a place for when I get home, but I got these two big black suitcases that I've got to find a place for as well.
- 04.30.01 Plus all the other stuff that's in the office that I've got to find a place for. So I think if I can get, like I said, if I can get the living room to look like I want it to, to feel at home, then I'll be anxious to finish the rest of it. Because once I get that feeling, once, then, and this apartment has a lot of potential.
- 04.30.26 It's just, you know, it's not the, not the dream home I always wanted. But it's, it's workable. So I think, you know. I've kind of, like I said, I've kind of had the ideas of how I would like things and so when I go home, I'm gonna spend some time and, and really try to make it home. You know?

JW: What lessons have you taken from all that you've been through?

- 04.31.16 LARRY COURTNEY: Oh. There are so many. And the main one is acceptance and exercise of my faith.
- 04.31.39 Knowing that I can't do it all on my own. Acceptance of being where I am, location-wise and spiritually.
- 04.32.06 And just knowing that I have taken this path. You know? Like we said just a minute ago, you can look back and you can see that you have come this far. And I'm happy for the journey.
- 04.32.36 And (?) I'm extremely grateful to have been a part of this project and to. To, to have had all of you in my life.
- 04.33.59 It's been that has been a part of that growth as well. You know, to see John every few years, you know, and Peter, I've met before, and, and then to see you and Danielle, and all, you know, everybody that's been involved in this project, because you have all been so supportive, so accepting.
- 04.33.30 You've never made me feel - what do I want to say? Small or - you've always let me say what I wanted to say. Have encouraged me to talk. And that's a life lesson right there in, in that being able to trust someone enough to tell them your deepest feelings.
- 04.34.19 Which I, which I have been able to do here. And realizing that (CLEARS THROAT) as this is the last interview, that there are others that I can, I can be honest with because they are trusting and accepting.
- 04.34.41 And so I, I have learned to be able to speak my feelings, and to in some cases help, maybe help someone along the way.
- 04.35.04 So I have learned a lot from this experience, and I know that, in a way it's, it's the basis of what I can do from now on. I have come to conclusions here that, or at least I've expressed them (?) out loud, and I find that when you are able to express something out loud you can own it better.
- 04.35.39 And so I really, I really see this path that we've taken together as building blocks for what is to come.
- 04.36.01 And I'm looking forward to it.

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS)

JW: Anything else you'd like to share?

(OFF CAMERA REMARKS – casual remarks with crew)

04.47.05 ROOM TONE

04.47.58 END OF TAPE # LC 097