

Oral History Interview of Mr. Al Worthington

Date of Interview: October 2, 2010

Location of Interview: Recording Studio of the Student Radio Station, 90.9 The Light

Name of Interviewee: Mr. Al Worthington

Name of Interviewers: Lowell Walters and Mike Cobb

Transcriber: Jesse Ronda

Interview Length: (1:27:08)

Notes: Editing done by Abigail Sattler

Walters: (0:03) Welcome to this interview in the oral history project of the Liberty University archives. This interview is being conducted on October 2, 2010. Today we're interviewing Mr. Al Worthington. My name is Lowell Walters and I'll be conducting the interview today along with Mike Cobb. Greetings, Mike.

Cobb: (0:21) Hello Lowell.

Walters: (0:21) And good morning, Mr. Worthington.

Worthington: (0:23) And, morning.

Walters: (0:23) Good to have you with us today. Well, we'll start off just by asking you some questions here about your, your background, your, your place where you were reared. What was your date of birth and where did you grow up and tell us a little bit about that if you would.

Worthington: (0:40) Well, my date of birth is February the 5th, [*clears throat*] excuse me, 1929. I was about three miles, born three miles out of Birmingham. So Birmingham was my home, I was reared in Birmingham. Went to high school there, went to the University of Alabama on a football scholarship and played four years of baseball, played two years of college football at Alabama but I hurt my arm, had it operated on, and I didn't play no more football. So then I turned completely to baseball.

Walters: (1:10) And what was your position in football?

Worthington: (1:13) Well, I was an end. I was a...I could catch passes. I wasn't the fastest man in the world but I, I could catch passes.

Cobb: (1:20) You had good hands.

Worthington: (1:21) Yeah.

Walters: (1:22) So then you, from your earliest days you had exposure at least to two sports pretty, pretty...

Worthington: (1:27) Well, in high school I played four; I played football, baseball, basketball, and ran on the track team. That was uh...that's all we did when I was growing up is play, you know, in Alabama, so...

Walters: (1:41) So, and that was in the 1930's then that you were playing high school athletics and in college, is that correct?

Worthington: (1:47) No, I, well, I...

Cobb: (1:48) The '40s.

Worthington: went to...

Walters: (1:49) Oh, that'd be right, yes.

Worthington: (1:50) I went to high school in '44.

Cobb: (1:52) Yeah.

Walters: Ok.

Worthington: (1:53) And then finished in '48, I went to Alabama and stayed for about four years, three and a half anyway. But I had four years of baseball and uh...

Walters: (2:08) And so then were you reared in a Christian home or...?

Worthington: (2:11) No, I wasn't, but we all went to church. There was ten in my family uh...but again, we weren't Christians but we went to church.

Walters: (2:21) Ok, and at some point in the interview here, would you be able to tell us about your, your salvation experience? How did you get to know the Lord and...

Worthington: (2:31) Yeah, I'd be glad to. I, I do that all the time anyway.

Walters: (2:34) Sure. Well, why don't we hear that then? Was it early on while you were in college or was it while later...

Worthington: (2:38) No, I, I got into professional baseball, excuse me, and in 1958 I was with the Giants in San Francisco, we moved out of New York City after the '57 season, and Billy Graham came out there to hold a crusade in San Francisco. So I had that emptiness that I knew about. A lot of people, everybody's got emptiness but everybody don't know about it, that they had one. So I, I was kind of, I was always looking for something anyway. I never was satisfied. I knew there was something missing from my life and I didn't know what it was. I had a wonderful wife. Been married, this December, sixty years.

Cobb: (3:22) Congratulations.

Walters: Wow.

Worthington: (3:23) And I, at that time I had three tremendous children, I got five now. And so I was looking. I had been looking for something all my life. Baseball didn't satisfy me, running the track team didn't, playing basketball didn't, playing football didn't. So I had been looking for a long time. When I was a young boy, maybe in the, nine, nine years old, my Sunday school teachers told me that heaven and a hell; you went to one of those places. So I never had any desire to go to hell. I always wanted, I knew I was going to go to heaven. And so that might have been on my mind all those years, you know. So Billy Graham came to San Francisco and one of the ballplayers on my team named Bob Speake, he is an outfielder. He said he was going to go and I told my wife, "Well, let's go." He was at the Cow Palace in San Francisco. In San Francisco you played Tuesday nights and Friday nights, the rest of the day were day games. So I went out to hear Billy Graham and sat on the main floor and he preached. I had never heard, I'd been, you know, I'd been going to church all my life but I never heard the gospel preached. And so he preached the gospel and I listened to it but I thought, "You know, I listened, I've been going to church all my life." So I knew there was, it was something. In fact, my heart began to pound and I wanted to, I wanted to, really wanted to go down the aisle at that time. Something came by and said, "Al, you're a Christian anyway. You know, you go back home and one time you teach a group of eight-year-old boys, Sunday school. And you got to be a Christian to teach Sunday school class." I found out you don't. So I, I wanted to go but I couldn't go. I had a lot of pride and so I didn't go. Met a preacher at the back. He was with Bob Speake, they came together. Went over to, went over to the preacher's house, walked in, the preacher said [*laughter*], "I'm a recruiter for Christ." Wow, that really shocked me. I didn't know what a recruiter for Christ was; found out later. But I, but he, he told us stories about the Bible, the Lord until about two o'clock in the morning. I mean, they were thrilling stories; I loved them. And so, my wife and I went home and, and I remember praying that night. I'm there by my bed and I said, "Lord, I, I don't know what that man was talking about but that sure was nice." And he came down about two days later, three...my wife invited him for dinner. He came in and he talked to us some more about the Lord and about what God did for him and I began to want what he had. Billy Graham was still there and so he invited us to go again to Billy Graham crusade. All the seats were taken in the Cow Palace. He got, went, took us around the back and went in

the backdoor and we got in and we sat on the cement, cement steps way up in the balcony. So here Billy Graham preaches again, and again, you know, I, I'm sitting there and I'm listening to what he's saying but, but I don't, I don't seem to want to do anything. I don't, I don't...maybe the devil did that to me. But I also wanted to make a decision. And I, again, that went back through my mind, "Al, you're a Christian anyway. You go to church all the time. You're a good guy. I'm one of those good guys." So kept listening and all of the sudden I decided I was going to make a decision for Christ. I was going to call Him Lord. I was going to call Him my savior. And I did just that and I walked down the aisle and I, as I got on the front, first floor, man, walking up to the podium that about lead a hundred people walked down the aisle that night. And I got up to the podium and then all these people, a lot of them are crying. I look at them and thought, "What are crying for? Why are you people crying?" And I stood there and said, "Well God, you know I've tried to give you eighty percent on some days and ninety on others and I surrender tonight. I'm going to give you a hundred."

Cobb: (7:55) Well that's a wonderful story.

Worthington: (7:56) So I surrendered and I, I wondered why, why those people were crying like they were and, and I still talked and said, "God, maybe I've been giving you fifty percent or ninety sometimes. I'm coming to give you a hundred." They took us into a big room and gave us some literature. That literature really helped me out. And my wife had walked out the stands, my wife was a Catholic girl, and she had walked down there where I was but she didn't feel like she should stay since she was a Catholic. We left there and we, oh, I, I read a scripture where the Bible says, "You shall seek me and find me when you shall search for me with all your heart." And I came with all my heart that night. On the way back to the preacher's house, the preacher was taking a couple of youngsters home. I walked in, his wife said, and the preacher came in, his name was Marshall Lavone, she said, "Marshall, Al gave his life to Christ tonight." It's been fifty-one years and the preacher came over, shook my hand, and said, "Al, I've been praying for you." I looked over and, "What for?" I thought, "What are you praying for me for?" And I didn't say that. That may have pleased it, that I made the decision. On the way home that night I felt good, felt like I, something different and I didn't know, really, what it was but I woke up the next morning, we had to leave on our second trip of the year and I didn't like going on road trips, leaving my wife and children, and all of the sudden I sat down to worry about something. Lo and behold, it wasn't anything to worry about. I sat down three times trying to worry about something. Didn't have, know how to worry about anything. And all of the sudden it seemed like God had taken all my problems and put them on a high shelf and I couldn't reach them; there was nothing to reach. And I, I laughed leaving that, leaving to go to the airport. And I thought, "Good night, laughing leaving home?" And so I laughed all the way to the airport and then, and right before I got on the plane somebody said, "Let's go play cards, Al." I said, "I can't be playing any cards. Something happened to me and I got to find out what it is. No, I'm not going to play cards until I find out what happened." I got on that, that plane, started reading my Bible. First time the Bible, in my life, the Bible opened up to me. You know, unless

you're saved you don't understand the Bible no matter who you are, what you have. And so I was reading the Bible and, and Jesus speaking to me. I don't want you to think I didn't ever read the Bible. I, I had a Bible; they gave it to me in the fourth grade. But every time I tried to read it I didn't understand what Jesus was talking about. And uh...I would, I would read but couldn't understand it, read and couldn't understand it. So I woke up the next morning in Pittsburgh, lo and behold, Jesus Christ was in my heart. I didn't know that, I didn't know he came and lived in your heart. I walked around for three days wondering how he got in my heart. But I woke up that morning and I was reading the Bible and the Lord was speaking to me then and I, I went downstairs to eat my breakfast. I went over to the cashier to pay my bill and I said, "Young lady, I got to tell you something. I'm saved. I want you to know I didn't know what saved was before." I knew then and she listened to me both eyes and both ears and she didn't say...anybody standing around, and so I told her how God had saved me. Went out to the air uh...ballpark, three thousand people, twenty-nine thousand people sitting in the stand, it looked like, and I wanted to jump over the, jump over the dugout and say, "Folks, I'm going to tell you: Jesus is not somebody a million miles away. He's right here. He's living in my heart." And I thought, "Man, if you do that somebody's going to get you and lock you up. You might not ever come back again.

Walters: (12:38) [*laughter*]

Worthington: (12:39) So I just sat there then and so I called my wife and told her, "Don't worry about me. If the plane goes down, I'm going up." And the Lord let me know I was saved, he let me know I had born, I had new eternal life. I never heard of whether you could lose it...I didn't ever know anything about being saved but when I got saved, I don't have any problem with losing mine because I can't lose mine. Christ gave it to me and I got it forever. So that's the way I got saved.

Walters: (13:08) And then your wife, did she uh...

Worthington: (13:12) My wife, the preacher kept going down to my house, talking to her. She opened the Bible, she never had a, Catholics don't have Bibles much. And she opened my Bible and it seemed like God had answered the question she had asked and so she got saved right then.

Walters: (13:30) And then you have how many kids and grandkids?

Worthington: (13:32) I got five, I got five uh...thirteen grandchildren, five great-grandchildren.

Walters: (13:38) And on the way over here you were telling me that all of your kids, you have taken a profession of faith, that, is that correct?

Worthington: (13:47) If you lived in my house you couldn't hardly make it.

Walters: (13:49) [*laughter*]

Cobb: [laughter]

Worthington: (13:51) We had devotions in my house and they all got saved. My, well, my oldest daughter's here now. She's, believe it or not, fifty-nine years old. But she was eight years old, six years old when I was saved and she was, when she got saved she was eight. I had been down [chuckle] giving my testimony down in the country somewhere in Alabama. A guy I talked to got saved and he became a preacher down there for three different churches. So uh...my daughter woke up one morning and walked in the kitchen where her mother was and she was telling her mother about being saved and, and I heard her. I was in the room next door and I heard her and I said, "Nana, come here, talk to me." I, and she said, "Daddy, I got saved last night." And I said, "Isn't that wonderful." And she was getting ready to go across the street to get some milk from the neighbors and he, they were Christians. I said, "You go ahead and tell them what happened to you." So she came back, stood by the furnace, and she was crying and I said, "What happened?" I thought that they made her feel bad. She said, "When I told them that I was saved I started to cry." So that was my oldest daughter and then my son was saved, he was seven. I've got another daughter saved, she was six. And I've got a boy that's on fire uh...he's not a preacher but he should be one. He was five and another boy was saved, four. But my five-year-old boy hurt my four-year-old boy...my five-year-old boy's named Marshall and the four-year-old boy's named Daniel and, and Marshall said, "Daniel, you're too young to be saved." And brother, that hurt him until he went to high school. And he finally got that cleared but it took him a long time. You shouldn't tell anybody something like that...

Walters: (15:48) Sure.

Worthington: (15:49) but he didn't know, he didn't know the difference.

Walters: (15:50) Sure.

Worthington: (15:51) So five of us um...seven of us are saved in my family.

Walters: (15:57) Well, we are going to follow kind of a chronological order here in these questions. So we'll start off asking you some questions here about your Major League career and then we'll get into the Liberty days. So Mike, would you like to ask...

Cobb: (16:09) We were going to go from things of eternal significance to things [laughter]...

Walters: (16:12) Yes, yes [laughter].

Cobb: (16:15) Well, if you wouldn't mind um...I guess we could see that you played for a number of teams, I don't know if you have any special memories that come to mind either with the Giants or the Red Sox or White Sox or Reds. We noticed it looked like you were on some teams with people like Willie Mays or Harmon Killebrew, Rod Carew, Pete Rose.

Worthington: (16:35) Yeah.

Cobb: (16:36) Even Leo “the lip” Durocher...

Worthington: (16:37) Yeah.

Cobb: (16:38) and Frank Robinson there. Do you have any memories either on the teams or some players that you’d like to share with us?

Worthington: (16:45) Well, I went up to New York in 1953. I was playing with Minneapolis in Triple A and, and they called me up and I, I arrived in New York about eleven o’clock at night and, and no band, no big crowd met me, you know. So I went to the hotel that they told me to go to. Woke up the next morning and I was supposed to go to the Giant office and I went in the Giant office and they said, “Now Al, you go down third building and go down the steps and, and you get on a plane. They’re going to play Philadelphia.” And I looked around and nothing but building and cement and he telling me go downstairs and get on a train. I didn’t know anything about a subway or whatever they are. So I went three buildings, I went down and lo and behold, there’s a train down there [*laughter*]. I got shocked so, I got on the train and they, we went to Philadelphia to play. Leo called me Bill, he didn’t, he didn’t really know my name. So [*clears throat*] well, I stayed with the Giants five years and we won the Pennant in 1954 against Cleveland; played them, beat them four games in a row. I didn’t pitch but we, we one that, that Pennant, World Series. Let’s see, what was, what was all that question?

Cobb: (18:13) No, just when you talked about...you, you talked about Leo Durocher called you Bill...

Worthington: (18:17) Yeah.

Cobb: (18:18) and didn’t know your name? Willie Mays came in...

Worthington: (18:23) Well, Willie went in the Army. I forgot when he came back but I played with him for five years. Willie was the best all around baseball player I ever saw and most anybody that saw Willie play uh...like a pro player would say Willie’s the best they ever saw. But a lot of guys can do one thing, a lot of guys can do two things, some guys can do three things, but, but to run, field, hit, and throw, Willie does all four of them better than anybody that ever played, I’m sure. So he was a, he was a nice guy; kind of kept you loose. He wasn’t, he wasn’t serious, you know, but he was a great player.

Cobb: (19:05) Were you at the game...at...what was the year when they had “The Catch?”

Worthington: (19:10) ‘54 World Series. I saw it. I had the best seat in the house; sitting on the bench. Sat there and watched it. It was a great catch. He turned around real quick and threw it to third base and the man on second couldn’t go to third because he didn’t know Willie was

going to catch it and he had played off quite a bit. So that was, that was the highlight of the whole series there, I guess, and, and uh...Dusty Rhodes hitting homeruns, pinch-hitting homeruns. So beat Cleveland four in a row but Al Rosen, the star of the Cleveland team, had a bad leg and he couldn't play good so that hurt them.

Cobb: (19:44) How was it different being on teams that played in the World Series in 1954 then I think you also played in 1965 where you actually pitched a little bit.

Worthington: (19:53) Yeah, well I didn't pitch in '54 and '65 I pitched in two games. The difference is one, you know, I pitched in one I didn't pitch in the other. But we lost to the Dodgers in the '65 World Series four games to three. Leaving the stadium on that last game some woman said, "Twins didn't lose that game. That Sandy Koufax, he just won it." He was...

Cobb: (20:22) *[laughter]* I was going to say when you talked about Willie Mays as being a, a player, as a pitcher, how would, what did you think of Sandy Koufax?

Worthington: (20:29) Let me say this, he had a great curveball, he had a good changeup, and everybody knows he had a good fastball. Well, you know, you can't look for the curveball, he'd throw you a fastball you're liable to get hit. So on that last day, we'd won three and they had won three, he only threw fastballs, he didn't have a curveball. And that made him fastball evidently better. And so he beat us two to nothing; we didn't seem to have a chance so...he's got to be ranked as one of the greatest pitchers that ever pitched.

Cobb: (21:06) A lot of people do.

Worthington: (21:07) Yeah.

Cobb: (21:09) If, if I did my research right, you played a little bit for the Reds when uh...was it the Reds when a young Pete Rose...?

Worthington: (21:15) I played one year with Pete Rose, 1963. Pete Rose was the hustling ballplayer I'd ever seen. I mean, he was hustling; Pete was a hustler.

Cobb: (21:24) Charlie Hustle, right?

Worthington: (21:25) Charlie Hustle, he made it, you know, he did good too. He was a good hitter but, but he hustled. He, he let everybody know, you know, they ought to hustle in this game. So he was a real asset to the game.

Cobb: (21:43) What did you see as the highpoint of your career as a professional ballplayer? Was it just the, the saves, I think, for the Twins? Was it the World Series or...?

Worthington: (21:53) Well, no, the, the highlight of my career, I guess, was going back to Minnesota. I played there in the Triple A team. Started back in 1953. So going back as a Twin, that was like coming home to me. So that was probably the highlight of my career right there.

Walters: (22:11) Now, you talked about your salvation experience and how long did you play ball after you were saved? Could you, did you have...I suppose you took opportunity to witness in the clubhouse and such. Can you tell us some success stories? Do you have anything there where you got to lead some of your other colleagues to the Lord or anything or at least witness and...?

Worthington: (22:32) Well, I was saved in 1958 and my last game was 1969. So...

Walters: (22:41) Eleven years there.

Worthington: (22:42) I guess I, I witnessed to everybody on the team. I mean, nobody told me about being saved, I never even heard that. They didn't preach it where I, what church I grew up in. So I didn't, you know, I was in debt to the Jew and the Greek.

Walters: (22:58) We at there um...we were talking about the um...

Cobb: (23:00) Witnessing to the...

Walters: (23:00) Yeah, witnessing to fellow players...

Worthington: (23:02) Oh yeah.

Walters: (23:03) The fellow that you went with to the Billy Graham crusades, his name again was?

Worthington: (23:07) Bob Speake.

Walters: (23:08) Now, he was, he was a Christian before the evangelistic meetings?

Worthington: (23:13) No...

Walters: (23:13) No, did he come to the Lord?

Worthington: (23:14) Became a Christian the same time.

Walters: (23:15) Ok.

Worthington: (23:17) So I witnessed to the players. I only played...when I was with the, with the Twins uh...New York Giants, San Francisco, I was, he and I, he, he got shipped out and I was the only Christian there. I got uh...that was 1958, I came back in 1959 and a little different

when you become a Christian on a baseball team. So I was a little, I was a little different, you know. So I believed what I'd say it, I believed in what I was now and, and nobody could take that away from me and I wasn't shying away from it and I wasn't running from it and so I wasn't real popular. So in 1959 I had the worst year I ever had in baseball. I won three and I lost two for my record but I, I didn't, it wasn't, wasn't easy. I remember an umpire called a bad pitch one day I was pitching and the ball was inside about a foot, guy called it a strike. And I wanted to go up there and say, "That wasn't a strike man...."

Cobb: (24:30) [*laughter*]

Worthington: (24:30) "It was a foot inside." And I sat there and thought about it. I started to do that, you know, and I thought, "You know what it is he'll say to you Al if you walk up there." I knew what he was, what he would have said to me so I didn't go. But I don't know, we had, we, the pitchers, we all had a deal there, every time a pitcher won a game go and buy the rest of the pitchers a beer. Well, I won a game one day, and it wasn't very easy to do, but I won a game, walked in, said, "Can't buy you guys a beer. I'll buy you a sandwich." Broke that up. So we didn't do that anymore. So...

Walters: (25:07) [*laughter*] Killjoy, huh?

Worthington: (25:10) They were just, everybody was aware that I was a Christian. They didn't know what a Christian was; don't know what one is until you become one. But uh...we were stealing signs from the scoreboard, that's where the guy was, and our hitter knew what was going to come. When the, when the hitter uh...by, by the time...the hitter knew by the time the pitcher knew...by the time the pitcher knew, the hitter knew too. So you can hit better if you know what's coming. So we did that in New York and I wasn't a Christian and I couldn't speak up. So we cheated there when teams came in and I had quit, I had quit the White Sox but that was, that was after. So Bill Rigney was the manager, he was my friend. I went and told him that's cheating and if we keep doing it I'm, I can't play no more. So he cut it out. We were leading the league by three games and we, we finished eight back and don't have eight to, eight to play and finish back, didn't the Pennant. So I wasn't too popular there. So they, they traded me in the spring training of 1960; I went to the Red Sox. So, standing out in the field in Phoenix and I got this Red Sox uniform on and playing the Giants. Manager came out to me and said, "You know, I wondered how we got you; you're a good pitcher. But I understand your bringing religion on the field. We're not going to have that things going on." [*chuckle*] I looked at him, thought, "All the things you hear in the bullpen from guys talking about and he's telling me that I can't bring my religion on the field. Well he thinks I'm going to take it." So I stayed twenty, twenty-eight days with the Red Sox, most of it was in Boston, rained all the time it seemed like. But I, I love Boston. They sent me to Minneapolis in Triple A again. So I was back there and then the White Sox bought me that year, in 1960, in September they got me. One of the pitchers came

over to me and said to me, “You know, we got a man on the scoreboard calling the signs of the opposing team.” I said, “Oh goodness, here we go again...”

Walters: (27:47) [*laughter*]

Worthington: (27:49) So we left Chicago this night, I won the game in relief. Had to go over to Kansas City to make up a game. Well, I saw Al Lopez in the lobby this day and I said, “Sir, that’s cheating, having anybody on the scoreboard calling signs of the opposing players.” He said, “Show me in the, in the rulebook where it’s cheating.” Well, they don’t have that in the rulebook but anybody ought to know that’s cheating, you know, with a man on the scoreboard. Now, it was ok for the, if the coaches could pick up something from one of the players to get a sign, that’s fair. It wasn’t too fair for me. So anyway, we talked for a while and went to the game, game ended, we flew back to Chicago. Next day I walked in, in the office late in the afternoon, laid there in that bed all morning, and I walked in and talked to him again about the cheating and he ended up saying, “I’m the manager. You ought to do what I want you to do.” I said, “Sir, I’ll go up and talk to the general manger.” Went up and talked to the general manager, Hank Greenberg, great hitter, and he said, “You ought to do what the manager wants you to do.” They sent me over to talk to Bill Veeck, the owner. I didn’t get to talk much with him with talk like that so I didn’t, I didn’t get any, headway so I went out and caught the plane. Went home, came back to Birmingham. My preacher came over the next day and he said, “You didn’t have to quit, you didn’t do any of that cheating.” And I looked at him and thought, “How in the world did you become a preacher?” So, I started college again, I had already made a mess of it the first time. So I went and graduated from Stanford University, took me about two more years. But I knew that when I laid in bed in Chicago, I, I knew God was going to send me back to the big leagues. In, in nineteen...let’s see, that was 1963, ’64. In ’64, San Diego got me again, this was my second tour with San Diego and I, I thought, “Boy, this is great. God’s sending me back to San Diego and it’s a great place to live and play and I’m going to retire after this years and I’m going to go back to Alabama. Praise God, that’s good.” So we drove out to San Diego, I went to school until almost June; I was late going to school, back, back to play baseball. So I went out to San Diego and [*clears throat*]...I hadn’t been out there a month and the Twins called and, and wanted to buy me. I thought, “Oh no, I’m going home.” So anyway, I went to Minnesota, got my, my family, sold me car...I had a car, I had a car that was nineteen, was nineteen...let’s see, what was that car? I bought it for seven hundred dollars, it was a Cadillac. I kept that thing seven years. I mean, that thing ran everywhere and I had to sell it for a hundred and twenty-five dollars because we got on the plane and went to Minnesota. And the very next day was Sunday and they always want to put you in the game when you first join a team, first day they can. So I went in that day and uh...that game and about the fifth, sixth inning and we scored a bunch of runs and I got my first win. Good night, I thought, “Man, I had, look at all the runs they scored.” I had never been on a team that scored a whole lot of runs. So [*chuckle*] so that’s where I made my home for, until I left in uh...I was forty years old when I quit.

Walters: (31:58) Now, [*clears throat*] excuse me, the degree that you got, you came back...did you finish a degree then or...

Worthington: (32:05) I did.

Walters: (32:06) And what was that in?

Worthington: (32:07) Social studies.

Walters: (32:08) Ok. When did you make the shift then to deciding that you might want to coach baseball? Were you always thinking of coaching at the college level or trying to get a...

Worthington: (32:18) I thought about coaching along the way. I had a, I had a young boy come up to me sometime I was in some church I, I spoke in and he said, "I wish you were our coach. All our coach does is cheat and, and curse." And I thought about that and said, "I don't have to curse anymore. I used to curse like a sailor but after I'm saved I don't have to curse anymore." I thought, "Well I, I could be a coach and, and try to influence boys." And that's when uh...I was the pitching coach for the Minnesota Twins, was in Florida, and I called up Dr. Falwell, I listened to him preach on the radio every morning I went to work. I worked at this bank and he was preaching and Doug Oldham's singing, "We've come this far by faith." So I said, "I'm going to call him up, wherever that is, Lynchburg." And called him up and he was out of town and I talked to the secretary, Janet, and I said, "You tell Dr. Falwell who I am and if he has a baseball team at that college I want to be the baseball coach." So she relayed him the message and I came up here, he invited me up here and, and hired me. Told my wife, "Don't ask for a job if you don't, not prepared to take it." He gave it to me.

Walters: (33:40) [*laughter*]

Cobb: [*laughter*]

Worthington: (33:42) So, I knew that I was leaving Alabama though. I, I knew three years before I was going to leave that I was going to leave somewhere. So it was Virginia. So that's when I came up here.

Cobb: (33:51) Dr. Falwell's always known for having a passion for sports.

Worthington: (33:54) Yes he is. He was, he was a great guy. And let me tell you this story, I had a boy on the team, this is about the first or second year, named Wayne [Stile]. They called him, he was a little flakey, left-hander they called him flakey. So we were playing Wilkes-Barre College from Pennsylvania and they had a hard throwing pitcher, left-handed and Wayne [Stile] was left-handed and there were scouts in the stands to watch him pitch. Wayne got hit, he hit Wayne right here in the face. And I'm standing at third base and I said, "Don't go up there Al. You don't want to see those teeth on that plate." And [Nunser] said, "Yeah but you're the coach,

you got to go.” So I walked up there and Wayne was down and he was, you could see the print of the ball on his face.

Walters: (34:49) Oh, man.

Worthington: (34:52) Charlie Hogan the dentist fixed him up. The next day he came to the ballpark with his suit on, baseball suit, and he was sucking on a milkshake through a straw. I said, “What are you doing out here?” He said, “I’ve come to play, coach.” “Come to play? Man, as hard as you got hit yesterday, I don’t need you to play. You get well and we’ll play you.” “I come to play, coach.” “We don’t need you, Wayne. You got hit hard, don’t you understand that?” “I come to play.” “You’re in there.” So I put him in there and we were playing Lock Haven, another school from Pennsylvania, another left-hander on the mound, the bases loaded, and this boy hits a grand-slam homerun. I forgot that Lock Haven coach but he told that story everywhere he went.

Walters: (35:43) *[laughter]*

Worthington: (35:44) Man, a man gets hit like that from a left-hander and he’s standing up there and hit a homerun, that’s got to be something, I mean, that was something to me. So that was it.

Cobb: (35:58) Dr. Falwell, we hear, would be involved in the games where he would uh...when we talked to Sid Bream, he said that Dr. Falwell sometimes would drive his truck down onto the field or his Suburban down onto the field and leave it and he’d sit in the dugout with the players sometimes.

Worthington: (36:16) Oh yeah, he did that often. There was one year he was trying to get Reagan, president I guess. He wasn’t there very much but when he was, he was in town, he was at the ballgame. Let me think, I, I forgot to...let me mention this, uh...wait a minute guys, I lost my train of thought here. Oh, I got a bill from Wayne [Stile] being hit in the face with the, from the dentist office. I went up to see Dr. Guillermin and he was the president and I didn’t know Dr. Guillermin, hardly. I just got there too. I said, “Dr. Guillermin, we got a bill. Wayne [Stile] got hit in the face.” He said, “We don’t pay the bill.” “I’ve been in athletics a long time, you know. Dr. Guillermin, this is the church’s responsibility, school.” “We can’t pay that bill but I’ll tell you what I do. I’ll take it up with the board about two weeks from now.” I said, “I’ll see you later Dr. Guillermin. Thank you.” I went over to Dr. Falwell’s office, I said, “Dr. Falwell, I got a bill.” He said, “For Wayne [Stile]?” I said, “Yeah.” He said, “We paid that yesterday.”

Cobb: (37:28) *[laughter]*

Worthington: (37:30) So he knew what was, Dr. Falwell knew...he, he was a smart man.

Cobb: (37:35) Yeah.

Worthington: (37:36) Like somebody said, he was twenty-five years ahead of everybody else. I believe that, so...

Walters: (37:41) Sure.

Worthington: (37:41) He, he, that was no big deal to him. But Dr. Guillermin, he didn't, just didn't know. He had, he'd been taught by Bob Jones and they didn't do things like that, Bob Jones University.

Cobb: (37:51) Your passion for Christ I'm sure was brought to your coaching here at Liberty. How'd you mentor the team spiritually?

Worthington: (38:01) You know, those guys think that I did something for them and I didn't really understand that. I'm only going, I'm only doing what's natural. I want all of them to be saved, I want all of them to live for Christ. So we had a lot of prayer meetings. A lot of times, you know, we'd go by the side of the building where we were playing and sleeping overnight and we'd have prayer meeting. We'd talk about the Lord, we'd talk about the Lord all the time. That's, what else are we going to talk about, you know? He's the most important person that ever lived. So we, I, you know, I, I had to talk about Him. I had to talk about Him to them. I had to talk about Him to my children. We had devotion in my home everyday. So that's been my life and so that was part of my being here, talking about Christ. Only reason, the only reason I was here anyway. And, but I didn't want to lose any games so. That's the way, I mean, my guys couldn't throw the bat. You can't argue with the umpire. You can't even look mad. If you're going bad, take it out on that pitcher. Go up and hit...don't see that sour look on your face. We're Christian people, we're supposed to act different. So that's the way we performed and that's the way we played and I didn't have any problem. You know, I had one boy, well I was talking about this with some guys this morning, one boy slung his bat when we were playing the University of Virginia, William and Mary, one of them. And I looked at that bat coming off of that backstop back there, you know that screen, and I suspended him for about three games. Practically broke his heart. His mother got mad at me because she said that's too harsh of a penalty. Wasn't for me, you can't act right, you can't play on my team; so they all acted right. And so we played and had fun and honored Christ in doing so.

Cobb: (40:07) Is it fair to say that you were as concerned about the men on your team as you were about the games?

Worthington: (40:10) Yeah...

Cobb: (40:11) Or more concerned about the men on the team.

Worthington: (40:12) I sure was. God put them, that's my responsibility; that's where he put me.

Walters: (40:19) How did you deal then with umpires who just weren't calling the calls correctly? You'd talk to them after the game or...what was your approach in that, to keep them honest with...

Worthington: (40:31) I mentioned that last night, I didn't, I didn't have any problems but I did in North Carolina. I played the University of North Carolina, I think five times, and I never won a game. One game, Lee Guetterman was pitching and it was the ninth inning and there was two outs and the score was tied and they had a man on third and the guy hit that ball like, back to Lee and he threw to first and, and had the guy out, I mean, I don't, wasn't even close and he called him safe and that guy went across home plate and the game's over; they won. And I went and caught him, caught that umpire. I wasn't going to hit him anymore but I couldn't understand how a man could do such a, a thing and I asked him why. And he said, "Because you all did so and so." I don't even know what he was talking about. I know my team didn't...we had a man name Kevin Napier from Ohio; he was a good pitcher. I mentioned this last night, he, he didn't know how to throw a ball. He threw strikes all the time. And he'd get, he'd get a left-hander two strikes, no balls, left-handed hitter, he's supposed to get them out if you're a left-handed pitcher. Well, he'd throw the next one right down the middle; they'd hit homeruns. That ain't right. Talked to Kevin, I said, "Kevin, next time you get two strikes on a, on the left-handers, you throw a pitch-out. The catcher's going to stand way out there, you throw it out there." After he did that and got through with throwing that third one down the middle, he, he did good against the left-handers. But one day he's pitching North Carolina and guy got a great curveball. That umpire's saying ball one, ball two, ball three, and he came in one inning and said, "Coach, he don't call any strikes." I said, "I know it." And, you know, it really, it didn't frustrate me, it just made me mad that a man would do such a thing and I sat on the end of the dugout and didn't do nothing the rest of the game. Walked out there and told that manager, coach over there, "Mike, you have a great team." They had great teams. I said, "But we can beat you but we have to do everything right. You don't. You're, you can make a couple of mistakes and win anyway and you don't need a man like him umpiring against people like me or anybody else. You ought to have more going for you than that, than to have a guy like that." So I got that in on him but sometimes it's tough when, there's not a whole lot you can do when an umpire calls bad but you got to have, you just want to have an honest game; that's all you want. But you ain't going to win in North Carolina much unless you can do it uh...I don't know, beat them bad or something.

Walters: (43:16) Tell us about the facilities back in those days when you first came here. You came here in what year?

Worthington: (43:21) 1973.

Walters: (43:22) Ok. What'd you have to work with there, facility wise [*laughter*]?

Worthington: (43:27) Well, I came up here and was, Dr. Falwell hired in the winter time. So I went back and I sold my house and we got ready to come up after the uh...I finished the 1950,

'73 season at Minnesota as the pitching coach and came over and I said, "Where's my baseball field?" And they didn't, they didn't have a baseball field. We worked out at Miller Park and we played our game at Liberty Stadium uh...Lynchburg Stadium. And that was ok but then it got where we were like fourth choice now. The, the regular team and Glass and uh...the other big, another big school here...

Cobb: (44:10) Heritage or...Brookville?

Walters: (44:14) Was it another college?

Worthington: (44:14) No. It was two high school teams and the, and the professional team so we, we were fourth.

Walters: (44:22) The minor league team that was here was the Red Sox at that time?

Worthington: (44:24) Yeah, they were first. Then the, these two...so, but we were playing the games at City Stadium at like twelve in the, twelve. Well, my players would rather play a baseball game than go to school so a bunch of them flunked out and I'm sorry to say they did. Well, the next year then, Dr. Falwell had us a baseball field that was playable. We played at Miller Park out there for about four or five years. And with a guy like Sid Bream and Lee Guetterman, you know, they're left-handed hitters and that, you know, the streets aren't that far and they were, you know, I was afraid somebody was going to get killed out there. They, they hit shots out there in that field and with that road and cars just coming and going. And so, boy, I was glad when we moved out of there. But one of my, one of my players' dad was a carpenter, he built us a broom. I had a little Valiant, we, we, I had all of the equipment in my car and so we'd, we'd take that, my car, and we'd put that broom on it and sweep the infield and to uh...that's the best we could do. My boys dressed in the toilet out there. I felt bad about that because that, that was terrible. But they wanted to play so they was going to do whatever they had to do to play. I had a little problem with John Baker and Eddie Dobson but we got over that after I got to know them and we became friends. But Dr. Falwell hired me to be the coach, I'm going to be the coach. You better look out if you're getting in the way of the baseball program. So we got to understand each other and we got along fine. We, we practiced two, two years at five o'clock in the morning, two years. And we couldn't get in the gym, it was all full. That, I mean, that's why we practiced at five in the morning. Everything, all during the day it was all taken up. So all, all those players came, it's cold and uh...no, we were down at UC uh...LCA, that's where we practiced at five in the morning and we had a great time down there and uh...

Walters: (46:39) What was their objection to that or can't you...

Cobb: (46:40) Yeah, what was...

Walters: (46:43) go into that? What did they, were they upset with you getting the kids out of dorms at that time or were they living downtown...

Worthington: (46:47) No, we got, we got, had problems, I don't exactly know but, you know, we all went to church on Wednesday night and, and about the food or whatever, them coming in late or whatever it was, that's what we objected to. But they didn't object, object to us practicing five o'clock in the morning. I mean, but those guys came and, and they were, they were dedicated. And so that was kind of a hardship though at five in the morning for them and I had to let them go at a certain hour so they could go to class and they did. I didn't have any money when I first came here. They didn't, they didn't, you know, I, I didn't have the money hardly to buy...I know one time we had one bat for one, for a whole season our guys used one bat.

Cobb: (47:33) Oh really?

Worthington: (47:34) So, excuse me, so that's uh...I didn't, couldn't recruit, didn't have the money to recruit. I prayed people in...

Cobb: (47:40) Wow.

Worthington: (47:41) I prayed people like Lee, Lee Guetterman, Sid Bream, and others that I couldn't, I didn't have anywhere to go, I didn't have the money to go anywhere. So God sent them in. I had a good team when God just took over and sent them in and we had a real good team.

Cobb: (48:01) That bat, you use it until it broke or...?

Worthington: (48:06) It didn't break, it lasted the whole year [*laughter*].

Walters: (48:08) [*laughter*]

Cobb: (48:11) [*laughter*] Were there any particular seasons when you were coaching that were special in your memory where you accomplished a goal that you wanted or you beat a team that you wanted or your team, you just really saw that they did something you thought was special?

Worthington: (48:23) Well, we were over at Appalachian State one time playing a double-header and they were ranked, like, sixteenth in the nation. And they had scouts all around there looking at their team. They had one boy who threw real hard. And I sat up in the stands listening to people talk and I didn't have my uniform on, game hadn't started. So I went, later went down to call the guys, "Guys, guys, there's scouts up there watching us play but none of them are watching you. They're watching North Carolina uh...Appalachian State." And so we went out there and we won the first game. And then I, I pitched, I think it was the first, the second game was Clint Horsley. Clint threw hard as anybody. His dad ran the, the Elim Home for alcohol. So about the fourth inning, we, over on the sidelines he said, I think we were tied

and he said, “You know, if, if you could, we could get one more run I think I can hold them.” And Pat Sicht, my first baseman, spoke up and said, “One? I’ll get you one myself.” And that boy went up there and the wind blowing in and he hit that ball through that wind and everything else off out of that ballpark. But we, we won the double-header [*laughter*]...

Cobb: (49:38) Wow.

Worthington: (49:49) and that was one of the, that was one of the nicest games, I believe, we won here. We were, weren’t supposed to win either one of them anyway. So that, we beat Georgia Tech one day too, wasn’t supposed to beat them. But that was, that was kind of nice for us. So we had a lot of good games. I mentioned last night, you know, my high school coach told me, “When you leave here, it’s not going to be the games you win that you think about. It’s going to be the games you lose.” We were in Virginia Tech and we had them beat nine to one, ninth inning, last inning and Randy Tomlin my pitcher. And Randy got real tired and uh...I think that was on Tuesday. We had George Mason the next day, James Madison on Wednesday, Virginia Tech on Thursday, and Maryland on Friday, you know. So, I had to leave some of my pitchers here and I, I, many times I think, “If I had only taken Clint Horsley,” he was my reliever, “we would have won.” But they beat us, we had them nine to one going into ninth and that’s, that’s...when they came over to play us on Thursday, I pitched Randy again. He, we won sixteen to nothing. But to think, all these years that’s the one game I think about. Nine to one going into the ninth inning, oh man.

Cobb: (51:03) You talked about leaving some pitchers here. Could you explain for some people who may be listening later, you didn’t take the whole team with you when you...

Worthington: (51:10) No, I had to leave these pitchers because I didn’t, they couldn’t, I didn’t want to use them. I got to play Wednesday and Thursday and Friday and Saturday really. And so I left Clint Horsley, I was going to start him in two days from now and so on like that, so.

Cobb: (51:24) Is that a common thing for colleges? It’s not like...

Worthington: (51:25) Yeah.

Cobb: (51:26) the whole team’s pitcher, pitching staff’s in the bullpen. It’s, so the whole team doesn’t necessarily travel to all the games.

Worthington: (51:33) I don’t know about those other teams but that’s what I did.

Walters: (51:35) [*laughter*]

Worthington: (51:36) And that was right to not do that but...

Cobb: (51:40) You talked about Sid Bream and you talked about Lee Guetterman, Randy Tomlin, could you talk to us about some of the other players that stood out or some of the other players that you know went on to play professionally?

Worthington: (51:49) Well, Mark Demas was an outstanding third baseman we had but he's preaching now in, in New Orleans, he's got a, kind of a mixed congregation, but he was an outstanding player for us here. Tom Sweat was a good player we had. He was a catcher. Let's see, we were down there playing Georgia Tech, score's tied three to three, ninth inning, we got a man on second. And when I was with the Giants, Willie Mays was on second one day playing the Cubs and two outs and score's tied and Willie stole third and the catcher threw the ball away, Willie came home and we go home. I got my best runner on second base, Todd Nelson, and I told Todd, "That's what you're going to do. You're going to steal third." But the first two, three guys in the game, this catcher threw them out; he was a great catcher. He threw them out and my guys didn't have a chance. And I heard the people in the stands calling, "Nice coaching, coach. Nice sending those guys down to second." Well, here comes the ninth inning, Todd Nelson's on third, score's tied, and he stole third. Now, surprised the catcher and if you don't do everything right, you can't, you can't do right, you see. So he came up too fast and, and didn't do what he was supposed to and threw that ball in the ground at third, went out in leftfield and, and Todd scored. We went up then in the ninth inning to get them out and the first two guys got, I'm pitching this guy again uh...throws all the strikes, Kevin Napier, two outs, third man got on. We were in Georgia, we're ahead of Georgia Tech; that's not right. And, my catcher came from Louisville and he stole, that man had to steal the guy. We knew he was going to steal him. He stole him and that catcher, I want you to know, I never seen a man throw a ball like he did. He came up out of there and threw that ball like a bullet to second. My second baseman was standing there waiting on the guy to get there to tag him. Now, the umpire had to call him out. He can't call him safe, everybody in the stands sees that, see. So, we beat Georgia Tech that day. That was a good victory for us.

Cobb: (54:07) Yeah, I guess so.

Worthington: (54:08) Yeah.

Walters: (54:10) Well, let's switch now, our time's drawing to a close here within another minutes or so, let's go on here to your days here as athletic director. Tell us about that um...how, how did you transition into that or how did you get that role here at LU and...

Worthington: (54:32) Well, I forgot who was the athletic director before I was but I asked Dr. Falwell for the job and told him there was two things that I'd like to have. I told him it was one of the coaches I'd like to fire, he didn't belong here. And the second thing, I don't want any athlete coming here that's not saved. He agreed with that one, ok, but he didn't agree with the other one. But that guy got out of here quick. So, I had good times as athletic director. I was

the baseball coach, the pitching coach with Bobby Richardson and he became the coach and so uh...

Cobb: (55:15) How'd you get Bobby Richardson to come?

Worthington: (55:18) Well, Dr. Falwell knew him from way back and Dr. Falwell called him up and asked him to be his coach. So Bobby came and I, but I stayed as the pitching coach.

Walters: (55:27) That was at the same time...

Worthington: (55:29) Yeah.

Walters: (55:29) that you took the athletic directorate, directorship he was called by Dr. Falwell.

Worthington: (55:34) Right.

Cobb: (55:35) Must have been some fun stories if you guys got to sit and talk shop about...

Worthington: (55:39) Yeah, you get all kinds of stories playing baseball...

Cobb: (55:42) [*laughter*]

Worthington: (55:44) So that, that, you know, no problem as athletic director. That was fun, that was...

Walters: (55:50) And then were, what, were you responsible then, was there particular, were there particular programs that you developed while you were the director here? Anything you can speak to?

Worthington: (56:00) No. We, I know we got the, the uh...Matthews, Jake Matthews, the track coach. So he told me about this fellow in South Carolina, North Carolina that's still here. We hired him. Little girl last night said I hired her. I forgot what she's coaching here now but uh...

Walters: (56:32) Who decided which programs to pursue? Did you do that and, or did Dr. Falwell have the final call on that or...?

Worthington: (56:39) Dr. Falwell usually took care of the football coach.

Walters: (56:45) Ok.

Worthington: (57:45) He hired Sam uh...

Walters: (56:48) Rutigliano.

Worthington: (56:51) Rutigliano. Otherwise, he kind of let me have it. Well, he would of hired the basketball coach. I don't think we needed one at that time but I'm sure he would of, he would of had something to say about that.

Cobb: (57:02) Were you here when we moved up to NCAA...

Worthington: (57:05) Yeah...

Cobb: (57:06) Division I?

Worthington: (57:07) I was here when we went to Division I.

Walters: (57:09) Can you tell us about that development? When you came in the '70s, were they in the NCCAA or were they in NAIA, can you speak to that whole...

Worthington: (57:19) I, I think, I don't know about the NCCAA but NAIA, we went to three tournaments for them, with them back at, back in those years; finished third each time. Lee Guetterman and Sid Bream were the first All-Americans, first team there.

Walters: (57:37) In the NAIA.

Worthington: (57:38) In the NAIA. They'd of been first string in anything.

Walters: (57:41) Right [*laughter*].

Worthington: (57:42) They were good. So uh...[*laughter*] so we just kept moving up and then got to Division I.

Walters: (57:50) Is there anything in particular about the move to Division I that stands out in mind? Any particular problems or...?

Worthington: (57:56) No. For the most part I let Chuck Burch handle most of that. Chuck Burch was good. I, I...the Yankees for years, you know, they won it about fifty years in a row it seemed like. And I asked about him, the, the top man hired the best man he could find to be under him and all the way down to the scouts. I thought, "No wonder nobody's jealous of one another, they're hiring the best men they can under them." Well, Chuck Burch was one of those people. I couldn't wait to get him hired. He was, he worked with Kevin uh...what's Kevin's last name? S, I, E, uh...sports director here, sports information director...Kevin Keys...

Walters: (58:42) Oh, ok.

Worthington: (58:43) Kevin is a friend of mine, couldn't think of his name. So...

Walters: (58:49) Now, this person um...was it Chuck that you said?

Cobb: (58:53) Chuck Burch.

Walters: (58:53) Chuck Burch.

Worthington: Chuck Burch.

Walters: (58:55) What was his position? Or what did you...

Worthington: (58:56) Well, he worked with, he worked with Kevin Keys and I hired him from there to be my assistant coach uh...athletic director.

Walters: (59:02) Oh, ok.

Worthington: (59:04) I knew, I had that much sense to hire somebody good...

Walters: (59:07) Right.

Worthington: (59:07) under me...

Walters: Ok.

Worthington: (59:08) And so he was the athletic director here for a while...

Walters: (59:12) Ok.

Worthington: (59:12) and then he went to Gardner Webb.

Walters: (59:13) Ok.

Worthington: (59:14) But uh...

Cobb: (59:15) Now, when you moved to be the athletic director, you, they didn't still make you take the broom around behind your car and rake the infield anymore, did they?

Worthington: (59:25) No, we play in the, we got our own field now.

Cobb: (59:27) Right.

Worthington: Yeah.

Cobb: (59:28) And they had their own maintenance crew and everything like that, that they come in...

Worthington: (59:30) Yeah, they take care of the field right here, yeah. Yeah, that was good.

Walters: (59:34) Now, then...

Worthington: (59:35) But I'll tell you, I, one day at, at Miller Park, with all my equipment in my car, I sat down and thought, "Oh my goodness." Then all of the sudden God seemed to say to me, "I prepared you for this job when you was in college." And there was nothing else I could say. I began to like it more.

Walters: (1:00:04) Now, the Vines Center and Williams Stadium were both developed here in the late '80s. In fact, Mike and I were students here when they were built. Did you have any role in the planning for those?

Worthington: (1:00:16) No, no.

Walters: (1:00:17) No?

Worthington: (1:00:17) None.

Walters: (1:00:18) Ok, well that an easy answer on that one...

Cobb: (1:00:20) [*laughter*]

Worthington: Yeah.

Walters: (1:00:23) You talked about how some of the experiences you had, like with umpires and such, with perhaps being discriminated against on the field, what about in other sports and things, did you have any issues with that with coaches coming to you and did you have to mentor other, your coaches when you were athletic director? Was there certain mentoring that went on there or were coaches pretty much independent and they were going to do things the way they wanted to do? Can you speak to that?

Worthington: (1:00:53) Well, I didn't, you know, I didn't tell anybody how to coach, that's their own business. But we had meetings up there about once a week or once every two weeks and, and we understood each other. We're Christian people and we're going to act like Christians or we aren't going to be here. And they seemed to kind of...all of them didn't follow that rule but some of them had to leave and some of them did leave. I'd rather not say who...

Walters: (1:01:18) Right.

Cobb: Sure, sure.

Worthington: (1:01:19) but then some of them had to leave...

Walters: (1:01:21) Sure.

Worthington: (1:01:22) they don't want to abide by our rules.

Walters: (1:01:24) Now then the various sports, I know you can speak well to baseball and please do but how, how did the University go about approaching athletes? It seems like, in what you told us thus far, the kids really wanted to play, they were here to play their sport. How did you go about finding out about good talent? Like Sid told us in his interview about scouts were watching him coming out of high school, I believe, but how did, how'd you go about pursuing good athletes and where did you hear about them? How...

Worthington: (1:01:54) Well, Sid's uncle wrote me a letter and said, "I've got a nephew who's a good baseball player. I'd like to see him come to your school." Went to Carlisle High School. Well, I called up the coach at Carlisle High School. We didn't have any money to go recruit. And the coach said, "Ok, I was talking to the coach that was here previous and we both came to the conclusion that Sid Bream was the best athlete that ever came through Carlisle High School." Two coaches said that. I couldn't wait to get to the phone to call him...

Cobb: (1:02:31) *[laughter]*

Walters: *[laughter]*

Worthington: (1:02:33) and I said to him, "We want you down at Liberty." So he came. So that's the way he came. Now Lee Guetterman, his daddy wrote me a letter and said, "I'm going to sea," he was a chaplain in the navy and lived out in the, the ocean sideway, California. And so I called Lee and he wasn't interested in coming here. "Man, that's three thousand miles away." So, but I had a friend called Marty Keough who was a scout for the Dodgers who was one of the first big bonus players; he got a hundred thousand dollars and made every paper in America about three times. And Marty said, "Al," I played with Marty in, in Cincinnati. He said, "You're not going to get him. He's going to be drafted." Well, God took care of that. He wasn't drafted. And so I got three of my players from California to call him. And he came, he got off that plane, I looked up

Cobb: (1:03:28) *[laughter]*

Worthington: (1:03:28) at him like this *[laughter]*. And so, he was, you know, he was one of our great pitchers.

Cobb: (1:03:33) Lee Guetterman, what is he, six-eight?

Worthington: (1:03:35) Yeah.

Walters: (1:03:35) We'll be talking to him in an hour or two.

Worthington: (1:03:37) Yeah.

Cobb: (1:03:40) What, we're going to be talking to Lee Guetterman, I, I can't help but ask, if, if you were going to interview Lee Guetterman, what, would there be a question you want us to ask him? We can, I was, just thought that might be kind of fun to ask.

Walters: (1:03:55) Well sure.

Worthington: (1:03:57) I don't know what to ask him.

Walters: (1:03:58) [*laughter*] What do you think of Al Worthington?

Worthington: (1:04:02) [*laughter*]

Cobb: (1:04:03) How different was Lynchburg from California?

Walters: (1:04:05) Yes.

Worthington: (1:04:05) Yeah.

Cobb: (1:04:06) How did God get you here?

Worthington: (1:04:07) Well, he lives in Tennessee now so he didn't think that much about California to go on back. However, his wife's got her family down there in Tennessee so...

Cobb: (1:04:16) Ok.

Worthington: (1:04:16) that tells you something.

Walters: (1:04:22) Well, would you like to speak any further about your relationship with Jerry Falwell? You've told us some baseball things. Anything in particular stand out? What do you think of his legacy and what he's been doing and, or what he had been doing and such for the country and...

Worthington: (1:04:43) Well, one year I told him he was the greatest man in America to me. That was when he was trying to, I think, trying to get Ronald Reagan elected. But he was a great man. Listen, when I heard, and I don't know if it's true, that he had to put up four hundred and fifty thousand dollars for the water to be turned on, on this mountain, and nobody in this city the city made put up money before they got things done. He had to put it up in advance. And he, one time somebody said something bad about him in this town and it was proven that he was innocent. He didn't even get mad at them. He was the, he was, he was nice to him and, and you know, I thought he ought to be mad but he wasn't mad. I never did see him mad and so, you know, he was, he was just the greatest to me. I, I really like, I, I was kind of afraid to come here in the wake because I heard he woke up at four o'clock in the morning and I thought, "Man, if he expects that of all of his employees I'm in trouble." [*laughter*]

Walters: (1:05:52) [*laughter*]

Cobb: [*laughter*] Did he ever travel with you to any of the away games?

Worthington: (1:05:56) No, no. But he was always out there. All the time, he was at the game; made a point to be there.

Cobb: (1:06:08) Did he ever talk to the players before or after a...

Worthington: (1:06:11) No...

Cobb: (1:06:12) game?

Worthington: never did.

Cobb: (1:06:12) He'd let you have the freedom to coach.

Worthington: (1:06:14) Oh, yeah. He couldn't coach. He's not informed nothing about, that much about baseball. But he was a real great fan and, and he was good to all the, all the sports here he was good to.

Walters: (1:06:30) What were the most valuable, looking at the whole broad picture here of your days at Liberty, what were your most valuable life experiences that you had during your days here? The ones that probably...well...

Cobb: (1:06:44) As you look back at...

Walters: (1:06:46) Yeah.

Cobb: (1:06:46) the most fondest...

Walters: (1:06:47) Right, the most long-lasting, the most...

Cobb: (1:06:51) If you, if you had a choice, did you like being coach, like being athletic director, they both had their plusses? If...would you do either one or the other if you, looking back on it now?

Worthington: (1:07:03) Well, I was the baseball coach and athletic director for three years, I think. And I told Dr. Falwell that's you know, I, I would leave the office of the athletic director and walk out to the ballgame getting ready to start at three o'clock. So I, I told him, "I'd rather have one of the two jobs and whichever one you'd want me to have." He said, "I'd rather for you be the athletic director." I said, "Ok." So I enjoyed, I enjoyed helping the other coaches in their job as coaches so...I, that was big to me to be able to help, I helped a lot of coaches. I

thought, I, you know, I don't tell anybody how to coach, you know, you got hired to do your job, do it. So, we've had a long...

Cobb: (1:07:46) The impact that you had on players, I think Lowell had mentioned about how Sid Bream had looked back at his time with you so fondly. Think the impact you had on him not just as a player but as a, but as an individual but as a man but as a Christian.

Worthington: (1:08:00) Yeah.

Cobb: (1:08:01) Did um...did you, as an athletic director, sort of still have time to interact with players?

Worthington: (1:08:13) No. I didn't, I didn't, I got to speak to the football players one time but I didn't speak to any other groups other than the baseball when I was pitch...I was pitching coach, you know, so I got to speak some but Bobby was the coach so he'd run that. But I spoke to them all the time, I was hearing my baseball players everyday, really. I mean, I wanted them to live right and do right and if they claim to be a Christian, live like one, you know. So that's what we did.

Walters: (1:08:48) Sure. You, you've been back to Liberty several times...

Worthington: (1:08:53) Yeah.

Walters: (1:08:55) at least, what's the biggest change you've seen in Liberty as you've visited? What does the future of athletics look like here?

Worthington: (1:09:01) Well, let me say this, that I saw a lot of building going on here. Everything was great, good. But the most important thing to me that ever happened on this campus, when they built that, when they asphalted that road that comes in here. They had nothing but holes here and my car got the brunt of all that. And when they built, put that asphalt on the road I was one of the happiest men in the world. And they can build all the buildings they want but nothings more important than that right there...

Cobb: (1:09:30) *[laughter]*

Walters: *[laughter]*

Worthington: (1:09:36) *[laughter]* But, what was the question?

Walters: (1:10:03) Well, like in regard with like...you know, you, you know the most about athletics aspect of the University. Based on our current trajectory and such, where do you see us going? Are we, are we doing this well? Are there things...

Worthington: (1:09:49) I, I...

Walters: (1:09:49) that you're concerned about...

Worthington: (1:09:50) Yeah, I...

Walters: (1:09:51) There things you're happy about? What are those things?

Worthington: (1:09:54) Well, I, I'm happy about the way things are going and there's a couple of things about the athletics program that, that I, I wouldn't be able to talk about but I, I'm going to say something about.

Walters: (1:10:06) Ok.

Worthington: (1:10:07) So I think, you know, we're on the right track. I think we're doing most things right. So that's, that's important and this is my school; I spent sixteen years here.

Cobb: (1:10:20) Dr. Falwell's kids, did, did any of them ever come to the game? We've got Jonathan is the pastor now, we've got Jerry Jr. is the chancellor. Did you interact with them ever when they were growing up?

Worthington: (1:10:33) No, Jerry was quiet. He never did come around. Jonathan was around. I don't think Jonathan ever came to a game. Maybe, maybe once, I never did see him. But I don't think Jerry Jr. ever came. He was, he didn't want the limelight or anything like that. So I hear he's doing a great job as...

Cobb: (1:10:54) Great job, yeah.

Worthington: (1:10:55) the chancellor, yeah.

Walters: (1:10:56) Now, in your years here, were you, it's my understanding that back in the earlier days, the, the first faculty members had to be members of Thomas Road....

Worthington: (1:11:06) Yeah.

Walters: (1:11:07) Were you a member of Thomas Road or did you go to other churches over the years?

Worthington: (1:11:09) No, I didn't go...I was Dr. Falwell's man. I was right here three times a week.

Walters: (1:11:16) And what was your experience like as a normal member at...well, you, you probably weren't a normal member of Thomas Road Baptist Church but, you know, any experiences in that, on that side of your life that you'd like to relate to us? Any speakers in particular that you remember or...?

Worthington: (1:11:35) Well, I...I guess not. I...

Walters: (1:11:38) Sure.

Worthington: (1:11:40) I was just, you know, I was, I was glad everything went the way it did as when Dr. Falwell was here...

Walters: (1:11:45) Sure.

Worthington: (1:11:46) and I'm just glad to be a part of it.

Walters: (1:11:49) Now, going back to the first part of the interview, we asked you about your testimony and you told us about your salvation experience and the Billy Graham evangelistic crusades,...

Worthington: (1:11:59) Yeah.

Walters: (1:12:00) did you ever get to meet Billy Graham personally?

Worthington: (1:12:01) Oh yeah, I did. When I was with Cincinnati, the hotel we lived in, in L.A., was the same hotel Billy Graham lived in, I mean was staying in, when he was holding a crusade in L.A. So I got to, I got to talk to him there. But one of his associates, I forgot his name doggone-it, he lives in North Carolina, died, but we corresponded every year. He sent Christmas cards of his family and all...T.W. Wilson, that's his name and we, we talked together out there and, and he was a good friend of mine and I got to talk to Billy one time.

Cobb: (1:12:47) Both of us, Lowell and I, are, are history majors and so part of the great delight in interviewing you is not just to meet you and hear about the history of Liberty but both of us enjoy some of the history of baseball.

Worthington: (1:12:59) Yeah.

Cobb: (1:13:00) I don't know if, do you mind me asking, you talked about Willie Mays being the best all around player, you talked about Sandy Koufax. As a pitcher, what was it like to...did you pitch to people like Clemente? Did you pitch to Stan Musial? And who were the, who were the batters that were coming up...

Walters: (1:13:17) Hank Aaron, Mickey Mantle.

Cobb: (1:13:19) Yeah, some of the players who were...

Worthington: (1:13:20) Well, I, I...Roberto Clemente and I played together in Puerto Rico in 1955-56 winter.

Cobb: (1:13:28) Oh you did, ok.

Worthington: (1:13:28) Yeah. So we were on the same team. Now, when the season ends there and starts here, he goes to Pittsburgh and I go to New York. Now, I'm pitching against him one day and the ball got away from me and I threw hard and the ball gone right to his head. And I hollered, "Look out." I did that a number of times. He swung at the ball. I'm hollering, "Look out," and he's swinging; it's going at his head. So he swung at anything. It didn't have to be a strike for him. Now Musial, I'll tell you, Jackie Robinson and Stan Musial, the first two hitters I didn't like, you know. First place, I walked on the mound, I'm a young boy, they been there ten years. They knew what I was going to throw. They knew the speed that it was going to be. They knew the location and I didn't know any of those things. And they never did spoil it. They never hit the ball hard off me, they hit it hard. And I didn't give either, either one of them a homerun but they got, they hit me and hit me hard. But David Matthews is the best hitter that I think I faced as far as I'm concerned. He didn't hit any homeruns either but he was always able to get that bat on that ball and get him a single or something. And so he was a really a tough out for me. Mickey Mantle hit a homerun off me in 1965, grand slam...no, three men on, lost the game. He hit a homerun, he was in a big slump and I got him out of the slump. And he hit a homerun with two men on, won the game. Made me feel bad.

Cobb: (1:15:08) Yeah.

Worthington: (1:15:08) Yeah.

Cobb: (1:15:10) You talked...

Worthington: Who else...

Cobb: (1:15:12) Well, let's see, Hank, you ever pitch against Hank Aaron?

Worthington: (1:15:46) They put me up against Hank all the time. I was relief pitcher with the Giants then. It seemed like every time he came up and was in trouble they put me in there. He hit two homeruns off of me in his, the time I faced him. I got him out a lot of times but he hit two homeruns. Dr. Falwell said one time, "He wouldn't even of had that record had it been for you at that time," you know.

Cobb: (1:15:34) *[laughter]* You, you grew up, you said, some in the south during the '60s. Are you at least um...when you talk about pitching against Jackie Robinson, when you talk about playing with Willie Mays, what was going on in, with race relations in the '60s that um...

Worthington: (1:15:58) I, I...I don't know. I don't think it was too good. I wasn't mad at anybody so I didn't have any part of it. So I don't think it was real good but I don't, I don't know how bad it was.

Cobb: (1:16:12) When you went to, when you went to play in the World Series in Los Angeles, that was certainly a growing area at the time...

Worthington: (1:16:20) Yeah.

Cobb: (1:16:20) I mean, that was, a lot of Hollywood people had to been out coming to the game.

Worthington: (1:16:24) They did, they had their box seats. They had the enclosure there and they, most of them were behind home plate.

Cobb: (1:16:32) What, who were the people, did you see anybody that you just kind of chuckled or was coming to the game or that you thought was interesting that you see in...

Worthington: (1:16:40) No, no. Didn't give it a thought, didn't care who came.

Cobb: (1:16:43) Now, was it Chavez Ravine that you pitched at, I think my dad talked about going, he said the seats felt like you were almost climbing straight up to be able to, you know...

Worthington: (1:16:51) Yeah, it seemed like that way but I, there was a guy named Greg Walcott that became a friend of ours, he was Christian, Bob Speake and I. And he met, we had lunch with him one day. He was the first man that I, we sat down and he said, "Bow your head, I'll pray." So then he prayed for our, our dinner and we corresponded...he was, he knew the pastor that led me to Christ, he knew him. So we, we had a couple of meetings but he was the only one I knew...no, I, I knew another one. What was his name? He died, he was a gray-headed guy. I can't think of his name but he, he came around a little bit because he, he was a friend of Leo.

Cobb: (1:17:45) Leo Durocher?

Worthington: (1:17:46) Yeah. And uh...there was two or three of them that would come in the clubhouse in Phoenix and I...Groucho Marx...

Cobb: (1:18:00) Really?

Worthington: (1:18:00) He came [*laughter*]...

Cobb: (1:18:01) [*laughter*]

Worthington: (1:18:02) Lucky I thought of his name.

Cobb: (1:18:05) Who were the professional athletes that you still interact with? Do you still talk to...

Worthington: (1:18:09) I call Jerry Kindle, Jim Kerry, Sid Bream...

Cobb: (1:18:18) Yeah, absolutely.

Worthington: (1:18:20) and every once in a while Lee, Randy Tomlin. That's, that's about who I still contact with.

Walters: (1:18:29) Growing up, what teams did you root for or follow?

Worthington: (1:18:33) None of them.

Walters: (1:18:35) None of them.

Worthington: (1:18:36) You know, I, I'm in Alabama, I don't know about any baseball teams...

Walters: (1:18:38) *[laughter]*

Worthington: (1:18:39) I don't know anything about big leagues.

Walters: (1:18:40) Right. Now, on the way over here you told me you didn't like baseball growing up.

Worthington: (1:18:46) I didn't like baseball.

Walters: (1:18:47) Can you expand on that?

Worthington: (1:18:49) Well, I, I was a football player in the first place and Alabama is football. My two older brothers signed a baseball contract and they never got to the big leagues. My daddy pitched baseball until he was fifty-three in the amateur circuits...

Cobb: (1:19:02) Wow.

Worthington: (1:19:03) Ok, I wasn't very good but I pitched and the war came, second war. I, we didn't play, we didn't have enough boys to play; couldn't even get nine. So we didn't have, play ball for about three years. So I went to high school, played just to play. Of course my brothers did and they kind of encouraged me to. I went to Alabama on a football scholarship and my roommate said, "Why don't you come out and play baseball?" I said, "Ok," and to have something to do I guess. So, as a freshman you couldn't play then, varsity, so we played about three games and they, they got me a job in Georgia making four hundred dollars a month for the summer; four hundred a month. I talked to the man I met in Georgia and I said, he said, "I want you to fly down here." "Fly? Won't that cost a lot of money?" I heard him pat, pat his back pocket and said, "I got a lot of money back here." So I flew down and they paid me four hundred dollars a month. I couldn't have paid, made four hundred dollars a month in Alabama sweeping floors or something. So that guy kind of got me started. I, I, when I got into pro ball, I played three years and I'd look up in the stands and I'd say, "I know you folks don't know what's going on. I don't and I'm sitting right here." But then I began to learn the game, I began

to like it, I loved it, I think it's the greatest game we play. And I'm reverting back to where I was before; I, I don't watch games on TV. I watch the World Series and I watch the playoffs. But I, I can't turn on that TV and watch a game. I don't know anybody. So, uh...

Cobb: (1:20:43) When you, you talk about making four hundred dollars a month, you couldn't make that when you grew up, what was, what were jobs growing up? What uh...

Worthington: (1:20:51) I made ten cents an hour working at a grocery store, delivering groceries...not, not...drug store, not grocery store. Made, made that, made ten dollars a week. So...

Cobb: (1:21:03) They had steel, steel mills in Birmingham?

Worthington: (1:21:06) Oh, I don't know what they made. I, I couldn't work with...I worked for a, I worked for a war plant when I was sixteen years old, [Goslyn]. We made shells. I don't even know what I made though.

Cobb: (1:21:16) Right.

Worthington: (1:21:18) Went to work seven o'clock in the morning, had to go catch the streetcar. I had to walk three blocks to catch the streetcar to go to work. Boy, when the war ended, that man came in there and said, "Folks, we're through." I was so happy you couldn't believe it, sixteen years old.

Cobb: (1:21:30) [laughter]

Walters: [laughter]

Worthington: [laughter]

Walters: (1:21:33) That was enough of that.

Worthington: (1:21:34) That was enough of that.

Walters: (1:21:37) Well, as we wind down here, anything that we haven't hit you with that uh...as we scheduled this interview that was, has been on your mind that you want to get out there on the record? Anything uh...as we wrap this up and conclude here, anything at all that you want to tell the future audiences about Liberty baseball or your career or uh...

Cobb: (1:22:02) Jerry Falwell.

Walters: (1:22:03) Yeah, Jerry Falwell.

Worthington: (1:22:07) Well, when I came to Lynchburg, I, I guess I was so naïve I thought that Liberty Baptist College uh...Thomas Road Baptist Church was the only church in town and I was surprised when I came over here and there was seventy churches here in this town. I really got shocked but I was surprised here that the people of the town didn't respect him like I did. Now, we, he, his birthday came by one year and, and there was a big something said about it in the paper; they didn't even regard his birthday. And this town is growing like flies now and other things and it's not because they did anything downtown; it's because Dr. Falwell. Dr. Falwell had known all over the world and, and people come into this town, when I was here, just to go to the church service, just to see Dr. Falwell. So, I, I liked him because he was always good to me and my baseball team and every Sunday after church he stood there and shook everybody's hand, no matter what. So that was an impressive thing and he, and he, he wasn't a big shot. He kind of liked to stay with the, those kind, he always called them his kind of people. He, not the rich but those mediocre people and he was that kind of a fellow. He, he loved people; he just flat loved people. And I thought that was great with him too. Let me say this, one of the guys got fired here one time...no, shouldn't, shouldn't say that, didn't get fired. My daughter was in a class with this girl and her dad was the leader here in the church. He told her to get out of the house. And my daughter came to me and said, "Daddy, how can he do that?" "Christian man, I don't know. I'm going to go find out though." And I went to see Dr. Falwell and I said, "Dr. Falwell, my daughter don't understand but I don't understand it either." He said, "That will probably cause him to leave this place some day." And he had called him up to pray, one of the nicest men ever. And he called him up to pray and I was sitting in the seat, "Oh, how can you say that?" Dr. Falwell was above that. He, he wasn't holding things against people. You know, he said one day from the pulpit, he sleeps, he goes to bed and before he goes to sleep says, "God, this is all I can do today." Goes to sleep. My wife worked with uh...I don't even know what they are now. The guy writes in the paper...Cal Thomas, she worked out there with him and they got, at one time, I don't know, fifty or a hundred letters a week saying somebody's going to kill his children, kill him. He goes to bed and sleeps. He ain't worried about that. So he couldn't, he can't take everything, like this guy, you know, doing that to his daughter, he can't take everything and he had enough to do.

Walters: (1:25:42) Right.

Worthington: (1:25:43) He had enough of that, all this extra stuff so...

Walters: (1:25:46) Right.

Worthington: (1:25:47) He was God's man.

Walters: (1:25:48) I remember one of the last messages that Dr. Falwell gave to convocation, it was on a Christian's indestructibility...

Worthington: (1:25:56) Yeah.

Walters: (1:25:57) and it kind of echoes what you said earlier in the interview. If you're, if you're a saved born again Christian who really is a believer, you can't lose your life in reality. So, yeah, you can lose your physical life but...

Worthington: (1:26:11) Yeah. Yeah, he was a great man. I loved him.

Walters: (1:26:15) Well, I sure appreciate your time with us today.

Cobb: (1:26:18) Thank you, sir.

Worthington: Ok.

Walters: (1:26:19) And I guess with that we'll conclude today's interview with Mr. Al Worthington. Thank you so much for spending time with us. This interview has been conducted as a part of the oral history project of the Liberty University archives.

[end of interview]