

**VOICES OF THE CAPE FEAR
INTERVIEW WITH AULEY M. CROUCH, III**

SEPTEMBER 2, 1995

INTRODUCTION

This is Sam Bissette on the afternoon of September 2nd, 1995. Today is the 50th anniversary of VJ Day. I'm at home at 1939 South Live Oak Parkway in Wilmington and with me is Lee Crouch, Auley Crouch, III that at one time was my next door neighbor and after a fashion, I helped raise him as I did his brothers and sisters.

CROUCH: And a good job you did.

INTERVIEWER: Well, time will tell. I do want to say that I hope this interview this afternoon will help shed a light on three very fine doctors and very fine people in Wilmington. We're going to see if we can find out a little about them and the lives that they lived and how they fit in with our community. I'm going to start out and ask Lee who is Dr. Auley Crouch, Jr.'s son to please tell me just a little bit about himself such as where he was born and a few things like that. He's an attorney in practice in Wilmington.

CROUCH: All right, sir. I was born in November of 1944 in Wilmington at James Walker Memorial Hospital. I am now 50. My family was Auley, Jr., my uncle Walter, and my grandfather Auley, Sr. all three of whom were pediatricians. All three practiced at different times together at 520 Dock Street and with daddy and Uncle Walter later on at 10th and Grace Streets at the Crouch Clinic.

INTERVIEWER: Okay, before we get back into them, tell me a little about yourself, where you're living now, and who you're married to.

CROUCH: All right. I am a lawyer here in Wilmington. I have been back home since about 1981. I'm married to Karen. We live on Chestnut Street in a fine old historic home that goes back to 1917 and is not far from where I grew up on Dock Street until we became neighbors out on South Live Oak Parkway. I have two brothers and a sister. George and Fred both of whom you know well and a sister Dottie. I have as well, cousins on Walter's side.

INTERVIEWER: Well, I think we wanted to establish your place and effect in this picture. You are representing a large family by being able to give us the information that we were trying to get this afternoon as the representative or proxy for the others. Your brother, I still remember and I've still got the marks from his hatchet when he was trying it out on my pine trees in the backyard.

CROUCH: Exactly.

INTERVIEWER: I've been living on Live Oak Parkway for thirty-three to thirty-four years now and we have had Auley, Lee's father, Dr. Walter Lee Crouch, Betty Crouch's family, and now, I'm with my third group of Crouches. Their son is also named Lee. If these Betty's and Lee's get mixed up, it's understandable. Let's do go back into the genealogy and to Dr. Auley Crouch, Senior. Tell me a little about him and then, we can pick up there a little.

CROUCH: Well, granddaddy was born in 1886 in a small town called Roberdale outside of Rockingham, North Carolina and was, I believe, the twelfth of thirteen children. The story that I always heard and I now have been able to confirm generally was that he returned to the fifth grade. He had been in school as

a child, but dropped out to help at home and that he returned to public school at the age of 19 in the fifth grade. When he was 30 years old, he graduated from the Jefferson Medical College in Philadelphia. He married grandmother Crouch or Minnie McCall Crouch who was I believe, was from the Richmond County in the Rockingham area. They initially lived in Raleigh where he practiced and where granddaddy was named the first state epidemiologist. Daddy was born in Raleigh in 1919. They moved to Wilmington and he opened the practice in Wilmington in 1920. Then, Uncle Walter was born somewhere in the early to mid 1920's. I don't remember the exact year of his birth, but grandmother and granddaddy lived their lives in the house at 520 Dock Street. This house is a place not only for me, but a lot of people in Wilmington, of many, many memories, some more fond than others because that was where the office was where granddaddy first practiced pediatrics. Later, daddy and Uncle Walter had their medical practices there, too. In terms of the family, my father Auley, Jr., married Betty Bell or Dorothy Bell Crouch, really. She was from New York and they met while he was in medical school at Jefferson. Daddy graduated from the Citadel just as I did. Daddy graduated first from Bowman Gray back when granddaddy was in Medical School as well as Walter. The schools in North Carolina, Bowman Gray in Winston-Salem and the Medical School at Chapel Hill were two-year schools and I don't believe Duke had a medical school at that time. So, to complete the education, Daddy also attended and graduated from Jefferson Medical School in Philadelphia. Uncle Walter attended Chapel Hill and then graduated from the University of Maryland Medical School. Daddy and mother moved to Wilmington and I was born in 1944 when Daddy was in Germany serving in the Medical Corps. There are, as I have previously related, four children on each side with Aunt Betty and Uncle Walter. My aunt is Betty Bugg Crouch. Her family was the Blackwell Buggs here in Wilmington. Her father owned the Wilmington Hotel downtown that is no longer there.

INTERVIEWER: He was one of the well-respected citizens of the business community in Wilmington.

CROUCH: He certainly was and I have come to know more about him of course, as I have gotten older. John and Louis Burney have related stories about Mr. Bugg and his business acumen.

INTERVIEWER: Yes.

CROUCH: Aunt Betty and Uncle Walter also had four children. Beth was the oldest, then my cousin Lee, who is actually Walter Lee Crouch Jr. and my Lee is just a nickname for Auley. It wasn't confusing when we were so young and it wasn't confusing because after I graduated from the Citadel and moved away. It has been more confusing of late and then there's John and Chris Crouch.

INTERVIEWER: Chris has just moved back to Wilmington as an accountant.

CROUCH: Exactly. We've all moved away and experienced other parts of the country only to return because Wilmington is such a wonderful place to live and to bring up a family.

INTERVIEWER: Well, that's good. That brings us in with a lot of background that is interesting. What was the name of the practice? Do you recall?

CROUCH: I've got the plaque somewhere that was on the door at 520 Dock Street. It was just Dr. A. McCoe Crouch. Then later, it became the Crouch Clinic

INTERVIEWER: Was that when they built the building over near the old hospital?

CROUCH: Exactly. It was at the corner of 10th and Grace Streets, across from what used to be the James Walker Hospital.

INTERVIEWER: Well you've mentioned 520 Dock Street. I want to put a little personal reference in there. I told you when we began this that I have known these people. I have known Walter since he and I were 15 years old and I've known your father for almost as many years. Walter has been a very close friend of mine because of that long association. When I lived at 511 Dock Street, across the neighborhood, your father was known as the man with the horn and sometimes, he blew that horn at times that weren't exactly pleasing to the rest of the folks around there. He enjoyed it and I think after he learned to play better, I think the rest of them learned to enjoy it too, because that was his learning stage.

CROUCH: Well, Daddy loved music. There was no question about that and I think the fondness I have for music followed. I can remember as a child that Daddy would record on Saturday afternoons the Texaco Metropolitan Opera broadcast. I think I still have some of the reel-to-reel tapes from those recordings. He loved the violin and I played the trumpet for a while and that may have been the same trumpet that kept you and the others astir on Dock Street. He insisted that we all take piano lessons and insist was the absolute way it was. Whether we liked it or not, we were going to learn something about music. We used to attend the various symphonies and I can remember seeing Arthur Fiedler and the Boston Pops in Brogden Hall. His love of music followed to the stereo and he had one that was state of the art in Wilmington and I can remember that there was an occasion with Dr. Benjamin Swalin who was the conductor of the North Carolina Symphony. When they were in Wilmington, they went to the office over on 10th and Grace Streets to hear daddy's latest and biggest stereo. People have told me many times about the visits to the clinic that they could barely hear the children crying because the music was blaring over the speakers. Daddy did love his music and I now know from you that its genesis was early on.

INTERVIEWER: He built the house over next door to me before we moved here, but I just don't remember when that was. Do you have any idea?

CROUCH: I believe it was either 1955 or 1957. I can remember the fact that I was a seventh grader at Tileston. I went from Mrs. Croneley's first grade private school to the second grade at Tileston and we moved between the seventh and eighth grade. I would have been 12, so it would have been 1956 or 1957. It was traumatic because as the house was being built, there were copperhead snakes it seemed everywhere. I had dreams and nightmares about moving out here because as we came out to see the house being built, there were times when copperheads were on the premises and had been killed or daddy had to kill them. So, I didn't look forward to moving out here.

INTERVIEWER: I think civilization has pretty well taken care of that.

CROUCH: It has that.

INTERVIEWER: Lee, let's talk a little about your uncle Walter. Walter had a distinct personality of his own and a nice fellow. I knew him as a friend for many years. What can you remember about Walter?

CROUCH: I think that the best way for me to compare the two brothers, father and uncle, is to compare them to my grandparents, their parents. I would say that uncle Walter was much more like granddaddy in terms of disposition and a dry sense of humor. He was a very handsome man, not to say that daddy wasn't. His features reminded me more of granddaddy in personality and more like grandmother Crouch in being more volatile, outgoing, and strong-willed. I would say that both daddy and Uncle Walter had strong wills. As I got older, Uncle Walter was always a figure of wisdom in the family, if you will. If I had a problem that I didn't think I could discuss with my parents, I would talk to Uncle Walter and he was always understanding.

INTERVIEWER: He was very much business oriented, knew what was going on, knew what was taking place in the stock market, and knew everything about the business community. Maybe that's where he got

his business acumen from.

CROUCH: Well I think...

INTERVIEWER: His interest in it led to the fact that he was very knowledgeable.

CROUCH: That's right and of course you know well about his coin collections. He was also a collector. What I remember about his early collections was that he collected, it seemed to me, every magazine or medical periodical and they found their way into his car. Whatever car he had, there was room for one person, him and it was full of periodicals of one sort or the other. Uncle Walter was, I would say, more even tempered than daddy was, but a delightful person that was a source of great comfort in the family at times of trouble.

INTERVIEWER: I'm remembering two or three things about Walter. Walter and I were both members of the Wilmington Lion's Club and Walter was a very faithful person down there to the point that he held some of the responsibilities of the club and accepted positions in it. It happened that I had said yes once too many times and was outgoing president of the club and I found out that my next-door neighbor, Walter, was the incoming president. Realizing that Walter's father was one of our revered members of the Lion's Club going back to the days in the 1930's when it was founded. I thought it would be very nice if we could get Dr. Walter Crouch, Sr. to install his own son as president of the club. I see that among your newspaper clippings that you have here today, I see a clippings of the pictures taken apparently by the newspaper for that occasion.

CROUCH: It was a treat to find it and to find that you're in the middle between granddaddy and Uncle Walter and then there is another photograph, as I recall, of other members of the Lion's Club. In preparing for this interview, if one can prepare for such an interview, I've had the pleasure of first visiting with Aunt Betty and talking with her and she provided me with a number of different newspaper clippings and articles. Most of them, frankly, are about granddaddy and some of them are speeches that were in the creation, if you will, and others were completed and typed. I remember distinctly as I was growing up and have found the evidence to remind me of it, that granddaddy was a very practical and frugal person and I have found speeches that he was writing or had written longhand on the back of envelopes. He would take an envelope and tear it open and literally use every piece of paper, every scrap of paper. If an advertising flyer came out that was printed just on one side, he would turn it over and use the back of it. Among the papers that Aunt Betty gave me, I have found a number of those, but the information about granddaddy has reminded me and brought back some of the fondest memories.

INTERVIEWER: Well, unfortunately both of these fine men have passed on. Your father passed on some years back.

CROUCH: It was 1969 and he was 59, five days after his birthday.

INTERVIEWER: I see and Walter passed away when?

CROUCH: 1991.

INTERVIEWER: Walter had some very severe health problems and we miss him. Did Betty Crouch tell you anything else that you can remember about Walter from her observations? I would like for her to have participated in this interview, but it wasn't to be, so you're the spokesman for everybody.

CROUCH: Well that's it. Well, actually when I was visiting with her last Sunday, her daughter Beth, my cousin, was there and we were telling tales. It seems that most of the stories that are remembered,

certainly in a more humorous vein, are remembered about daddy rather than about Uncle Walter.

INTERVIEWER: Because of the seriousness of his nature?

CROUCH: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: The fact that your father was not as serious?

CROUCH: He was the cutup, as I told you before. I remember him as the last adult teenager. Daddy was always doing something. Once, he returned from a vacation in Florida and had a pair of golfing pants that were red on one side and green on the other and he wore them just as proudly as he might have any other trousers.

INTERVIEWER: Tell me about the horns. I had forgotten about those.

CROUCH: Well, it seems that it didn't matter which car, because he moved the horns from one car to another. He had some horns that would make this "Aoogah" sound. He just loved to drive places and blow the horn and if they didn't know that he was coming, they knew it by the time they heard the horn. Then he graduated, if you will, to a keyboard in the car or a series of horns that he could play a melody on. It would have a shrill sound or a siren, and that's probably something he shouldn't have had. I think that he did it in part to let folks know that he was coming or to attract attention to himself, which was something he liked to do sometimes, or maybe should I say, often.

INTERVIEWER: He was flamboyant is what I remember about him.

CROUCH: He was a wonderful doctor and a wonderful man in his own distinctive way and is remembered. It has been one of the joys in returning to Wilmington and it happens often that people remember daddy in a humorous way.

INTERVIEWER: Well, the relationship between people, their children, and their pediatricians is sometimes very close because they go through some pretty trying times together. Starting out with whatever it is that was wrong with the children and continuing on with some of their problems and sometimes they don't want to give them up when their children get further along in than the pediatrician will allow him to be called.

CROUCH: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: Let's do a little more talking about your mother. Tell us a little bit about your mother, the other Betty Crouch.

CROUCH: That's right. For her, and she's never described it as traumatic, but it must have been the most traumatic event in a young woman's life to arrive in Wilmington from New York City in 1944 or 1945 and to be greeted at the train by Mrs. Henry Longley and to, in effect, be introduced to the small sleepy southern town that was Wilmington back at that time. Mother, though, being the gracious person that she has always been, adapted and acclimated to Wilmington. She was active in the community, but she was also active of the mother of four active children. She has related as we grew older some of the stories before Dottie was born, that she would take the three of us, the three boys, down to watch the trains. My wife Karen has said that from what she's heard about our level of activity and our behavior back then, she's surprised that mother didn't leave one of us on one of the trains that was leaving town. She had her hands full back then, raising four young children in Wilmington and it was a full-time job. We lived on Dock Street as I was relating earlier, until about 1955 to 1957, somewhere in there, two houses away from

my grandparents on Dock Street. We were at the corner of 6th and Dock Streets at 604 Dock Street. Back then, it is my recollection, that daddy was busy all the time practicing medicine and made himself available to his patients and was away. Mother had her hands full with us but that might not be the case today. Daddy was busy with his practice and that was a time when doctors made house calls. I can remember going with granddaddy, daddy, and maybe even Uncle Walter to make house calls. Each of their cars had a searchlight so that they could read the numbers on the houses. That was a standard option that they had on each car.

INTERVIEWER: Nowadays, we have a hard time to get past the receptionists.

CROUCH: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: Let's go back. We've left out a little segment that I think would be interesting. Let's go back to your grandfather and to Robber Dale. He was apparently, from what I've read, a self-made man if there ever was one. It seems to me that he'd bought one or more barbershops before he got into the practice.

CROUCH: That's in reading the materials, but some of this is my recollection and some is from reading, but he did practice as a barber first. One article I read said that he was a barber in Carrboro, North Carolina while he was at Chapel Hill. I didn't know that. I knew that he'd been a barber in Robber Dale and I knew that he'd played the slide trombone, too.

INTERVIEWER: He bought one barbershop, I remember, for eighty dollars and then he got to be a captain of industry and he bought another one for three hundred dollars.

CROUCH: That's right. He was a self-made man and a man whose motto was, "He can who thinks he can." Granddaddy was truly that sort of person.

INTERVIEWER: Okay. Well, I think that is wonderful that the people in the newspaper were a great favorite of his and every time he'd come to town, they'd write up his visit. Once, they put in an item titled, "Dr. Crouch started out paying eighty dollars for a barber shop and in 1957 comes back with a brand-new Cadillac.

CROUCH: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: He did all right for himself.

CROUCH: That's right.

INTERVIEWER: By the way, I want to tell you a story that you may not know and this concerns your father and it's a very serious and a very fine little happening. In some of the people that I've talked to, I talked to Stewart Benson.

CROUCH: They were good friends.

INTERVIEWER: It seems that Stewart Benson and your father were very good friends and Stewart was floating around a little bit and wasn't making much progress helping his father out in his store. Your father sat down one day and read him the riot act and told him that he needed to go ahead to become a dentist. Within ten days from the time he talked with him, Stewart Benson was in Dental School in Richmond.

CROUCH: My goodness.

INTERVIEWER: Starting off his career as a dentist, he attributes it all to the fact that your father pushed him right down to the wire and told him what he had to do. He says, "I did it and I've been glad all my life."

CROUCH: Well, I did not know that but it sounds true to Daddy that he would have pushed him and insisted, if he thought he ought to do it, he would certainly have done it. I knew that Dr. Bentson and daddy were the best of friends and so that is another nice thing to know about him.

INTERVIEWER: As we bring things up to date a little more and up to the times after your father and Uncle Walter passed away and in recent years, what happened to you along the way?

CROUCH: Well, I have covered quite a bit of territory.

INTERVIEWER: Something happened to you from the time you got out of school somewhere around 20 years old and you say you're age 50, now.

CROUCH: That's right. I have covered quite a bit of territory and as Mr. Carl Allen and I were talking about it the other night at a Citadel Alumni function, he said, "Now Lee, you've had three careers now haven't you?" Well, its almost been that. I, after graduating from the Citadel, went to work for Hercules in Wilmington, Delaware and then, pulled two years in the Army. Although I was an infantry officer, a lieutenant, I had the good fortune to be assigned to Germany instead of Vietnam and got to have a wonderful time in Europe. While over there, I got to travel as a staff officer to Greece and Turkey and when my tour of duty of two years plus...

INTERVIEWER: You enjoyed what I and a few more in 1943 and 1944 made ready for you.

CROUCH: That's right. It was wonderful and I was assigned to a unit in a town called Kraultime. When I told daddy about it, we learned the most remarkable thing. His division, the 10th Armor Division in World War II, had leveled that town in a siege. The Germans had defended it and repelled the 10th Armor Division and then there had been a counter attack and I was certain of it because the streets in the town were wider than in some of the older German cities and towns that had not been so badly damaged. The streets were so narrow you could barely get a car through, but the streets in Kraultime were wide and it was because of that battle. So, it was ironic that I was assigned to a town that we had previous experience with as a family. After the army, I moved to Chicago, again to work with Hercules and decided I would do what I really wanted do back in high school. That was to go to law school and I went to law school in Chicago and then practiced. I was admitted to practice in North Carolina in 1976 and practiced first in Rocky Mount for four years and then have been in Wilmington since late 1980 to early 1981.

INTERVIEWER: It is my understanding that any legal advice that you get is free because your wife is also an attorney?

CROUCH: That's right: She is. There's plenty of legal advice available in our household: free or not.

INTERVIEWER: In other words, you can hold court anytime you want to?

CROUCH: Exactly.

INTERVIEWER: Well Lee, I appreciate what you have shared with us and I think that we are getting

about to the end of our time. Obviously, the three doctors in their practices were among the leading pediatricians in Wilmington in that time and we didn't have the 350 doctors we've got today. They were looked upon, looked up to, and considered with great reverence by the people that used their services. They were considered to be and I think they tried hard to attain and keep that position because there was a position of trust and public confidence. All three of them appreciated that their reputations were something that they had created and were certainly proud of. What kind of final closing thoughts might you have?

CROUCH: Well, I think that the thing for me as a person that has been so wonderful is the fondness with which people have remembered all of the Crouch doctors. It's a treat for me when someone will ask me, "Are you related to Dr. Crouch?" and I say, "Yes, all three of them." Then, I go through the explanation and it happens as frequently as yesterday. I was meeting with parents and a young man to talk about a legal matter and the mother and father had been patients of granddaddy's and the son had been a patient of daddy's; the fondness with which they were remembered. From my perspective, my grandfather was probably my truest and longest lived hero. I grew up really down the street and at times, in the house on Dock Street. I was relating earlier today an experience from back then when daddy and Uncle Walter would come from the office and have lunch with grandmother and granddaddy at the house on Dock Street. Even once they were over on 10th and Grace Streets, I would have lunch with them. As part of the ritual, we had to get quiet when Paul Harvey would come on the radio and that occurred time and time again. When I became an adult, I didn't listen to Paul Harvey anymore when I moved away from Wilmington. In the middle of the bar exam in 1976, I was having lunch and someone turned Paul Harvey on the radio and I can remember literally salivating the Pavlovian response remembering those good times with my grandparents, my father, and uncle all around the table. As I say, I am certainly proud to have been a member of this family and proud to be reminded as often as I am, of the contribution the three of them made.

INTERVIEWER: Well, I think that would be a fine closing note. Thanks very much.

CROUCH: Thank you.