

CHARLOTTE YOUNG

Interviewed by: Louis D. Silveri, August 20, 1975

SOUTHERN HIGHLANDS RESEARCH CENTER

The University of North Carolina at Asheville

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Interview with Miss Charlotte Young

August 20, 1975

Second Session Interviewed by Dr. Louis D. Silveri

[Tape I, Side I]

Dr. Louis Silveri: Let's continue with Piedmont High School. Is Cleveland County down in the eastern part of the state?

Charlotte Young: It's about the middle part of the state.

Silveri : This must have been toward the end of the 1920 's, right?

Young : Yes, 1924-1928. A very nice school. The principal was hoping it could become a junior college. It was a mixture then of paying students and free public school students, and it was almost a rival of Boiling Springs High School. Boiling Springs was working for the same thing: to become a junior college, and it succeeded; got backing enough and money enough, and it is now a prospers is junior college. I'm afraid they'll make it into a senior college. It's such a good place for a junior college. I'm strong on them.

I came back to Buncombe County and taught a short school --about seven months near Weaverville, Reems Creek, a two-teacher school. Then I had a chance at Christmas or a little after Christmas to teach in Sanford for the spring term, four months in 1929. Then Whittier; next, '29-'30 Brevard High, then Ravensford, then Clyde High '31 - '32. Then I taught and studied in summer school at Western Carolina, 1931. In the meantime, the Depression came on, and teachers who were not strong with the authorities were the first casualties. If there was any political criticism on the teacher at that particular place, and under that particular standard of

politics, they were likely to be dropped. Well, such is life. The spring term, 1933, I taught French and English in French Broad High,

Then I am honored to report that I worked for my "Uncle Sammy" for adult education, part time, part of the '30's, for adult education. I went from home to home. I couldn't get students together as a group, so I took the bull by the horns and went to their homes, where I could be sure to catch them and teach them-- and I enjoyed it. Then I was at Swannanoa for half a year, helping with the library work. You know, there was all sorts of work that Uncle Sam gave us, bless his heart. Bless the memory of Franklin D. Roosevelt, although he got sick and gave away too much at Yalta. He was too sick to do any thing then, and I hold him in reverent memory because he had mercy on the poor and needy, and teachers without jobs and others of pride and high-in mindedness who were out of jobs. He gave us something to keep our self-respect, and a little bit of money to buy our food with. Well, such were the 30s.

Then, the Superintendent of Macon County Schools, M.D. Billings, a fine, scholarly gentleman, wrote me and said that he'd like for me to teach a fifth grade at Highlands, North Carolina. So I went and taught there, January - June, 1938. Then he placed me as principal in one of the three high schools the next year --at Otter Creek High School. In the meantime, by political chicanery, a rascal was put in as County Superintendent, and the rascal knew I was a great friend of the one the County School Board had fired. So there I was, but a cousin of mine, wealthy and

influential, was one he didn't want to offend, so he took me out of that place as principal, but gave me a place to teach Math in high school in the county seat at Franklin. He knew that I helped honor this good county superintendent whom his enemies kicked out. He hated me like the Devil hates holy water; I returned the compliment. My crime: I paid no attention to political threats to my teaching jobs. (He delayed contracts until he found out how teachers voted!)

I stayed two years more in the county, but he sent me up to "Siberia," as he thought, the end of the first year. I had a good time up there. I had a little group cut off by bad roads, up on a big plateau on the Onion Mountain. But it was a good little community, and there were twelve students there--averaged about ten.. I was cut off from his influence and everything else. I had the time of my life teaching that little group; a good boarding place and good, old fashioned milk and heavenly corn muffins, and other good things.

At the end of the first year I said to the County Superintendent: "I want to go back to Oak Grove School. I was born and bred in the briar patch anyhow." He let me go back that second year, but he beat me to it the next year. A new law was passed that if a county superintendent disapproved of a teacher he should notify her before the end of the school that she was not wanted. He forgot to do that the year before. I know he would have done it, but it slipped up on him. He didn't notify me in time so I stayed on the second year, until 1942.

Then I went to Southport, the farthest east town in the state. It was a magnificent place. I made friends. There were good, old-time, aristocratic people, and they knew that I appreciated them. They appreciated me, and I was just starting off happily. But the sandflies and the mosquitoes simply thrived on my legs.

Friends would say: "Oh, get Citronella . Rub your legs with Citronella " I did, and the mosquitoes thrived on Citronella.

Finally I said to the principal, "I am going to have to resign. I can't live with these sandflies and mosquitoes." He said, "We'll regret it. We like you; you do good work. If that must be, I can grant it." Then he said to me as I was getting ready to leave, "Miss Young, I want to ask you one thing: Is it the mosquitoes and the sandflies driving you out of Southport, or is it something else? You haven't told me." I said, "No, sir, it isn't anything else. I don't know when I've started off so happily as I have here, and I will say that I've never had a better school principal than you are."

"Well," he said, "Would you tell the county superintendent?" I said, "I certainly will." And it was a lady, and I told her how much I thought of Mr. Lingerfelt; what a good principal he was .

Well, I moved at once, further west, to a town called Whiteville, for the rest of the school year, until June, 1943; then went to Marshall, 1943-'44. When it closed, I came back home to Asheville; then went to Charlotte looking for war work for the summer. Southern Bell was under the war plan. I found "war work" there for the year 1944- '45 in the

Diet Department. During the summer of 1945 a new school opened in Charlotte- -Burton Institute, a junior college accommodating ex-service men through the G.I. Bill. I was employed by the president, Dr. Thomas Burton as one of the charter members of the faculty. I taught mainly Math and Latin here for nine year::;, except one year, 'S3-1 54, when I taught in Estil High, South Carolina. Burton Institute closed, 1955. At the end of my last teaching year, the lady director was disappointed when I resigned. She said "We hoped you'd stay on here, help us out with this good work." "Well," I said, "I think I've taught long enough," (I didn't tell her how old I was) "I think it's time to quit." I didn't retire; I just resigned, and as the old lady said, I just resigned and "snook out."

Silveri: You came back to Asheville?

Young : Came back to Asheville and fixed up my property and lived on- -by that time I could--well before --plenty before that, I could retire; also on social security. So I have a State and a Federal income (one from each) enough to live on.

Silveri : Want to ask you some questions about consolidation of schools that had taken place while you were teaching.

Young : Oh, yes. I didn't help one bit with that. I didn't believe in it, and I don't now.

Young : Even if they cost more, they need smaller schools where

the teacher knows each child and is part of the community and can work with the community. But they say they're dragging them in, for instance, in--let's see, it's over in Madison County, I believe, someone told me the other day that they had just one big high school, and that from the farthest home to the

schools, some of it is forty miles. Children have to get up day, stand in the wind and snow and wait for that big bus to come. It's a shame on humanity the way those big schools are managed by these big overhead men who don't care a hoot for the children nor for education. As the old man says, "I'm agin it." Oh, it's cheaper. It saves money. Well, money is not very important, compared with the life and education of children. Even if it costs more money, they ought to have little schools here and there with two or three teachers, maybe half a dozen, that can know the children.

"Oh, well," they say, "they get so much better instruction." It is not so. They kept saying up at Watergate: "It ain't so." I say it ain't so!

They don't get better instruction. All this consolidation, all this pulling together--the big organizations swallowing up the little ones. I'm against it-for whatever that's worth.

Silveri: I talked to another teacher who was very much for consolidation, and doing away with all of the one-room schoolhouses, and all of that

Young: Perhaps we ought to have a little larger than one room houses. We ought to have enough students for two or three teachers, about twenty students each, and really educate the children; inspire them and talk to them; have a little time for singing; a little time for art

as the children wanted it; a little time for good literature, even for the first, second and third graders. Let them appreciate good writing on their level.

Silveri: When you went down to teach in the eastern part of the state, did they look down upon you as being from the mountains?

Young: Not at all. They realized that I'm as aristocratic as they are, and so we "aristocrats" had a good time together. Now some people who don't understand Western North Carolina; may be a little bit snooty without any reason except geography, which doesn't have anything to do with civilization. (Not as much as they think, at least.)

Silveri: I wanted to ask you about the Depression Years. You saw an awful lot of tragic things, I imagine, during the Depression Years

Young : Oh, I did.

Silveri : A lot of people went without. But they say it didn't hit the mountain people as much as it did the other people.

Young : Somehow the mountain people- -the lowest mentally, educationally and socially, or what-have-you from the lowest to the highest-- learned, to be independent and somehow they did get through it pretty well. They appreciated, all of these elderly people, grown-up people mostly, that I taught, just welcomed what I taught. I could tell you stories that would fill a book of those Depression Years .

There was a man named Penland who lived at Buckeye Cove, two or three miles from Asheville. He once had a good job

in the paper mill at Canton. Well, some people came around talking about union (worker's union). He joined the group; which failed. The company dropped him from their workers' list; wherever he went that story preceded him and he couldn't get any work. He found a farm belonging to two ladies near the foot of Mt. Pisgah. He worked there several years as a tenant farmer. Then he was living in Buckeye Cove, near Azalea. Now and then he got some work; whatever he could find to do. He could hardly read. I found that he could spell out words enough to read a little, but he wanted to read better. So I taught him, and then I gave him work papering my house, which helped him out a little.

I taught him to read meters; taught him several things that would help him get a job. So he went to the blanket factory at Swannanoa and asked for a job as assistant in the plumbing department, The supervisor said, "What do you know about plumbing?"

He said, "Just hire me and see." He had plenty of native ability and a quick mind. He just watched the other man work and learned it, and kept the job. He wanted to read the Bible. He was reading the Psalms and he reported to someone, "I'm so glad of what I'm learning. I can read as far as the twenty- third Psalm."

According to Greek belief, there two groups in the world. Apollo stood for reaching for Divinity for music and poetry. The followers of Bacchus emphasized the physical side of like, and were call Dioninysiams.

In Western North Carolina you see that as it was then in Greece and Rome, and everywhere, for that matter. You can see it all over the world now; all civilization,, or lack of civilization. It was a fight between those two forces. In North Carolina the force for seeking the Divine is rather strong.

Some are followers of Bacchus and some are followers of Apollo, reaching for the Divine in art, in music, in beauty, as Apollo stood for all the finer things of life, as we say. So Bacchus stood only for his wine and women and eat, drink and be merry.

In North Carolina, I don't know if it's more so than in other places, but those who are with the group that reach for Divinity are very strong in it; and just as strong are those who like to shake their feet and dance and drink and run with the Bacchus crowd. I find that in my teaching, and I suppose it's more or less that way everywhere. Always the followers of Bacchus are a little more bragging about it. They brag about it more than they used to; they try to advertise it, but that's off the subject. But still it's part of my experience and part of Western North Carolina, and I have known it for ninety seven years.

Silveri: You're probably the only one around who could say that, too. I want to ask you some other questions about the folklore of the region.

Young: Oh, I love the folklore, and I find the folklore of the

hill country is just the same as folklore you find in the lowlands and in Virginia and in New England.

I love the ballads, and I love the Indian folklore. I taught one year at Whittier, not far from the Indian Reservation. I made the acquaintance of several Indian women, and one of them knew the Cherokee language and English. The other lady knew only Cherokee. So those two women had their little children; one of them with a little baby tied around her back and a little boy who toddled along with her. We would all get together and sit by the Tuckasegee River, and they would sing their songs in Cherokee. Then this other woman would interpret them, and before I forgot it I wrote it down. I put several of them in English, and I put two of them in English poetry and put them in my first book of poetry. I wrote notes of several tunes they sang.

Silveri: What about--when you mentioned ballads, did you find that the students you taught in the mountain area knew a good deal of music?

Young Yes, a great deal. All Western North Carolinians are singers. We all sing the best we can, one way or another. I've heard some of the older people sing ballads, and my father had gathered a great many ballads and loved them. So I gathered some, and heard one song I'd never heard. I never saw<sup>7</sup> it in any ballad<sup>1</sup> book. I've read a lot of those, particularly Mr. Sharpe's book of ballads gathered around here. The one I've never heard anyone sing but my father:

*"In London town a merchant did dwell, He had but one daughter, a very nice girl,  
Her name it was Dinah, just sixteen years old With a very large fortune, as I have  
been told."*

Then it goes on to say that he told her

*"It's time you should get married, you're sixteen years of age."*

The daughter answered:

*"Oh father, dear father, I've not made up my mind To marry just yet, for I don't feel  
inclined And all my large fortune I'll freely give o'er If you'll let me stay single a  
year or" two more...."*

Now Dinah was loved by a very nice man and the gist of it is:

Now Dinah loved Villicans, a splendid young man, who had neither houses or money or land.

He and Dinah hoped to marry.

*"One day as Villicans was walking around,  
he found his dear Dinah lying dead on the ground,  
And a bottle of cold poison lying close to her side,  
And a billetdoux that said 'twas of poison she'd died."*

Silveri: What kind of instruments did you find were played in the homes of mountain people?

Young: A great many of them organs, violins and banjos. I never heard any autoharps until recently – or dulcimers.

Some of the them –some of the native men who were carvers could do a splendid job of making the violins and making the dulcimers.

I remember the first time I ever heard a violin. I was a tiny girl about six years old. My father was teaching a small

school where we lived at Crabtree in Haywood County. I heard the strangest, most intriguing sound I had ever heard about the time school turned

out. I looked in the direction that it came from, and someone was coming. A boy was coming down the path through the woodlands to the lot where our schoolhouse was. It turned out to be my first cousin, who was teaching a class in another community, six or seven miles away. He walked in with his violin and was playing it as he approached the schoolhouse. He came and spent the night with us.

Then afterwards I found some neighbors who visited us once in a while in our pretty little white, two-story house, open to

visitors any time. They came, and they'd play. I remember one man was playing the violin and his brother was playing the banjo. My

mother had knitting needles; when she'd sit down she was busy knitting j stockings and socks. A boy who was there said, "Mrs. Young, let me

borrow a pair of your knitting needles." She lent him the knitting needles, and while the violinist was playing he would keep time with those knitting needles, tapping the strings. •

It made a very charming

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addition.

Silveri: It's interesting that you call it a "violin" and not a "fiddle."

Young: Well, we always called it a "fiddle"; I just forgot and called it a "violin." I don't think it was a violin; I think it was a fiddle. I think there is a difference. I know it was beautiful. I guess they were playing "Sourwood Mountain" and a lot of other things like that. Beautiful tunes. I heard\*^to my shock-that some of the words' were slightly ribald, but I never heard them.

Silveri: .What year did you retire from teaching?

Young: Well, I quit teaching in '63, and never have regretted it. I found so many other things to do.

Silveri: Right. But even when you did, you were eighty five years old when you did retire.

Young: Yes.

Silveri: Eighty-five years old. How many years had you taught school all together?

Young: Sixty-four years--between the ages of twenty one and eighty five. I divided my time between teaching and learning more myself, always going to summer schools in colleges and universities. Once, when I taught in a school of only six months, I studied the Spring Semester and a double summer school at a college. This met residence requirements. I got a high school principal's certificate by examination on eleven subjects, which is a very good thing to do.

My work as high school principal is a part of the educational

history of North Carolina. In 1907 the legislature of North Carolina voted high schools to be paid for by the state. There was need of high school principals immediately. I got my first principalship of a high school in 1910 at Denver, North Carolina, in Lincoln County. I was given a temporary certificate, promising to take my examination later. That was in 1910. I went to summer school in 1911 and was drilled through eleven examinations and earned a blanket certificate, which allowed me to teach most subjects in high school or the grades. After teaching under it a few years, it became a "Life High School Certificate." I saw the time when: "Oh, well, your certificate is still good. It's a Life Certificate, but we're not--they're pass6 (they are out)." So, instead of taking what I liked in summer school or by correspondence, or extension work, or what have you, I began to see about getting my college diploma. So I consulted the secretary at Western Carolina College (it was then) and she told me what I needed. I began immediately to study those things and get my uoedits, adding up and up and up until I had enough, and I got my diploma from college three days before I was sixty four. That was June 8, 1942

My brother Oscar said, "Charlotte, surely you will succeed; you never know when you're defeated"

SiIveri: What State Superintendent of Schools in North Carolina did most for education?

Young: Dr. J.Y. Joyner. He was a great man in every way. Now, he was an "'Apollonian; he sought the Divine. He was a seeker of the

spiritual; he was for beauty and thorough education with intellectual integrity. Oh, I had the privilege of teaching under his direction.

Did I tell you about my best experience? I think I did on that other interview. The Shangri-La in my teaching experience was at Webster, and we had a good commencement, which was a very great thing in those days. It advertised the school; it advertised education, we had Dr. Joyner for our annual speaker^ to the 1918 commencement.

Silveri : Who is this, again, you're talking about?

Young: Dr. J.Y. Joyner.

Silveri: Who is he?

Young: He was State Superintendent of Education; and I used to hear him make speeches. He said, "I am spending my life for the little the little North Carolina child from Cherokee to Currituck. I spend my time working for the little North Carolina child." When he made the address at the Webster High School Commencement, he was on the board for Western Carolina College (or University, as it is now) . We were delighted to have him. We had to wait an hour for him, but the crowd was patient.

A girl made a talk for the graduate class. There were a ton in the class. I helped her write her little talk or oration, and when she finished what she gave of the history (she was historian of the class) she said, "To be continued." Dr. Joyner said, "I liked the way that young lady closed her speech: "To be continued.""

Silveri: You've seen many North Carolina governors, right? governor did the most for education in the state? Was it Governor Aycock ?

Young: Yes, Governor Aycock. I never met him personally, but I met Mrs. Aycock. She was a very sweet, wonderful person. She went to the State University of North Carolina summer school, in Raleigh, studying Home Economics, in 1918.

By the way, the last summer school I attended was in '61, and I had my eighty-third birthday there; roomed with a girl of twenty-five. We were both graduates, but we didn't get into the graduate dormitory, we had to stay in an undergraduate dormitory.

Silveri: And you graduated at 64?

Young: Yes.

Silveri: And you left out some teaching?

Young: Yes. Now, going back to the '30Ts, my employer was Uncle Sam, and I was teaching adults. There was one poor boy there, where the father was living (an old man who had been a miner--he had mined years ago) and he said, "I was underground in the dark so much of the time and didn't have anybody to talk to 'til I pert-nigh forgot how to talk." I thought that was rather pathetic. He had two sons living with him in a little house ggsar across the river from Oteen at Azalea It was lined with newspapers. I taught his two boys. One boy was up in thirty and the other was younger. One was named Noah and another was named Solomon. In the meantime, Solomon (he was my main student there) got into trouble. He told me he had lost his job in the little mill, a little saw mill. He said, "I wasn't to blame. It was my cousin, who was with me, and he got

hold of a big roll of wire. But I didn't have anything to do with it. It was him, but I was blamed with it, too, and

lost my job." That was his tale. He said, "I wish you would put in a good word for me and help get my job back." I went to his big employer, the owner of the big sawmill at Azalea, and put in my plea for my student. And he put him back.

He went along working a-while, and then this story came out: He and this same cousin that got mixed up with that copper wire, blackend their faces, got pistols, and hid behind the hedge 'til the man who was collecting for a company in Asheville came by. They knew when he would come by; they saw him pass and knew when he'd be back. So they came behind that hedge and then they jumped up as he came by and pointed the pistols at him; told him to give them what money he had\_ \$80.00.

Sol couldn't get out of that. He was arrested and put in jail. I heard about it and went to see him. He was incommunicado, but they let v•.; go and talk to him. So I took him an aritb ^tric book to kill time with and gave it to him. He looked so uncomfortable I thought I'd see if he needed anything. He said, "I do need a change of shirts. Please tell my father to send me .some shirts." I told him. I suppose he got them. I never knew how h^ got out, or what was the outcome. I lost track of him. He got out somehow. I don't know how. If Solomon did his time, I never knew.

[Side II]

Silveri: What was the name of the program you worked for?

Young : E.R.A , which had something to do with education. I worked at. three different sets of letters. I worked at E.R.A.

teaching, and also helping care for the school library. I was assistant librarian for Swannanoa High School while, and then when a newer tiling came out for writers, being a writer myself I was eligible for unemployed writers project. I got to help make the handbook of the State of North Carolina. You ma have seen it.

Silveri: The guide, the guidebook?

Young : Yes, guidebook. State guidebook.

Silveri : Oh, you did.

Young: I had a responsible co-worker, a loyal girl, a very sweet person. She and I both had a sense of humor; we'd laugh about errors we found in the copies. We were not exactly proofreaders; they called us copy readers. We were supposed merely to catch misspelled words, or something like that, but we came across- -day after day- - something that was to go into that guidebook that wasn't so. We'd take our time and go up to the library to check it to be sure, and we'd make those changes.

The manager came to us and said, "Now, I'll tell you, all I want you girls to do is to just correct the errors in English, Now we will get everything straight." But they couldn't. somehow we'd manage to go on with it, and when we saw something obviously wrong we'd check our memory with it. We'd go to the library on our own time. But we helped make that into a good book.

Silveri: That was the Federal Writer's Project?

Young: Yes, Yes,

Silveri : Under the W.P.A.?

Young: Or some such letters; its own set of letters.

Silveri: How long did you work for that?

Young : I'd say six months or more.

Silveri: How did the people in the mountains here in Western North Carolina look upon Roosevelt? Did they think he was a great help to them?

Young : He was loved and honored. All of us who were working under his direction fairly worshipped his name. I think that was illustrated by a Negro woman (they want to be called black people now). Say, a black woman who was helping keep the courthouse clean; we were talking about how much we appreciated Roosevelt. She says, "Law, honey, when I hear that music come on the radio at night, oh, my love for him just comes up out of my heart right into my whole being, and I love that man better than I ever loved any white man in my life." That's the way the black people looked upon him. He was very unpopular with big business who wanted to keep people on their knees begging for work at fifty cents an hour. They hated him because he didn't let people starve, and he didn't allow these people to get by working a man to death for just-enough for his bread and butter. They hated him and still do, but that didn't make any difference with the rest of us. Of course, at Yalta he was a sick man, and what he did at Yalta was pathetic. He sold us out to Russia, but that's another story. I've seen his picture

I've seen several different books and papers ~-there he was, wrapped up, and he looked cold. He seemed to have a cold sea wind blowing over him, and he looked as though he was nearly frozen and as thin as a rail, pathetic looking. I don't think he knew what he was doing. He died soon after that, as we know.

Silveri: During the war years, you taught school all during World War I, didn't you?

Young: Yes, right on.

Silveri: Right through that period. You saw a lot of boys go off to war and not come back, right?

Young: I believe I never had but one student who went into the war. That's when I was teaching, principal of a high school at Almond in World War I, 1918 and '19^ just beyond Bryson City. There was a very nice young man named Henry Davis, a little late getting his education, but very ambitious. He was twenty two, and studying in this high school, but he saw he was going to be drafted and so he volunteered. We went down with him as a group to see him off on the train. We beat the drum for him, not for the war. At a party before he left we sat together and talked a little. I said, "Now I'm sure you're going to keep your high integrity, your high character. There are people who can come through it all. I've heard there are all kinds of people in the Army." He said, "I'm going to. I'm going to keep my high idealism." So he came back and I had a little talk with him, and he said, "I did what I said I'd do; I didn't let them pull me into their meanness." He married my second cousin a few years later.

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Silveri: Let's trace the other Youngs, the Young family. What happened to the rest of the Young family? Let's see, you had a brother and a sister.

Young: I had two sisters and a brother, and they have passed on from this world. Of my grandfathers family, there were three boys. The older son, Watson Young, son of William Young, II, was killed at Malvern Hill, July 2, '61. Another brother, William, my father's other brother, married and he had three boys and a daughter. The daughter married and had one child. The older boy married, but didn't have any children. Then the other boy, Fred, married and had two boys. One of them is up toward fifty and never married, and the other boy married and has one son. From my grandfather's family there's one male descendant. The grandson of my first cousin is retarded, The name Young will go on to that one boy who is now about twenty-four years of age and unmarried.

Of my immediate family, none of the children married. My older sister, Alma, died at twenty-one; my next sister, Leona, next to me, died in 1960.

She was past eighty. She hadn't married nor my older sister, nor my younger brother, Oscar, who died at age 28, June 14, 1910, I've never married; so the Pinkney Rabun family will be only a memory.

There's nobody to carry it on, but I don't know that that's so important. There are a lot of people in the world anyhow, maybe enough. I don't think it's such a tragedy. I have a picture of my great-grandmother (my mother's grandmother). She doesn't mean a thing to me.

I look at the picture of the dear old lady, Sarah (Murray) Arnold, but she's a stranger to me, though Grandpa Wm. Arnold honored her highly and named my mother Sarah after her.

Silveri : I want to ask when you started writing poetry?

Young: I made a false start when I was twelve. A little cousin of mine on my father's side, Gertrude Mingus, came to visit us. She lived in what is now Canton. We went to the hayloft to tell stories, and she said, "Let's write some poetry." I said, "All right." We went and got some paper and pencils and she wrote a very beautiful poem. But the word "write" to her didn't mean to her what it did to me. I understood then that if you "write" a poem it's yours, but she "wrote" a poem she had memorized. So she wrote (I remember how it started):

*"I love it, I love it  
And who shall dare  
To charge me for  
Loving you, while I share."*

I thought it was very pretty. So I wrote one, the best I could with my imagination. I spoke of the sun:

*"And the sun in his vain glory  
Lifts his head above the hill."*

My father listened to both of them. He said, "I wouldn't use the word vainglory there because the glory of the sun is not a vain glory." I saw how right he was. I realized that I was too ignorant to write poetry. I didn't write any more until I was 18 or 19 years of Age. One of my early poems was published after I entered college at the age of twenty.

I offered one of my early poems (I think it was the first one I was at all satisfied with) to the state Baptist paper, *The Baptist and Reflector*. The paper accepted it and gave me a six-months' subscription to the paper. Then I wrote to other religious papers. Poets generally begin by writing religious poetry, because those who are writing poems are with the "Apollonians", reaching up toward divinity, and they must express it. Of course, it gets to be very banal, but that's always our first effort. Papers used to publish those early efforts I made.

I had an early experience that was very interesting. I was just beginning to teach in one of those little one-teacher or two-teacher schools, I had heard a sermon on the value of standing firm for religious and intellectual integrity. I was intrigued by the sermon, and I said, *"Blessings are the twos and threes who stand*

*so strongly together"*. . . and so on. That was published in a religious paper. I got a letter from someone at Harvard University. He said, "I would like to use your poem in an anthology I'm making, and all I'll ask of you is five dollars to help publish it." I sent the poem and the five dollars. I had read about how dangerous it is for a person to advertise he will do so and so and if it turns out to be spurious he is compelled to make retribution. So I risked it. I didn't hear from him for several months. I wrote and asked how the anthology was coming along. No answer. I wrote two or three other letters; no answer. I wrote to the bank at

Cambridge and "asked them if they knew anything about the "Cantabrigia Press", from which I had the offer. I said, Can you tell me if they are reliable?" The reply was, "I have heard that the Cantabrigia Press is made up of some young students. How reliable they are, I cannot tell, but please don't quote me." Then I wrote to the inspector of the Postal Department. In reply to that I got a letter from a lawyer. I could tell it was an old man's handwriting. It didn't look very official, but he said, "I'm a lawyer for so and so." (He gave me the boy's name.) "He never meant to cheat anybody, and I'm enclosing a check for five dollars." I wrote the bank and I asked if it was good. The Harvard bank said it was. So that was my first venture in publicity for my poetry.

Silveri: You continue to write poetry all the time now, don't you?

Young: Oh, yes, I write even now. There's a friend of mine who's a poet; he's a retired professor of the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill. He's a good friend of mine, and he writes poetry. He was present at a wonderful birthday party that an artist friend of mine gave in Hendersonville, and he wrote one of the most beautiful sonnets I've ever read. He's young enough to be my son and knows it, but we are good friends. He wrote, "To Charlotte Young, at Age of Ninety Six."

I wrote an answer to it, I had been working with "What is New in America," haiku and tanka (Japanese forms). I think they fit our genius, although the Chinese and Japanese poems are almost sung. Each word has its pitch, lovely to listen to, even if you don't understand it. But still I find these patterns meet my needs.

I've written reams of haiku lately because so often I will have an impression which three lines will hold. In the tanka, of course, the haiku stretched out two more lines, counting the syllables, not the accents in it. One of my best tanka I wrote in answer to that sonnet:

*"If my name should live through future generations,  
It will be because I had a friend, Francis Hulme,  
Who praised me in a sonnet."*

And I think that's one of my best brief poems because it says what I wanted to say.

Silveri : When did you get your poems together in first publication?

Young: Not until 1953; that's when my first book came out. I had a good friend whom I met at Chapel Hill at the University in 1922. A young fellow, an associate teacher of English, then in his twenties. Literature meant much to him. He was just a boy with a very brilliant mind. He said, "Now if there are any of you here who write poetry, I would like to get acquainted with you, and I would like to see you in my office and talk with you about your poetry."

Well, I hadn't done a thing up 'till that time, except to have a few things published, and before that I got into some educational journals about happenings in the Spanish- American War. I was very bashful about it, and I put two or three pieces on his desk, one of them in free verse. I didn't sign my name. The next day he said, "I would like to see the author of so and so (he mentioned the poems) ;

"they came in without a name. I would like to meet that author after class." Well, I very timidly went up to him (I used to be the most bashful person you can imagine) and confessed that I was the perpetrator of those lines. "Why," he said, "Your poem shows promise; I would like to talk with you up in my office."

He'd give himself and his time away to help others, and he's that way yet; a retired professor. He came to see me from Blue Ridge Assembly, where he goes every summer. He's up in seventy, and he's still going strong, helping boys. He's dean of boys up there, and every summer I have a little visit from him. So he was here last Saturday. I had a good time talking with him.

So there was the beginning, and then I get in touch with him and send him poems to criticize. He knew that I would take not only compliments, but the adverse. So he helped me so much in poetry; I owe him much for what I've done. He made it better than it would have been without him; just gave his time. He said, "Now you ought to get a book out." Then he encouraged me once again and said, "Time creeps up on a person before he knows it, and you had better get it published."

I asked him to pick out some that would do. I sent him seventy-five poems, and he appraised every one of them and helped me choose the ones to go into the book. It was published [1953. reprint 1956] by a very good little publisher, The Banner Press, Emory University, GA, which used to be very high. It's changed hands now and not so good. I gave the book the title,

The Heart Has Reasons, from the French, "the heart has reasons that reason doesn't know anything about." It sold rapidly. I have been taught that you just needn't expect any money from poetry. But I made, on my first two books, three hundred dollars. Which did very well.

I called the second book Speak to Us of Love [1959], quoted from Kahlil Gibran's The Prophet. It sold very well. They're both sold out.

Silveri: That second book of poems was published in 1959?

Young: Yes.

Silveri: By the Banner Press, Emory University, right?

Young: It was not connected with the university; that was just the name of the Post Office.

Silveri: How many volumes were printed of these two volumes?

How many copies of The Heart Has Reasons were printed? Do you know?

Young: Six hundred

Silveri: Six hundred.

Young: I had three hundred first; then it went into second edition \_ in '56, and the other, three hundred. Nine hundred of the two books. I almost wish I had let the second book go into a second edition, but the editor, a new editor of Banner Press, it turns out. I don't like the way he manages it. He had a daughter going for some summer work at Ridgecrest, and he had brought her up there from Atlanta or somewhere, and stopped at my house and talked with me about my books.

He said, "I would advise you, instead of having a second edition,

take the best of both books and some of your new poems, and have a third book." That's what I'm doing now, 1975.

Silveri: When did you become a member of the Poetry Council?

Young: As soon as it was organized, in 1950. I entered the very first contest, I've been associated with it right on 'til finally I became a staff member. We don't have regular members; we just have workers. So I got so interested in it that other workers saw my interest and they elected me president.

Silveri!: What's the official title of the organization.?

Young: The Poetry Council of North Carolina, Inc. I was already a member of the North Carolina Poetry Society. Now this Council was organized in 1950. This year is the twenty-fifth anniversary of it. Then I was elected again as president, two years at one time, and then someone else came in. I resigned for somebody else, but they put me in again, later, and I stayed three years. They have elected me now as coordinator, which means calling on me for whatever I can do to help.

Silveri: What kind of poetry do you write? Do you have particular themes that you use?

Young: No, I am not obligated to any group. You know how people like to put everything in its pigeonhole. Well, I kick out of those pigeonholes; I don't think I belong in any of them. Or they say no rhyme and meter -- Oh, it's passe now. All of the young people and all of the new professors are for the "new" poetry \_whatever

that is. "We must have every thing new." I don't go with them, and I don't go with people who would cling to what they call traditional form: "It must have rhyme and meter. " Since 1920 I've been using free verse if I want it, if it fits. I use rhyme and meter, and now I'm using those Oriental forms that appeal to me:. But each poem must find its own form which makes it a part of the artistic whole. Just as a vase is part of a bouquet, so the form is a part of a poem, and a poet should have all forms, free verse, oriental forms, traditional, what have you, right ready for the thought that comes. And the holder of that thought, the words and the form, belong to that thought or that emotion.

Silveri: Did you write any poems about the mountains and the mountain people?

Young: Yes. Generally it comes in free verse, when I quote some of these wise, old native mountaineers. That is, someone with good intelligence and his own way of saying it, and sometimes it's pure poetry. Sometimes traditional forms suit -as:

*"I love to hear old mountain men discuss the weather  
As unconcerned as if the hills hob-nobbed together.  
I been to fetch my cattle down from Deer Lake pasture,  
Seems like fall's a- setting in earlier'n last year,  
Had just a skift of frost here in the valleys  
nipped the pet flowers we left out and some of the dallies  
Bet you in two weeks or three, if you went again,  
You wouldn't find a leaf on nary a tree, happen to rain.*

*"And so they whittle and converse in quiet rhythm  
Unconscious of the poetry that's innate with them."*

Silveri: Any more like that? Can you remember any more about the mountains?

Young: Two or three that I just had to write. I don't like the same thing all the time:

*"Oh these mountains, How we love you."*

Such bore me. Those supposed to be odes "to the mountains" are wearisome to me. So I write only what I have to write about the mountains:

*At dawn this prayer I say:*

*Make large my heart to hold this mountain beauty*

*Through the day.*

*At night, this my request;*

*Life from my heart, lock from my dreams*

*This beauty – let me rest*

I just had to write that.

Silveri: You're still writing poems too, right?

Young : Mostly haiku and tanka. One of my best haiku, one I think tells the most:

*"It does not struggle To climb over the mountain; But flows around it."*

Silveri : You've given me certainly a lot of time on your reminiscences

Young: I loved every minute of it.

Silveri : That first interview we had was quite fascinating, particularly about the Civil War period and the stories your father told you about that era, and so on; about the years of growing up and stories of your father and mother. I think I asked you at one time whether you identify yourself as a mountain person, an Appalachian. What is your answer to that?

Young : Now just how would you put your question?

Silveri. : Do you consider yourself an Appalachian?

Young : I certainly do, just as everyone carries the name of his native soil where he first saw the light; where he lived and loved.

Silveri: There's a problem, though, when you use that term. A lot of people right away think of stereotypes; think of negative things.

Young: Oh, yes. If you're a mountaineer you've got hayseed in your ears and you say "yeah" and "set in that cheer [chair]." They are surprised that there's any except the kind they've heard about in poor poetry and spurious stories. Because the type of people who talk like that are unusual, and they can sell their stuff. They try to mimic backwoods vernacular and make a mess of it. It nauseates me.

Silveri.: Would you recommend any particular book written about the mountains or the mountain people?

Young : No, not one that I've ever read ~ I've never known except John Fox, Jr. I've never known anybody that pictures them as they are. Olive Tilford Dargan, who passed on at the age of ninety -nine in 1968, wrote about them rather accurately. But in her accounts she was the superior, Miss Dolly. She was a good friend of mine. I once memorized the 53 lovely sonnets in her Cycle's Rim.

I visited her when she was in her last illness and I've talked with her many times.

She asked me to write her biography. I said, "If I can get around to it, I will." I spoke to Dr. Francis Hulme about that request. He planned to write it . I told him that she was a Communist for years. I think she got over it in her later years.

But. she fell for things too easily – without looking into them. She'd fall for anything that came along if it was sold to her with a glib tongue. I said, "I'm not sure I could write her biography even if I had the time," although I. knew her quite well, and loved her, too.

She tried to make a Communist out of me for years, but she just made a failure out of that. I said, "I'm not sure that I should

perpetrate a story like that, with such a talented person, a marvelous poet, one of the best poets in the United States in the 19-teens and early 20s.

I said to Dr. Hulme, "Do you think it would be good citizenship to write about a woman who turned Communist?" He said, "It would be the very thing. Any poet now that gets into the public must be either a Communist, or a criminal, or a mentally sick person. It would have to be all in her favor."

Silveri : Was she a member of the Communist party? (I made some tapes for him)

Young: I don't know whether she was even quite a member of it, but she was all for it during World War I, and ever since it started.

She hob-nobbed with the big guns of the Soviets and went over to Europe, to Russia^

I don't know what all she did. She tried to sell Communism to me and my sister Leona, but she made no sale there at all.

Silveri : She wasn't a native of the mountains, but she came here to work and write about the mountain people, right?

Yes, "for health and adventure" for herself and her husband.

She was born in Virginia in 1868, just after the War of Secession. Then her family moved to Kentucky. Her father was a school teacher. That's what he could get in those days. Her sisters, I think, taught some, and she taught a while. Then she saved her money and went to Radcliffe College. In the meantime, she was a secretary to a big shoe company in Massachusetts. She saw how the owners piled up millions for themselves and how the workers got starvation wages. She said, "It's all wrong; the country's all wrong that would allow that. I'll go to Communism." That's about the story of what happened to her. Now, so many people say, "Well, the thing's wrong; we've got to take this other." They never stop to think, "Are we going to be any better?" My sister used to illustrate that; she was a whale of a girl. She would use such words as, "We've got to get rid of that political ring" "We've got to get a new set of officials; break up the ring." My sister would say, "Will the new ring be any better?" She stopped to look at both sides of it, but Mrs. Dargan jumped right into a thing without looking at both sides of it. In her life she went to writing novels about the condition of the poor working man. During the strike in Gastonia in the '20s, she went down there and  
Look part in it. I think she hob-nobbed with the Communists that were

stirring it all up, and she wrote a book about it. It came out in the Asheville Citizen in a review/ of it that she was a Communist. I suppose she allowed it.

Silveri: Site didn't make any protest to that?

Young: No, but late in her life when I was visiting her, I believe the last time she was able to talk, I spoke something about her being a Communist, but she said, "We don't say anything about that any more."

Silveri: Have you known any other writers over the years that became famous? Do you know any more?

Young: No.

Silveri: Have you ever met Tom Wolfe

Young: No, not quite. My sister met him when he was a little boy, age five. She was boarding a while in that same boarding house that he wrote about. She remembered one thing that she saw. His father came home "in his cups". He said, "Tom, come kiss me." The little fellow sort of drew back. Then his sister, who became Mrs. Wheaton, said, "Tom, kiss Daddy for my sake." Tom reluctantly kissed his drunk father.

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[End of Tape II, Side I]

Young: In his writings, he showed up his father and mother in the worst light. His mother had more virtue than he gave her credit for. Personally, I don't think he was a great author. He was a repeater, and as some say, "sophomoric" in his attitude. It was repetition, repetition, repetition, and a few fine

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phrases. One thing that struck me so ironic: people in the North, from New York and around, all of them made fun of Asheville people for his making and showing them up as he chose to do. One novelist was talking about that:

"Well, it wasn't that the Asheville people objected to those wicked things, those awful things he related, but that they just didn't want them told."

I thought that was stupid, and I know I'm not reading any more of her books. But this is what happened, and it's just fitting, that's so ironic. Maxwell Perkins put him on the map. He gave his time and took bushels and bushels of writing and out of. it plucked enough for a book. Got him on the map, Well, as soon as he [Wolfe] got to doing very well, thank you, he went to another publisher. Someone said it broke Maxwell Perkins' heart that Tom had forsaken him when he got to doing very well, thank you. He wrote some ironic things about Maxwell and about a sweetheart of his, I don't remember her name, but a well-to-do lady who helped him in many ways: fed him, kept him, and pushed him on. Then he said smart things about her and about Maxwell Perkins. They sued him and got a hundred thousand dollars or so from him out of the money they had helped him make. (This I read somewhere. I don't vouch for it.)

It was quite a different story when he used them as he had used his Asheville relatives and acquaintances. There's one thing he said that was so out of place: Oh, he hoped to write a great play

"and by G--, I'll tell the truth even though it doesn't

digest well with Baptist preachers and lady school teachers.

Silveri : You've seen Asheville grow over the years from a little town of a few thousand to something around seventy thousand today.

Young: It's so gradual that I haven't been conscious of it any time from the time I first saw Asheville when I was in my early teens. Every time I go "up town", it's different; it's torn up and new things are being built. That's Asheville to me, torn to pieces with new things going up; tearing down everything that's fifty years old. I think it's a mistake.

Silveri: Change is not always for the good.

Young : No. Changes will come, of course. The old First Baptist Church building where we used to worship on College Street in a pretty meeting house; the members decided to go to another site on the corner of Oak and Woodfin Street. Where the old meeting house stood is a used car lot.

Silveri : I want to thank you again for all the time you've given me and for your reminiscences.

Young: I forget trivialities when I get into something like this.

[End of this interview

