

Oral History Transcript- Charean Williams, NFL reporter

Interviewed by Rachel Linch

Transcribed by Sarah Lara, Maggie Toerner and Rachel Linch

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Rachel: Okay, so yeah, so how did you get your name, Charean?

Charean: It is a combination of my parent's names. My dad's name is Charlie, C-H-A-R. And my mom's name is Jean, E-A-N. So they combined their names. I'd say my parents got creative. My mother actually got creative. It was her idea. So my sister's name, I have a younger sister four years younger, named Charla. C-H-A-R-L-A. And then my mom's a twin, Jean, and her twin sister Jane lives here in Arlington. And I have my aunt's middle name, Jane, and my sister has my mom's middle name, Jean.

Rachel: Wow.

Charean: Yeah.

Rachel: I love the family connection. That's so cool. Well, there you go. I'm glad I asked how to pronounce it and now I know, not only how to pronounce it, but why that's your name.

Charean: Yeah, there you go.

Rachel: That's really special.

Charean: It is.

Rachel: I was about to say do you have siblings though? Because hopefully they have, that would be weird if it was just one of you.

Charean: Yeah, right.

Rachel: But no, so I guess yeah...speaking of your parents and your family, did they impact your love for football? And the reason that this is who you are today or how did you get into loving football?

Charean: It was my, my maternal grandmother Mamaw, who we called Mamaw. And she lived in Hillsboro, up you know an hour from from Dallas and was a huge Cowboys fan. And apparently my grandfather was a big Cowboys fan and sports fan and knew a lot about football and, you know, kind of taught her the game. And so we would call every Sunday after Cowboys games and talk about the game and rehash the game and then got to go to some of the games up here. I think my first game was a Cowboys-Dolphins game on Thanksgiving. And it was '72, '73, '74, somewhere in there, it was 14 nothing and the Dolphins won so it wasn't a very good outcome being a Cowboys fan back then. But you know, we went to several other games and then I got to stay and get autographs after the games and so it was a really big deal. But it was my Mamaw I credit with really my love of the Cowboys, and my love of football and then all the kids on my street or most of the kids on my street were boys. And so we would play, whatever time of year it was, whatever season it was, that was the sport we would play. So in the fall, we were playing football, and the boys would come knock on the door and say, "Can Charean come out and play?" And we would go play football or basketball or baseball or you know, whatever time of year it was. And they sometimes would knock on Sundays and I would go to the door and say, "You know the Cowboys are on TV!" And shut the door in their face because we weren't going to go out and play while the Cowboys are on. They'd have to come back after the game.

Rachel: Oh my gosh, that's awesome. That's really cool. And, and what age were you at this time when you're talking about?

Charean: Oh, we probably started this at five or six. So when I was in the - I don't know if this is on your list of questions- but when, when...

Rachel: It's all, it's whatever we want to talk about...

Charean: When I was in the second grade I asked my teacher Cindy Bridges, I went to Amelia Elementary School in Beaumont. In Beaumont, Texas. And so I asked my elementary school teacher in second grade Cindy Bridges, I said, "How far is it to Dallas?" And she said, "Well, it's about five hours. It's 300 miles, why do you want to know?" And I said, "Because I'm gonna marry Roger Staubach," who was the quarterback of the Cowboys. And she was a big Cowboys fan and so I was just like thinking to myself, "Gah, I thought teachers were smart. She's not very smart if she doesn't know why I want to go to Dallas." And so anyway, she laughed and she thought it was cute. So she called the local newspaper *The Beaumont Enterprise*, and they had a reporter named Joe Cody and Joe came out and wrote a feature story on me and they took pictures and I'm wearing my Roger Staubach uniform. And I'll never forget my mom was stitching on the "Staubach" on the back of the jersey because she wanted to have a good, new jersey in the picture so she was stitching "Staubach" on the jersey the night before and she said,

“Don't tell that reporter that I was stitching Roger's name on the back of this jersey the night before.” So I was ordered not to say that, so they took pictures and then they wrote a story about me and in the story I mentioned that I wanted to cover the Cowboys. As well as marry Roger Staubach, somehow that seemed to you know, work in my little mind, my young mind and it was probably a relief to my parents. That that's what I wanted to do as my profession because my, the first job I really fell in love with was the garbage collectors because they got to ride on the side of the garbage truck, and I thought that was really cool to be able to ride on the side of the garbage truck. So I would run to the window and watch them. And that's what I wanted to do for the first few years of my life. So then it changed to wanting to cover the Cowboys. So I kind of knew in the second grade really what I wanted to do, and I probably thought it would be more in the broadcast part of it, whether that be radio or TV, part of it, because I would, we had an A-frame swing set, one of those old metal swing sets, and I would go climb up on the side of the swing set and I'd pull off the plastic cap and so my voice would reverberate through the swing set, through that metal. And I would practice doing play-by-play. I think Roger Staubach threw about 500 touchdown passes to Drew Pearson back then because I just keep practicing, you know, “Roger Staubach to Drew Pearson. Touchdown Cowboys!” And, you know, I didn't know that girls like didn't do any of this back then, like, I never thought about that. I just, it's what I wanted to do when I was in second grade.

Rachel: Wow. That's really, yeah. Because you were just surrounded by it. So, of course you did.

Charean: I just thought that I want to be involved with, I can't play, I mean I knew I couldn't play football.

Rachel: Okay.

Charean: But I wanted to be involved in the game because it's what I loved to do. So, okay, I'm gonna go cover the Cowboys. I can't play for the Cowboys, let me go cover the Cowboys.

Rachel: And was there anybody that told you this was a potential career or how did you know that journ-? Because I mean, like, personally, I didn't know journalism existed until I was well, older so.

Charean: I was so excited to read. I mean, I was a big newspaper reader. Like I loved reading about the team. And at that time, you know, newspapers were so big, and you had the, you had a morning newspaper and you had an afternoon newspaper. And I'll never forget, like the year they traded for Tony Dorsett, which was 1977, I was so excited by the trade because I'd heard about the trade, they were trading and of course, you know, there was no social media, there was no internet, there were no phones where you could go look so you had to either wait for the evening

news or wait for the afternoon newspaper to go read. I will never forget, I was standing out in the yard, waiting for the newspaper guy to come by and deliver the afternoon newspaper and I don't even remember what time it came, I'm assuming five or six o'clock maybe? That it came, whatever time it came, they had the *Beaumont Enterprise* and the *Beaumont Journal*. So, the *Journal* was the afternoon version of the paper but I was standing outside when they delivered the paper because I wanted to read about the Cowboys had drafted Tony Dorsett, they had traded up to draft Tony Dorsett, number two overall and I wanted to read the story. So, I, you know, just watching, reading the newspapers and watching the TV and listening on the radio to Cowboys games, and reading about 'em. It's a great point, but I think that's how I knew that's what I wanted to do. And maybe it was, now I think about it, maybe it was more in the newspaper side of it because I did read the newspaper so thoroughly as a kid, you know, morning and afternoon like I read both papers and I would get so mad, my dad would do it on purpose like he would take out the sports section if he beat me to the table. You know, I'm having breakfast with the family like he'd take out the sports section, and not only would he just take it out, so I couldn't read it, but he would start reading it out loud which just infuriated me because I wanted to read it myself. You know?

Rachel: That's so funny. I love it. It's so cool to hear that you had such a supportive, like it was a family affair, like it was a family thing that you all did together and sometimes joked with each other about.

Charean: Yeah. So, they never loved the, they you know, they never loved, and my sister really never loved, the Cowboys as much as I did. It was just kind of my deal.

Rachel: Your parents didn't either?

Charean: They watched the games because I did you know, but my mom probably more than my dad and they'll they'll still watch some now, just because of me. But you know, it was more my thing and they were involved in it because it was my deal and it gave us something to talk about, you know.

Rachel: That's nice, that's cool that they supported you in, in your love for the Cowboys and, and now, well, we'll get to that but. Okay, so kind of in that track of wanting to cover sports, you know, specifically the Cowboys one day, but when was your first experience getting to actually participate in journalism? And what was, what was it?

Charean: Oh, I remember the game exactly. So, I went to Texas A&M and majored in journalism because, obviously, knowing since the second grade what I wanted to do, that was the obvious thing, I was going to major in journalism. And again, I went more to the broadcast side of things. I went more to the TV side in the journalism department and was on TV there and on

the local station, the campus station and really did more on that side of it probably even than the writing part. The writing just always come naturally and easy to me but *The Battalion* hired me as an assistant- well, at that time, I guess I was just a sports editor and eventually became, I mean a sports writer, and eventually became the assistant sports editor my last year there. But this would have been my second year at A&M. So my first game, I was going to cover the A&M-Texas Tech game, which would have been 1987. And I studied the rosters and I, you know, got the flip card, looked through and read all the stories I could possibly, you know, read on the two teams and you know, leading up to the game and really studying, prepared for the game and just remembered how excited I was to get to cover. And the fact is, I got to cover a college game like my first thing I ever covered. I mean, that was pretty big. And so from there, just kind of you know, took off covering all A&M sports for *The Battalion*, which was a great experience. Probably learned more there than any of the classes I ever took, just, you're doing it, it's the experience of doing it, you have to do it to get better at it. And so I did a lot of that in two years at A&M and really got better at it and I became a correspondent for the *Dallas Morning News* while I was there, covering A&M sports, as well.

Rachel: That's really, and how did it feel to like, what was your, do you remember the feeling of actually getting to like...

Charean: Oh, it was awesome. Yeah it was awesome.

Charean: And it, I remember even maybe more than that, the first Buccaneers game I got to do, it was at Tampa Bay. You know, I was working for the *Orlando Sentinel* and I got to go over and cover. Well, even before that, I covered a Cowboys game when I was at the *Bryan-College Station Eagle*. You know, I remember my first Cowboys game I got to cover they played Washington. And, gah I can't remember who it was but they had a famous person do the coin flip, and the Cowboys ended up losing that game, but to get to cover my first Cowboy game was really cool, for the *Bryan-College Station Eagle*, I was still there. And then, fast forward to get the Buccaneers beat, like the first time I'm really an actual reporter and it's my beat in Tampa. I was working for the *Orlando Sentinel* and got to cover, it was a Buccaneers-Detroit Lions game, it was really huge, too and really cool. So, I think yeah, I think you remember all- I remember my first Super Bowl down in Miami, you know, the 49ers beat the Chargers. It was '95, January or February '95 but it was the '94 season. And the 49ers won real big over the Chargers, so I think you remember all those kinds of firsts that you had, never forget those. And there have been dozens, hundreds of games since then, and probably most of them I never, you know will remember again unless I run across like some story I've written or something on one of those games, but those first ones you always remember that and how excited you were. And, you know, like, I wouldn't study for a game now, you feel like you know it and you're gonna, you know, go and do it, but just the excitement of being able to do it and prepare for it and all that stuff. Yeah.

Rachel: That's really neat that you got to cover so many big games right off the bat like that.

Charean: Right.

Rachel: So, you said you went from A&M working for *The Battalion*? Correct?

Charean: That's right.

Rachel: And then you went to...

Charean: I went to a really tiny paper called, it's the *Orange Leader* in Orange, Texas. So, I lived at home, I lived in Beaumont so it's pretty close to Beaumont, it's about 30 miles away, and I was actually going to grad school. And they called me and he called me out of the blue and his name's John Curylo C-U-R-Y-L-O. And he was the sports editor there and he was an Aggie, and he knew who I was because I was an Aggie and hired me sight unseen and I said, "Well, I'm in grad school, but I only have classes Tuesday/Thursday. Can I drive back and work on the weekends, you know, and then drive back to College Station?" And he said, "Yes, as long as you promise in January that you'll be full-time." And so I did that, so October, November and part of December I drove back and forth and worked and then January I moved back home and worked for them full time but by September I was already gone again. So, the *Bryan-College Station Eagle* hired me, so I was there less than a year and the *Bryan-College Station Eagle* called and hired me to cover really more high schools and secondary sports but I did get to cover A&M football, I was the lead person on A&M football. But I got to cover and go to all the football games and I covered volleyball and softball and women's basketball and you know, whatever else, track, you know, every pretty much everything like you do. And then I had A&M Consolidated High School, was the high school I covered so I always had Friday night football to go and cover which was a great experience. And they were good back then so they were fun to watch. So, yeah, that was, learned a lot at both of those places. I was there six years and then left there and went to, the *Orlando Sentinel* hired me to cover NASCAR. And he said, "We have a NASCAR opening." And I said, "Well, I don't know anything about, I never even watched it. Like, I don't know anything about NASCAR." And he says, "That's okay. You'll learn." And what I learned quickly was it's about people. You know, you don't have to really know the sport. You're writing about the people, you're not writing about- there's the "gearheads" out there, even in football, that want to know, okay, the Patriots were in cover zero, you know, whatever the technical parts of the game but if, most times if you just write about the people in the sport, that's what most people want to read about. They want to read about Dak Prescott, Ezekiel Elliot, and Amari Cooper and they want to read their stories, you know, and hear what they have to say and, and so anybody can do that, really. You know, even if you don't know the sport and you learn the sport as you go, what I found is there's really no dumb questions and they really like it most

times if you admit, “I don't know what you're talking, can you explain that?” And most of them are really good at explaining what they're talking about. So, I found it a lot easier to cover than I thought it would be. It was not boring. I enjoyed it. Didn't do it very long. Had two deaths at Daytona, it was the deadliest NASCAR weekend in history. Two people died, two drivers died within four days of each other and had that and did a combined with a Pulitzer Prize winner. He'd won a Pulitzer Prize and we did this investigation on why these two deaths happened at Daytona and it was nominated for- it was a three part series, nominated for a Pulitzer. Of course, didn't go beyond that. But just to get nominated was really cool. And that kind of set me off there. Then they gave me the Buccaneers job right after that. So, I moved to Tampa and covered the Buccaneers for six years. And then Celeste Williams hired me in Fort Worth in 1999. So I started at the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* in the summer of 1999. That's when I started there and was there 17 plus years, and now I'm at NBC Sports for *ProFootballTalk*, their digital site.

Rachel: Wow. And that's 30, how many? 30 plus years?

Charean: '87 would have been when I started full-time after *The Battalion*. It would have been, it would have been well, wait. No, it would have been at, it would have been October of '86 was when I started full-time.

Rachel: Okay, so that's 30...

Charean: You can do math better than I can.

Rachel: 33 years?

Charean: Okay.

Rachel: 33 years? Right? Anybody else know how to do math here? Okay, 33 years.

Charean: That's right. That's a long time. Wow, you make me sound old.

Rachel: No, you've seen a lot of things.

Charean: I have seen a lot of things. A lot of games. 24 Super Bowls, seven Olympic Games. That's probably the two things I'm most proud of.

Rachel: Okay.

Charean: Is getting to do those two things. A lot of those two things.

Rachel: So, did you do those both while you were at, while you were in Orlando and then at the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*?

Charean: I did all the Olympics while I was at the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*. The Super Bowls, yes, have gone over from Orlando to Fort Worth to now NBC, covering the Super Bowls.

Rachel: And do you have, I mean, this is probably a big question. But do you have a favorite Super Bowl you were at or like a story that kind of comes to mind of why you're so proud or an experience you had from that?

Charean: They're all so fun. Like I remember something about all of them. You know whether it was the city during the week, whether it was being with friends. Indianapolis was so cool just the city, like I can't even remember off the top of my head who played in the game. I'm sure it was the Patriots and somebody because Patriots are in most of them lately. But, you know, I remember the first time I got to cover the Cowboys. I was not working in Fort Worth, but I was working in Orlando, but got to cover the Cowboys winning the Super Bowl in '95 was a really cool experience because I had been a Cowboys fan growing up. But each one, and then lately they've all been, you know, they've all been so good. Except for the one last year but they all you know, I think I have I don't really know that I have a favorite just because they were also special, you know? Miami, we're going back to Miami this year. It's such a great place to go. New Orleans, you know, to have Super Bowls there. San Diego was always a lot of fun when we'd have the Super Bowl there. San Francisco is great. So, they're usually in really nice cities and you spend a week there. And, you know, they're usually all pretty special. Whether the game is or not, but the games have been pretty good here in recent years.

Rachel: Yeah, I agree. I agree. And that's just really neat. I'm sure it's a whole different atmosphere when you're actually there. You know, we all watch on TV but...

Charean: Yeah, it yeah, absolutely. And it's one thing, I would put Olympics on the bucket list before I put the Super Bowl on the bucket list. But for any sports fan, I think those are two of the things that you have to go see in your lifetime. I mean, they're just incredible. Even if it's the Olympics, if it's seeing curling or table tennis or badminton or something like that. That's not even a major sport. I mean, it's still it's in the Olympics. It's just really a neat experience to see that, no matter what the sport is.

Rachel: Yeah, that's, that was my next question was, as far as the Olympics- seven Olympics that's, you know, knowing how spaced out the Olympics are that's impressive. And what did you get to cover while you were there?

Charean: Pretty much everything, I've covered pretty much every sport. Some are Winter Games, some are Summer Games. I've covered more summer than winter. Turin, Italy for the Winter Games was probably my absolute- just because it was Italy and it was in Turin and the food was so good and living conditions. I mean, the living- you know, when you're there for a month you really indoctrinate yourself into the country and you, you know, you're using their transportation, you're eating their food, you're going to their version of Walmart or Target or whatever to get your food and your supplies and you're trying to take stuff that you're used to, like when we went to Beijing, like I didn't know how I'd like the food and it was kind of so-so but I took a whole- I took a second suitcase because I figured I'd bring the suitcase back with souvenirs, but I took the suitcase over there full of food. You know, peanut butter and crackers and things I was used to, you know, soap that I use every day and things that I felt like I would need that I might not be able to find. So, you know, every Olympics, I think, was different. I did that a little bit in Rio, but not quite as much in Rio. And that one was really cool. That was probably, if you boil it down to what I've seen, I got to see in a four day period, I got to see Michael Phelps, Simone Biles and Usain Bolt all compete live like in a four day period. So, they're probably the best at their sports in history of anything, so that was probably the greatest just pure Olympic experience I had was in the last one, just getting to see those three things, you know, those three athletes perform was pretty incredible.

Rachel: Yeah, that would be, that would be incredible for anybody but you know, for somebody who loves sports as much as you do, I'm sure the little second grade version of yourself was really excited.

Charean: And I thought I liked- you know, growing up, I mean, I never thought about covering the Olympics like and then you know, you get into like, you start thinking about things well, what would I like to do what do I you know- and that became pretty quickly like something I figured out, like I want to go cover an Olympics and I thought it would be like one Olympics. So, now it's been seven Olympics and, you know, I would go back to, you know, I would love to go back to the next 10 Olympics like it's just such an incredible experience to- even when it's, it's not quite as much fun when it's in the, like I did Salt Lake City, that was my first one and it's not quite as exciting when it's in your own country because you're living somewhere else for a month. But that was my first so it was still pretty cool to just to be able to, to cover that. And Vancouver, same type deal, like it almost felt like it was the U.S. You know, because you've been to Vancouver before, etc, etc. But it was still, it was still a neat experience but you know, five of them were in you know, different countries. I'd been to London a number of times but even did live there for a month was good. So yeah, that was my, that's probably my number one. My favorite thing I've ever done is probably the Olympics.

Rachel: That's really, that's so fun.

Charean: Yeah.

Rachel: I want to go to the Olympics, so that's really cool.

Charean: Bucket list.

Rachel: Yeah,

Charean: I got like the Masters. I really want to try to go to the Masters in 2020. Just as a fan, not even to cover but just go as a fan to cover, I mean to watch, the Masters. Yeah, I've never been to a Rose Bowl. I'd like to do that. So, there's still a few things on the Bucket List. But if I never get those, I'm okay. Like, but the Olympics and the Super Bowl, if I hadn't done that I would feel like I had missed out on something.

Rachel: Okay, yeah, so when you got to do those was that, is that kind of the moment you feel like you...I don't know. I don't wanna say "made it" but...

Charean: Um, yeah.

Rachel: You know, has there ever been that moment? Or do you just kind of feel like getting to do it every day is...?

Charean: I think really getting to cover when I came here and getting to cover the N- or maybe it was when I was in in Orlando, just getting to cover the NFL full-time, probably, for the first time, which would have been when I was covering the Buccaneers and for the *Orlando Sentinel* would have been probably the time I would say. Because that's what I had aspired to do since I was in the second grade. That's what I felt like I had trained to do since I was in second grade was to cover the NFL. You know, I said the Cowboys, but it still was the NFL. And then in '99, when I came here, it kind of completed that entire circle, it was almost full when I got to cover the NFL, and then when you come here, and you're covering the Cowboys. I think it just completed the circle of what I wanted to do. So, then it's like, okay, I've done this, like, what's next? You know? And it's been like, what's next? Probably since '99. You know, what, what's next on our list? And I guess the Olympics was the next thing and I got that and then, you know, now I'm still searching for the next thing now. Whether that's teaching or doing something else.

Rachel: Oh okay, cool. I was, yeah, that was a question I was going to ask toward the end, kind of like what's the future look like for you? But we'll get to that. But kind of going back to the, to the football aspect of it, because you've done things besides just football, but I was reading that you mentioned him, one of your former coworkers, Clarence Hill, Jr. nicknamed you "Mother Football"

Charean: Uh huh.

Rachel: So, how did that become your nickname? Well, I mean...but where did that come from?

Charean: Well, we were in the high- you have to realize, too that not many women cover the NFL full-time. I mean, it's a hand- when I started it really was a handful of people and now it's maybe two handfuls of people, like we all know each other and it's a small group and, you know, a small gathering of the core reporters who cover the NFL are female. And so you know, there's just a natural connection there with things you go through and whatever. So you know, we know each other. But I was in the press room, at Valley Ranch where the Cowboys used to have their training facility, the press room was like teeny tiny and we were all on top of each other. We had one TV that we shared and it was really bad and it was up in the corner. And baseball was on and I'm a huge Astros fan but the Astros weren't on. And so there they started this baseball debate, and they kept going, and they were yelling, and they were really loud and it annoyed me, and I was probably in a bad mood that day anyway, I don't remember entirely. But I remember they had this baseball debate going on. And I just got tired of it and I said, "Can we please stop with the baseball talk? I am done. This is a football press room and we have got to talk just about football." And Clarence responded, "Who do you think you are? Mother Football?" And everyone just burst into laughter. So, it stuck after that and what really made it stick, most people think Randy Galloway was the one who named me that because Randy was so popular on the radio, he was the most popular figure in Dallas-Fort Worth sports, maybe ever, and just retired a few years ago. And he worked for the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* as a columnist and had the radio show that everyone listened to, the most popular radio show, and so Randy picked it up on the radio. I don't know, Clarence told him or however it came about because we all travel together and however it came about, and he started using it on the radio. And so then everyone picked it up after that. So, most people credit Randy. In fact, I just had somebody tell me that a couple weeks ago, "I thought Randy was the one that named you 'Mother Football'?" So it's the nickname has stuck since then.

Rachel: That's, that's really, that's a good story.

Charean: Yeah.

Sarah: So, you mentioned about how there's a handful of female reporters doing these sports. What are some challenges that you noticed that either you or other female reporters have had recurring throughout the job? And it can be like, location and scheduling or it could be more emotional or something that's just like, you have to take a step back and be like, I need a quick minute to think and get back on there.

Charean: You know, first of all, it's a hard job and I think it's harder for females, especially when you have family responsibilities. Mary Kay Cabot covers the Browns for the Cleveland *Plain Dealer* and she has a ton of kids and I don't know how she has done it her entire career. I don't have any kids, which makes it easier, and I just didn't feel like I could have kids and do the job too. But most people, most females, are faced with a choice, you know? Either you do this and then when you start having kids you usually don't do this. You know, not many stay around the NFL who have kids, and Mary Kay has been one and I really admire her for what she's done. I think the problems you face are much less now than they used to be. It is unique. When I was coming up again, there were only a handful of women who did it. I was covering an A&M-Arkansas game - I want to say it's 1989 - and they were playing at A&M for the Southwest Conference Championship. And I was assigned to do, I was a young reporter and I was assigned to do a sidebar on Quinn Grovey, who was the quarterback of the University of Arkansas. And so I went up to the sports information director for Arkansas and I said, "Hey, I'm coming to your locker room after the after the game, just you know, wanting to make you aware of that. I'm the only female in the press box, right?" And so he said, "Well, we have an open locker room and it's closed to women. What would you like me to do? Or who do you need?" And I said, "Well, I need Quinn Grovey and I need your coach Ken Hatfield." And he says, "Okay, well, we open the locker room, just stay outside and I'll bring them out to you as soon as they're done with their posts-game interviews with the men." I'm a young reporter, so I follow instruction. That would never happen now. Like, I'd be just like, "No, either we all go in or none of us go in." And obviously, that wouldn't happen in today. But you have to realize that, you know, it was only in '77, '78, when, you know, Melissa Ludtke of *Sports Illustrated* sued to get access after the World Series, after she was denied access. So when I'm talking about the late 1980s, it really wasn't that long when women had been allowed in locker rooms and equal access, but I didn't know any of that at the time. And so I stand outside and I wait, and I wait and wait and five minutes, turns into 10 minutes, turns into 20, turns into 30. And finally, Kirk Bohls from the *Austin American-Statesman*, who's still there, he comes out and he says, "Charean, what are you doing standing here?" And I said, "Oh, I'm writing a feature on Quinn Grovey and so I'm waiting for Quinn Grovey and Ken Hatfield to come out." And he goes, "There's a back exit, they're gone." And you know, I probably was either about ready to cry or throw up or maybe both, you know. So how do you go back and tell your boss that you failed in this assignment that you were given? And he says, "Don't worry all the quotes were in a group setting. I'll give you all the quotes and you'll be good." And so it created a little bit of a drama because - as it should have - now, you know, I obviously realized that. At the time, I'm just trying to do my job and not trying to cause a stir and not realizing really that I've been discriminated against, which I was discriminated against. And you know, the awesome women's sports media organization got involved in it, you know, as they should have. Christine Brennan, I think was the organizer of that back then.

And so, you know, those incidents now, I don't think we see that, and it's a big deal when they do happen, but they don't happen with regularity anymore, thankfully, as it should be. And I think, you know, most athletes now are used to women in the locker rooms and things like that and, and locker rooms have changed more than really the media has changed. Now, the media has changed, the makeup of the media has changed. The locker rooms have been, to me, the biggest thing that have changed. I mean, they're like houses now. I mean, the whole training facility is like a house and they have a back room where they can shower and a changing room where they can change in the back. I mean, they've designed all this with the media in mind, to be able to do this behind. So normally, you know, players no longer are, you know, they're usually dressed when they come into the locker room as opposed to how it used to be.

So I would say this: back when I first started, the athletes didn't want women in the locker room. Now, they don't want anyone in the locker room. So it's changed I think in that facet, where they just don't want male/female anyone in the locker room as opposed to just not wanting females in the locker room. But yeah, there's been some hurdles and there's always hurdles in those things. I also think there's some advantages. A lot of athletes that I have covered grew up in single parent homes and that was always the mother. So they were used to talking to their mom, a female. So they were more relaxed and open talking to a female reporter as opposed to a male reporter is what I've found. Now some are flat out, "I don't think women should be in here and I really don't want to talk to you." But, you know, in a football locker room there's 52 other guys you can talk to and I found that part of it more an advantage than a disadvantage, because I do think they're more willing to open up to a female than to a male. Especially if you're talking about sensitive situations sometimes, or bad things that have happened. Females sometimes, know, elicit that empathy and know how to ask questions maybe a little bit softer sometimes than the male does.

Rachel: That's really interesting. That's an interesting advantage, or perspective on the advantage, that makes sense when you say it, but maybe isn't what people think of or would assume. But yeah, thanks for answering that question, because you are and have been one of the first females in the NFL reporting and in journalism. 30 years ago, and as you mentioned, it's gotten better. It's still progressing, but I don't know. It's really cool that you've stuck with it. And I guess I, that was kind of a question that I wanted to ask as well, as you said, it kind of has caused you to make some sacrifices personally. You had to deal with these really hard situations. What - why didn't you - I mean, I know this is your passion, but why didn't you change or give up? What made you just stick it out?

Charean: I guess just because I loved it. Yeah, probably more than anything, you know. And that's the advice I give to, you know, college students I teach or when I go speak or whatever is: find whatever it is you love, whatever that is, whether it's sports, whether it's, you know, something else and find some way you can use that to make a living and then you never feel like you work a day in your life because it's not work. You know, it's fun. It's fun to watch games and

get paid to do it. It's fun to go to the Olympics and get paid to do that. And I know not all jobs are like that, I understand that. But whatever you're really good at and you enjoy doing, like working on cars. I mean, some people are really good at that and enjoy doing it. If that's what you like to do, then it doesn't seem like work while you're doing it. And I think that's the key thing. And I think that's how it's always been for me. I've always been able to write. It's come naturally and so that's what I wanted to do. I wanted to write and I wanted to write about sports. And so I think that's why, you know, I'm fortunate enough to find that passion early and pursue it and stick with it, even through the hard times. And like anything, there are going to be some hard times. You know, I was laid off from the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* in May 2017. And thought about, "Okay, what now?" That really makes you think about what now? Okay, you know, they've paid you six months salary, so you've got about six months and you don't want to lose all that, like you feel like this is bonus money if you can find a job right away. But, you know, what do I want to do now? How do I want to make money now? And I was fortunate enough that NBC came calling and got hired relatively quickly. My boss, Mike Florio, has said, "You know, the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram's* loss was our gain." I'm very appreciative of what he has done, and what *ProFootballTalk* and NBC have done for me, because I never even missed any time. I went straight into another job, which doesn't usually happen. There's usually a long search and a lot more thinking through things. But, you know, there were a couple weeks there when I was thinking, "Okay, what do I do now? Do I go teach?" You know, I've got my masters, I graduated with my masters in May 2018. So, I was headed along that path to have a backup plan the way newspapers were going. But, I didn't quite get there before I finished. But, it's all worked out and it usually does work out. But yeah, that was one of the, I think, big hurdles when you think about maybe it's time to go do something else.

Rachel: Well, I mean, you didn't and it worked out for you because one of the biggest, I feel like, achievements, at least when I was researching, was the Dick McCann Award that you won in 2018, while you were with *ProFootballTalk*. The first woman to win the award. It was the fiftieth award that you won or, I mean, the fiftieth Dick McCann Award that you won. So what was that like? I mean, you know, not giving up, continuing to press on, not quit, not changing careers, and then getting this recognition.

Charean: It's the biggest award in my profession. There's nothing else you can get that's bigger. It's voted on by your peers, which makes it even more cool. It's not somebody deciding that it's time for you to win this. I'm one of the youngest winners, which is probably even more gratifying because the whole thing is, you know, to be so young and feel like I have so much more of my career in front of me and to win this award made it even more special, I think. Yeah, I got a phone call and I knew I was one of the finalists because I had, you know, you see the list and you vote and I did not vote for myself.

And I thought I had really zero chance. I mean, I hadn't, I seriously hadn't. I know people always say, "Oh, it's great to be nominated." It truly was great to be nominated, again, because I was so young. I was like, "There's like four people doing this and three of them are older than me. They've done this longer. They deserve it more. You know, one of them will win it. I'll have my day at some point." Never, never, ever dreamed that it would be the first year I was nominated that I would win the award. And it happened and I got the phone call and I recognized that it was a friend of mine, who was president of the ProFootball Writers of America, Bob Glauber. I got the phone call from Bob and he said, "Charean," and I said, "Yeah?" And I didn't figure they were calling to tell me you didn't win it and I knew when they were going to announce it. And he said, "You've won the Dick McCann." And I'm not usually speechless, but I didn't say a lot other than, "Thank you, thank you, I can't believe it, thank you" type deal, because I didn't expect it. I really and truly didn't expect it.

So, the highest honor I received. Recently was named into the Journalism Wing of the Texas Sports Hall of Fame, which we haven't had the induction for that yet. That'll probably be this spring that we'll have that. That'll be another honor, and I have a Texas A&M Legacy Award I'll win in November. But, you know, they have all kind of spun off from getting the Dick McCann Award, I think, because that's the biggest one and people recognize that one. And you know, you don't get the yellow jacket, you don't get the ring, and you don't get the bust - and everybody asked that - which the players get when they go in the Pro Football Hall of Fame. But, outside the bust room is a plaque, one for broadcast and one for the writers, and my name is on that plaque. Every time I go in that's the first thing I go look at, just to make sure that it's still up there, that they didn't make a mistake. That there was no mistake in the voting. And that no one's defaced it or, you know, put graffiti on it or anything. And it's still there and still up on the wall and it'll be there forever, which is pretty cool.

And I went in, my best friend in the business is John McClane, who works at the *Houston Chronicle*. And I think it was meant to be because we're side-by-side on the plaque. He [was inducted] in a few years ago and I got to present him going in a few years ago. But, we're side by side on the plaque, which made it more cool. My boss even pointed that out. He goes, "I just think it's so cool that you're side by side with John." And they do ask you, they ask you what organization- broadcasters, believe it or not, do not have the name of their organization. It's just their name on the plaque, but on our plaque it's a name of an organization you work for. And so they called me, the Pro Football Hall of Fame called me, and said, "What organization would you like to go on?" Well, the bulk of my career was spent at the *Fort Worth Star-Telegram* covering the Cowboys, but they had just laid me off a year earlier. So, I was obviously not going to go that route and so I picked my current employer, *ProFootballTalk*. So, *ProFootballTalk* is up there and I know Mike was very honored that I chose *ProFootballTalk* and they went up there. And again, the *ProFootballTalk* will be up there for eternity, you know, kind of another notch in their belt, I think too. So I think it speaks to them as much as it speaks to me, because if

I hadn't gotten that job and had gone to do something else, I probably wouldn't have won the award. So I think it's worked out for them and it's worked out for me at *ProFootballTalk*.

Rachel: Well, congratulations again!

Charean: Thank you.

Rachel: That is really amazing. Just thinking back to how you were a young girl who wanted to do this and your whole life has, you know, you've dealt with trials as you talked about all these things. What does it mean to you to know that your name is on this plaque, that forever, you will be part of this role model kind of culture of sports, female sports journalism for young girls right now who are wanting to do the same thing.

Charean: It's pretty amazing because it's 2019 and you just think, "Oh, all the firsts have been done," you know. But again, I think I'm pretty young to see myself as a pioneer, trailblazer - whatever you want to call it - but, the facts are I do have a lot of those "firsts", you know. [I was] the first selector for the Pro Football Hall of Fame and the first president of the Pro Football Writers and, you know, the first Dick McCann Award winner. A lot of these "firsts". And so I do hope that young girls or kids - I mean, it doesn't even have to be girls, but particularly girls - I mean, if they want to do this, they know it can be done. Like I said, I never knew that women didn't do this. But now young girls, if they decide when they're in the second grade that this is something they want to go do, they can look and go, "See, this is what I want to do. This is who I want to be. This is it right here." And I didn't really probably have that to point to when I was in the second grade. But now those doors are all open and you aren't going to have to wait outside the Arkansas locker room for them to bring a player or coach out. Those rules are in place and things have changed and it's all good.

Rachel: Do you have any advice that you would give to them?

Charean: Again, I think it's just finding whatever it is you love and pursuing that passion, so it doesn't seem like work for your life. Because, I mean, as we talked about earlier, you're at work an awful lot and you don't want it to be a chore. You don't want it to be something that you don't look forward to doing. You want it to be something that's like, "Hey, I get to go cover the Cowboys game tonight." Or, "Hey, I get to go to the Super Bowl. Hey, I get to go do whatever it is." You know, whether it's working on cars or being a plumber, if that's what you're good at and what you enjoy or figuring something out or whatever. Math, science, I wasn't good at, but if that's what you want to pursue, certainly that's the thing to do. So I think it's that. I think it's pursuing whatever it is that you truly feel like you love to do, you know. I was just fortunate that I got to figure that out at a very young age and pursue it. It worked out and I don't know how many second graders get to do exactly what they said they want to do, but I was fortunate

enough to do that. I still have the - my husband jokes about it sometimes - but I still have a framed copy of the article and the pictures of me in my Roger Staubach uniform, on the wall there. I've told Roger the story and he laughed and he said, "You know, I'm probably old enough to be your grandfather." And I said, "Probably not my grandfather, but my father." But he thought it was funny and he said, "Next time that Marianne, his wife, next time I'm with Marianne I want you to tell her the story." And I told her the story and I don't think she thought it was quite as funny as he did, but they both laughed at it. So yeah, the second grader wanting to marry Roger Staubach and cover the Dallas Cowboys.

Rachel: You did one of those.

Charean: I did one of those two things, I did. It was funny because in my Dick McCann Award speech at the Hall of Fame, I got done with it and my husband said, "Well, you only mentioned three husbands in there." And I'm like, "Yeah, okay, I did." Because I called Clarence Hill my work husband and I mentioned wanting to marry Roger Staubach, and then I mentioned, obviously, my real husband in the speech. So, I did mention all three. He was, he was right about that. And then John McClane, of course, I mentioned him in my speech too. So it was probably four husbands I mentioned in my speech.

Rachel: That's funny! Well, that was kind of you to mention them, because well, you didn't have to.

Charean: I told my husband in the speech, though, that he was always the number one. I just didn't know it when I was in the second grade.

Rachel: Yeah, yeah, it's not your fault! And then, okay, so just kind of wrapping up. My last couple questions is future related. You've mentioned personally for yourself, what's next for you? Like you said, you're young, you still have a lot ahead of you. So, you've mentioned teaching and things like that, but what are you kind of looking to in the future?

Charean: Well it's, you know, it's a search. I probably would like to write a book. I've never written a book. And my mom's always wanted me to write a book. You know, whatever that book is, I don't know. Whether it's fiction or nonfiction or what the book is, but I probably would like to write a book. That's another thing that never goes away. Like, if you have a copy of the book, like it's not going anywhere, you know. So, probably would like to write a book. That will probably be number one, and then yeah, you know, I'm an adjunct at SMU right now teaching a class, my first class. I've gotten that experience now. It would go a lot smoother the second time because you know what to expect and you get better at it and, you know, things of that sort. So I'm not sure that teaching is totally out of the realm of possibilities of future pursuits at some point, whether that's five years from now, or 10 years from now. I do know right this

second, I want to keep doing what I'm doing now, for at least the foreseeable future, but maybe working other things in there. Well, you can write a book on the side. You can teach on the side, like what I'm doing now. There's things you can do on the side, and then maybe eventually go into those full-time. So, I'm still trying to figure out exactly what that future is.

Rachel: And as far as the future of journalism, that's a whole other topic.

Charean: We could talk about that all day.

Rachel: You know, you've experienced a layoff. You have experienced the progression, as far as the female part of the industry, the digital, all the things. What do you kind of foresee the future being or what are you hoping maybe the future is?

Charean: I would like to see newspapers thrive and journalism thrive, in general, but it's certainly not looking that way for newspapers. I think they're dying. And I don't know what the answer is. And they don't know what the answer is either. They would have figured it out and they would be in a better place than what they're in right now. But, you know, we're just seeing a generation now that's, you know, living online and not reading newspapers and not even reading newspapers online. And I have to admit, unless it's for work, I rarely read newspapers anymore. If the *Star-Telegram* has something, a headline on a tweet that catches my attention, that may be local or something, I may click on it and see. I read the *Dallas Morning News*, some of the tornado coverage, and WFAA, their online stuff about the tornado that hit Dallas. But even I'm not - and my generation, obviously, I grew up, like I said, reading two newspapers a day. I don't read a newspaper anymore and rarely even read it online. So, I'm getting my news mostly off of Twitter. And I do watch the 10 o'clock news, sometimes the six o'clock news, sometimes the 5:30 national news. So I do get some news off TV, but I don't, you know, I don't read newspapers much any anymore, unless it is for work. So, the business has changed. The way we consume news has change. Everything has changed and they haven't figured out how to monopolize the internet. Until they do, I think newspapers are in a world of hurt. And I do think there's other forms of journalism that will take that over. You're seeing it now with subscription based services, such as *The Athletic*. [They've] come in and have a lot of subscribers now and they have the no advertising model that I think people really like. So, if *The Athletic* takes off, it might take off in other areas, news and whatever that might be, financial, whatever. So yeah, it's going to change again, though, you know, just when we seem to have a grasp on what people will read and consume and pay for, it seems to change again.

Rachel: It is crazy. It's crazy that it's changed as much as it has just in the time you've been...

Charean: Yeah, no question! And I sometimes think, like, how did we do our research? Because you had no internet. And I do remember that, for instance, I was writing, Brett Favre was playing

for Southern Mississippi. A&M was playing Southern Mississippi and I always wrote some sort of feature on a player on the opposing team. So, I had to write this feature on Brett Favre at Southern Miss. And so I called the Sports Information Director at Southern Miss and he FedExed me a stack of stories that had been written on Brett Favre. So, it would be like our internet search now except they were the hard copies. And I flipped through 'em and read all these stories on him and he had this car wreck where his career almost ended and things like that. And so I read all these stories and then got him on the phone and had my interview. My research was based on the stories that they had sent me. Just think about how few people really actually read those stories, because the only people reading those stories were the people who get the hard newspaper copy. Well, that didn't go out to people elsewhere. It just goes out to the people right there in Bryan College Station, you know. So I imagine only, you know, 30,000 people maybe read that or 40,000. And now, you think about, you know, my site gets over 2 million, sometimes 3 million hits a day. It's just a huge difference of how many people are reading, comparatively speaking. So, that's how the business has changed too, just by the number of readers that you're getting.

Rachel: Right. It'll be very interesting to watch how it continues to change. Again, you've been here for 30 years and aren't going away anytime soon. So, it's very cool to hear your experience and what you've seen and been through and achieved in those 33 years. Is there anything else you would like to add that you feel like you didn't get to talk about or regarding your life and career?

Charean: I think we've covered really most of it. One of the big things for me was when I was covering A&M for the *Bryan-College Station Eagle*. I met my husband there, he was a volleyball coach at A&M and that's how we met. We didn't date then, we just became really good friends. Then when I moved back from Florida, he was in Houston at the time, and that's when we started dating and married. We'd been friends for 13-14 years by the time we had married. But if it was not for writing and writing for the *Bryan-College Station Eagle*, and covering volleyball, I never would have met Tom. So, I feel like it's given me more than just a great reward for, you know, a job and loving what I do. But you know, it also gave me my husband. So I'm very appreciative, I think, to that part of it, too. And with somebody who loves sports and that's what we do. We have four TVs in our living room and, you know, most of the time they're all on sports and we're watching sports and talking about sports.

Norah: Like Buffalo...

Rachel: Like Buffalo Wild Wings!

Charean: It is, yeah.

Rachel: Wow. That's really cool. That's a really good perspective to have. Well, if that's, if that's all the things you want to say and you feel like you said everything. Thank you so much for your time.

Charean: Appreciate it. Thank you guys.

Norah: Thank you so much.

Rachel: It was awesome!

Norah: We enjoyed it.

Sarah: We loved, I loved hearing, I was just like, "Oh my gosh."

Rachel: You were saying all the right things, all the good things - not all the right things- there was no right answer, you know what I mean. That was good to hear.

Sarah: Very encouraging to us.

Rachel: Yeah. Especially just the female aspect of it, because you don't want it to only be focused on that, but it is such an important part of it.

Charean: It is. It is. I think, you know, people don't - some males, probably some females too - they don't take you seriously. They don't think you know what you're talking about. I do think there is that part of it, where you have to prove yourself a little bit more. You do a little bit more to prove. Now, having done this for, as you said, 33 years, I think, you know, you'd already been weeded out if you weren't good and didn't know what you were talking about. But I do think there's that aspect of, you know, you still get the [comments] on social media like, "You're a woman. Get back and into the kitchen." And all those, the mean tweets. I still get some of that backlash, but it's far less, I think, than it used to be. And you're not going to change those peoples' minds. I mean, if they don't believe a woman should be covering the NFL, you're not going to change their mind.

I'll never forget Quincy Carter, was a quarterback for the Cowboys, and he wasn't a very good quarterback for the Cowboys. Jennifer Floyd Engle was a coworker of mine, and we were in the locker room, and they got into a disagreement. Quincy was just an idiot anyway. But they got in this disagreement over women in the locker room and Quincy said, "I just don't believe women should be in the locker room."

Now look, nobody likes going in the locker room. It's sweaty. It's stinky. Like I said, they've changed over the years, so they're much better now. But generally speaking, they're sweaty, they're stinking it's these big men changing clothes and, you know, it's not a nice place to be, but if you want to do your job, that's what you do. Like, men don't even like going. No one likes going in a locker room.

Norah: No one wants to be there.

Charean: No one wants to be there. Well put. Yes, even today when they're dressed, it's like, I always said, "The best part of my day was when they said to get out of the locker room." That was the best part of every day back when I was covering the Cowboys, because then you could go write and really do what you loved. So, Jennifer is in the locker room with Quincy Carter and they're having this disagreement over women in the locker room and Quincy said, "I just don't believe women should be in a locker room." And Jennifer said, "I don't believe quarterbacks who can't throw a spiral should be in the NFL." And she turned around and walked out.

Rachel: That's a good point. I mean, she's not wrong. Yeah, well...

Charean: It was a great comeback. It was a great comeback.

Rachel: Right. What did you - could you - did you...like what happened? What did he do?

Charean: He just kinda...

Sarah: He was shocked?

Charean: Yeah. He was very surprised.

Rachel: Yeah, well you just can't talk to somebody like that. That's not very nice.

Charean: No.

Rachel: Well, if you're going to dish it, you got to be able to get it dished back to you.

Charean: That's right. That's exactly right.

Rachel: But that's, that's - I think it tells something that you stuck through it, through the hard, like it's gotten better. But even if it wasn't better, which I'm thankful it is, I can tell you would still be doing it because of your love for it.

Charean: Oh, absolutely. Absolutely.