C. VIVIAN STRINGER INTERVIEW
MAKERS: WOMEN WHO MAKE AMERICA
KUNHARDT FILM FOUNDATION

C. Vivian Stringer
Basketball Coach
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Interviewed by Julie Cohen
Total Running Time: 1 hour, 44 minutes and 9 seconds

START TC: 00:00:00:00

ON SCREEN TEXT:

Makers: Women Who Make America

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JULIE COHEN:

Tell me a little bit about your childhood and what it was like growing up in Pennsylvania.

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VIVIAN STRINGER:

I can just remember it as being a lot of love… fun, where everyone was one big family. Even though I was… the little girl that belonged to the Stoner family. I'm a Stoner girl, where your name meant something, where people genuinely cared, where a neighbor would, yes, in a minute, call your parents, and let you know if there was anything that you didn't do that was right. But it was a true community where people took care of each other.

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I grew up in a coal mining community, I don't know that there were more than four, five hundred people, and my father was a coal miner. And I saw my father go to work each and every day. And I should point out that I knew what it was to work hard. Probably by the time my father was forty-five, he had both of his legs amputated. But you know what's interesting about that? As soon as he got out of the hospital, he went back to work. In the mine.

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Now what's interesting about that is that I come to find out only a few years ago, that one of the neighbors, one of the miners, exchanged places so that my father didn't have to go deep into the mine, but he was able to work just outside the mine and in their office there. And another guy exchanged and risked his life everyday. But there it didn't matter what your nationality was. It was Black, White. Italians, Polish. It just didn't matter.

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We were all a fabric of society, all working hard to live and survive and take care of one another. We were truly our brothers and sisters' keepers. I just remember every night praying, always afraid there would be a siren. I would hear a siren and that generally meant that there'd been a mine explosion. And everyone poured into the street or went down to the fire hall to ask, "What shift was that?"

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You'd be so relieved that your father wasn't caught in that mine explosion and yet, so sad and worried about your neighbor or one of your schoolmates who may have lost their father. So we saw hard work from our parents, but we grew up believing in trusting each other. There weren't any stop signs, stoplights. It was just a small- what they called a patch. To that extent it wasn't even on a map.

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But in my heart, there was just a lot of love. In fact, I recall one incident when I was getting an award. The Reverend Jessie Jackson was giving me an- He said something like, "It must have been rough growing up there in Appalachia." And I thought, "Appalachia. Gee, I didn't know I was growing up in Appalachia. Wasn't that poor?" And it never struck me that that's what it was. I felt rich. I would never want to leave Edenborn.

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Although I did point out that I used to wonder, when I would come home from school sometimes and I would see my mom watching the soap operas and I would see these people dressed in evening gowns and suits and I

thought, “Dang. In the middle of the day? Twelve o'clock in the afternoon?” I never saw people like that. I saw parents that… My father who, and all the other men there, go to work with a metal bucket and work clothes; many times, winter clothes on in the summer because they were going deep into the mines. So it caused me to wonder about that other life.

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JULIE COHEN:
Why were your dad’s legs amputated?

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VIVIAN STRINGER:
They determined that he had Buerger's Disease. I think they were really confused and not really ever sure. As you know, Black Lung is something that is very common amongst miners and when you stand in a coal mine or in a deep pit, deep beneath the earth, in a bent-over position, you have to know that there were a lot of diseases that miners would get that people don't talk about.

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I just remember him coming home each night or day and just coughing this black soot out of his throat. But I remember the doctors saying, because he was at West Virginia University Hospital, it was a Presbyterian hospital in Pittsburgh, and he said, “If you were to look at my father, he'd look like he was about twenty some years old, not a gray hair on his head. But yet his veins,

his arteries were that of a ninety-year-old man." So it was a circulatory problem that they call Buerger's Disease, and to this day you know I wonder what really happened. But we lost my father at a rather early age.

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JULIE COHEN:
It takes a lot of determination to keep going back into the mind every day anyway, let alone having lost your legs. What impact did his determination have on you, and your character, you think?

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VIVIAN STRINGER:
Let me tell you something. I pale in comparison to any work that I would ever try to do. My father would often say, "You know, I had several scholarships." He was captain of the football team and was very smart in school. "I had several scholarships but you know, your mother and I chose to get married and we had children, and I want you to understand that education is the most important thing that you can get 'cause you can either work with your back or work with your head." Obviously in coaching, I've worked with my head more but I always feel guilty.

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There's no amount of work that I can ever do that compares to his. And then when you consider that he had his legs amputated and I would hear him moan many times at night, through the walls, and yet every morning he

would get up, slide down the steps, put his prosthesis on, and have a smile on his face and go to work. So I can't ever… I don't look at my players- We have no excuse. Are you kidding me? We're not going to work. What we're doing is easy. Life is easy.

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But here I saw a mom and dad that were committed to raising and taking care of our family, and emphasizing the importance of hard work and getting an education. They paid for piano lessons that they really couldn't afford. There were too many times that there were strikes, when the miners would go on strikes, it means that the families didn't get a paycheck. So they talk about company store, so when you ask, "What was Edenborn like?" All the houses were basically the same.

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They were just different colors. The company store was a place where you got credit for food, and yet when those strikes took place, it was those times that you would get government cheese and you would get powdered milk. And you as a child really did… I just loved my parents with all my heart and soul and just felt that I wanted to do anything and everything I could.

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I wanted to make them proud and to contribute because I did understand and I did know of the struggles and what they try to do. And I shared this the other day, I remember going to the coal mine, what they called a slate dump, which wasn't too far from our house, maybe about a mile, but we couldn't afford the coal to keep us warm in the winter, and so my brother Tim and

Verna, my sister and I, and my dad walked to the slate dump and we picked coal and then we carried it home so that we could put it in the furnace.

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But you know what? That didn't seem like a burden. It just seemed like I was so proud because I was helping to keep our family going. And we each felt that. And I look at families today and I sometimes wonder that we show them so much, they think that money just comes out of that little ATM machine. They don't realize the sacrifices that the parents are really making each and every day-

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-and I'm just grateful to this day, thank God, that I had parents that allowed us to be a part of a family unit. We all were doing our part to make our family proud and to work hard to make it.

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JULIE COHEN:
And what was your parents' views of girls and their place in society?

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VIVIAN STRINGER:
My parents made me believe that I could be anyone. President of the United States. What do you want to do? But the one thing that they would always tell us is there is a price to be paid. They never told us what we had to do, which is what has led to even my coaching style today. I'm like that. If you can tell

me- Just make some sense. Tell me why and then I'm good. But they taught us the consequences of things and so when they would say, “If you want to do this, this is the price you're going to have to pay. You want to be a doctor, then you have to love science and you have to work on this and that.”

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But my father would just remind me, he said, “You know what, when it comes to the housework, I noticed that you're real shy,” and he was right. But they would always defer, like I didn't have to do the dishes if I was participating in some school activity, so be it a concert or I was playing in the band or something like that. So I found a way to do those kinds of things. But on the other hand, I always knew that you had a price.

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For everything there are consequences and there's a price to be paid and as my parents would say, “You make your bed hard, you lie in it and you understand that there are consequences.” And as a result today, I know that for anything that you want, there is a sacrifice and there is a price to be paid. And we all pay in our own way. We make conscious decisions on that.

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JULIE COHEN:
And how about by the larger community? How were you treated as a girl, as an African American girl…

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VIVIAN STRINGER:

At the time, obviously, there weren't any Black… even the idea of a Black President, are you kidding me? But yet my parents made me think, “You can become President of the United States.” And I thought, “Hm. I might just do that.” Because I was one that was always seeking justice, so I was socially conscious of a lot of things and I remember going to a Boy Scout meeting. I went to the Boy Scout meeting because there were no Girl Scouts. And I thought, “Gee. Did guys always have all the fun?”

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They're rubbing sticks and starting fires and having marshmallow, roasted marshmallows and everything. So I went to the meeting and I saw that they were having an ice cream social. Well, that sounded great. ‘Cause I would play sports with the guys and I wanted to do that too. And as the scout master went around and he said, "Well little Stoner girl, girls aren't allowed." And I was so hurt. And just like upset, and embarrassed. And I walked away. I wanted to know why the boys in my community-

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-why they were playing baseball and basketball and I was always the first one- If not many times, the captain- when they would play down at our school, and yet that was Sunday through Thursday, but on Friday, it was the guys who had the uniforms. On Saturday… I could never understand. It seems like the guys had a chance to do all these things. Well, girls, how dare you even think about that, and I hated… I just absolutely hated to be called a tomboy. Oh that really bothered me,-

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-'cause there seemed to be a negative connotation with that. And so this was all prior to Title IX and even so, I mean there's still lingering effects of that. But I kept thinking, "Why can't I just be tough on a court but then when I get done, you know I'm a lady. You know, I'm still a girl. Come on. What's the problem here?" It seemed that… Guys just should seek to be the president of the class. Where were our principals at the school? Why is it that everyone seems to be the subordinates—women.

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And I thought, "Well I'm not going to do that. I can do anything. I can be anything that I want to be." And I'd go so far as eating Wheaties in the morning and running around the community because I wanted to be a track star and I thought, "Yeah, that all looks good," but when I talk about prices that you have to pay, I decided to try out for the track team and I saw all the times that they were running, the dust and the soot in their throat, and jumping, and I thought, "You all is running just to have that one victory lap?"

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And the same thing, it was just, I had those kinds of dreams and I think that dreaming is necessary. Music—you know those piano lessons that I took? I really imagined myself on the concert stage. Why? And I could see you know the orchestra waiting for me to walk in my gown, and I'd play in… But you see I really wasn't going to sit there for hours and practice the fingering that was necessary, because in addition to my father working in the coal mining, he was also a jazz musician.

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And so I always heard music different from what it was to be played. So I just believed that I could do anything and I think that it's important to have dreams.

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JULIE COHEN:
Let me get you back to sports. Tell me a little bit about what sports appealed to you as a girl, and what you were good at, and how you got the sense that you had some abilities in that area.

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VIVIAN STRINGER:
Let me say this. I loved the basketball and I was pretty good at it. I loved all sports. I remember even thinking that I would be a gymnast and then I realized you really have to have some formal training, so when I watched television I knew how to spot by putting a towel around your waist and flipping my sisters and brothers over. And I thought, "Yeah. I can be a gymnast." And so I did some gymnastic shows. Everything. Everything. Field hockey. Everything. And I used to wonder, "Why do I get so excited?"

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I would get excited when I would hear the band play or that a ball would bounce and I'd walk in the gym and I thought, "What is it? Why is it that I get so excited?" And I guess that's just the love, the passion that you have. And I

loved them all. Obviously ended up going into basketball but that was because I played basketball in college as well as field hockey, but basketball was my true love and I had an opportunity with my basketball coach, Dr. Griffith, to actually serve as a graduate assistant.

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And I thought, "Isn't this sad? Guys can go on from college into the pros, but we had to stop." And of course there were very few opportunities in Europe but in order to stay somehow connected with sports, it seemed to be only through coaching. And I thought, "That is boring. Who wants to coach? That is so disgusting." But when I had an opportunity to work as a graduate assistant, I would get so excited about coming up with offenses and defenses.

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I could never imagine myself loving coaching more than I did playing. But I really did, and I still do. When I was playing basketball… First of all, in order to play basketball I had to walk from my house, like maybe half a mile down to the elementary school where there was a basketball court, which of course had potholes and everything so you really had to learn to play well. And it… also the ball had a bubble on it so when you would bounce it would kind of move so you got to get through that but…

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But I still remember walking from my house to the school with a skirt on and a brown bag because I dare not walk through the community with shorts on. And I would get down to the court and I'd throw my skirt off and play with

the guys. And then I just remember many times looking to see cars that would be passing. I was thinking, “Gee. They see me down there playing.”

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And the guys would, “Come on V.I., let's-” cause that was my nickname- “Come on. Let's play. Let's play." And I would get so excited and I thought, “Why is… Why do I feel so… have this feeling of a three year old enjoyment, and yet what's wrong with this?” And I always went with my friend Arlene, who was the only other girl that would come down to play. I wanted her to come too because wow, like at least there were two of us. But something had to be wrong. Why? Why was that that I loved it so much?

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And of course I think that as time has evolved, parents have come to understand that with Title IX, there are so many opportunities. It got to that but I never will understand and even till this day, I get so excited just sitting down and writing out a practice. And that feeling, that is something I can never quite explain. It's just that my heart starts to beat. I get excited about having people move and having things flow. It's much like conducting an orchestra.

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All the pieces that have to fit in the place and it's the same feeling that I've had. And really at a very young age I used to lay in bed and just wonder, “Why is it that I have such a love for when I hear a ball bounce?” Or I was always drawn to sports and… it's just something about me that I'm grateful for.

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JULIE COHEN:
How aware were you, or did you have any awareness as a kid about any female athletes out there?

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VIVIAN STRINGER:
The only female athlete that I remember… No, I shouldn't say "the only," there were a few. There was Authia Gibson and I just admired her. Wow, that was special. Authia Gibson. And I wanted to play tennis but you see, now you can imagine that you can't really afford tennis lessons or a tennis racket. Now I lived in Edenborn, we did not have a tennis ball. Hey, we were lucky to have a basketball that everybody used. The other was track. And I remember seeing the Wide World of Sports and I saw Wilma Rudolph and…

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I met her years later but I was so thrilled, and I thought, "Wilma Rudolph. Look at her. Oh, look at those thousands of people that would stand up in the Rome Olympics." And that's probably where I got the idea of running track. And when I got a job, I think, in my junior year in high school, I… There was a girl whose father owned that supermarket and she invited me- Wendy, she invited me to play tennis and I thought,-

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- "I'm going to take my money that I earned. I'm going to buy a tennis racket and I want to learn to play tennis." So I saw myself doing those things. But we

didn't have many, so it probably more likely be track for one, and of course Wilma.

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JULIE COHEN:
Tell me a little bit more about what the feeling you had was watching Wilma Rudolph on the Wide World of Sports and seeing the crowd cheering for this woman athlete.

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VIVIAN STRINGER:
She represented her country. She made a statement to the world. And wow, she was the best at what she did and I always had the desire to be the best at what I did. She was the best and she handled it with such grace and dignity, and what was even more important is I learned of her story, and I'm one of these people that loved the rags to riches story—the people that get knocked down that keep rising up.

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I want to continue to be encouraged by the people who are the have-nots of the world. That's me. And so I thought, "She has polio and she still overcame this? There's no reason why I can't run. I'm going to do this." All I needed to know is that someone made a sacrifice. I'm inspired by her story…It'd be years later actually as a coach- I was a coach at The University of Iowa, when

she was one of our keynote speakers. And afterwards one of my colleagues introduced us and it was just love at first sight.

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We really just talked. I went down to her hotel room. We just talked and talked. She invited me to come up and visit her in Indianapolis, which is where she was living, and I did. It was amazing. We had a great friendship and she invited me to her birthday parties. So I thought, "Well this is a dream come true." Can you imagine? Can you imagine this woman who had accomplished and had done all that? But what was obvious to me was that she was just a great human being, just an ordinary person like everybody is. Like all of us are.

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JULIE COHEN:
Gonna move you to the cheerleading episode. Tell me a little bit about that, what made you go out for the team and what happened, and how did you cope with that. I'll let you tell me the story.

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VIVIAN STRINGER:
Yeah, okay. Let me say this. First of all, this is true. I'm not the, "Two, four, six, eight, who do we appreciate?" I'm not the cheerleader type, period. Remember I said to you that I loved sports and… Wow, I mean I would watch the same guys that I would play with on Sunday through Thursday and I was

like, “Dang. You, like... This doesn't make sense. The wrong people are taking the shots. Look at the way he's shooting the ball.” And I got to go out for cheerleading because I need to get closer to these guys while they're playing on the court or on the field to tell them what to do.

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JULIE COHEN:
But you’re talking about once you already were a cheerleader, tell me about how it was that you came to be one.

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VIVIAN STRINGER:
I came to be one because I tried out, and they were having an open tryout in the gym, and the students were there, and we had a routine that we did, and at the end of the day they called everyone's- the people that had made the team, they called their names. And as I listened intently, I didn't hear mine and I'm thinking, “Wow. I feel so bad.” My parents always taught me never to make excuses, don't blame anyone for your own shortcomings, always to look from within, what could you have done better yourself?

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And like my father would say if you did… came up short then you need to deal with that. If you didn't and you were right, then he and mom would defend us in whatever it might be in life. In this case, I kept thinking, “Well, maybe I didn't stick the landing right. Maybe I should've dropped my voice.

Maybe one arm was a little bit higher than the other." And aside from that I'm not really interested in cheerleading. So I went home, I never even told my parents that I tried out. But little did I know there was a gentleman by the name of Son Steel who was involved in the ACP-

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-and he'd come really to talk to the principal about something else, with his nephew or something. And he happened to have been in the gym amongst those hundreds of other kids that were there. He saw the tryout so later that day he came to visit my dad. I was, by now, upstairs, going to sleep. And I heard him say to my father, they called him Buddy, "Buddy, we really do need for you to allow your daughter. She's got great grades and I saw her in the tryouts.-

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-She was not only one of the best, she was clearly the best. She is so talented that we haven't had a cheerleader here. If there's ever going to be a time that there's going to be a black cheerleader, it's now." Which I do want to point out that I come to find out that there was a girl by the name of Danceler, who had been a cheerleader but it was quite a few years before that. I think I may have been three or four, but nonetheless in our era, we didn't know of that.

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And so, he was saying to my father, "Please let us present her before the school board." And my father said, "Well, I'll speak to her." And I'm thinking, "Oh, I don't even want to hear this. Please don't even ask me about this. I don't even like this." So when my father came upstairs and he said, "Vivian,

it's not about you, perhaps it's not even for you, but it is for future generations of young women who will come after you. And you have to understand something, if you don't stand up for something, you'll fall for anything. I need you to think about this."

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I was so nervous and so scared, 'cause I sort of had the cover partially over my head, and with that he quietly walked out of the room. I couldn't go to sleep that night. I could not go to sleep that night. And I kept thinking, "Yeah. Okay. Okay." So they did. They presented me before the school board, I was placed on the team. I think… Let me say this. I think that every one of us has a defining moment.

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I know that mine was this cheerleading incident because I was placed on the team and I couldn't help but feel inferior, less than, guilty, because I never wanted to cause a problem. There were some conversation around the school and everything. "This girl didn't make the team, but she's placed on the team." So horrible. And I remember the first day of practice and I was in the bathroom where all the cheerleaders would change their clothes.

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And I could hear them walking toward the bathroom and I quickly got up. 'Cause you know this is the first time I'm meeting them so I'm like, "Okay. What are you doing here?" Basically is my feeling that I was having. And as I quickly ran into the bathroom and into one of the stalls, I put my feet up. So if you can imagine… and they started talking right away. They weren't talking

about me or anything, but they were talking. But like if you don't let people know that you're there, it's kind of like you're eavesdropping, so now you're afraid, you know?

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And so I began to look out through the crack of that shower door, that bathroom door, and I saw the girls putting on makeup. It was called pancake makeup, and I thought, "That's interesting." Because all the time when I would see the cheerleaders, their legs always looked uniform and I kept thinking to myself, "Gee. How could you wear stockings when you're doing this? You'll get runs in your stockings… Oh. So that's how they do that." And then I said to myself, "But where's my color?"

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And I felt so hurt, I can't even tell you how hurt I felt about that. "Where's my color?" You know? And needless to say, I mean, I loved cheerleading… My friends are everlasting and all that, but I do want to point out this—my father was right. Because it would be those many years later that my two nieces, Keonte and Tiana, became cheerleaders at that same school. So it did open the door, but little did I know at the time.

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But I vowed from that day on that I'd never want anyone, especially a female, ever to feel inferior. I didn't want any woman… Keep in mind that, Girl Scouts and everything, that I would do everything in my power for every day that I lived to make sure that no woman felt guilty or ashamed because of her gender, or that no person felt inferior because of their race.

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That was a defining moment. I learned that I need to speak up. My father always impressed upon us, my mom always impressed upon us, I saw with the way that she went to speak for me about getting a job, that your voice is important. Who you are is, you're a making of God, no less than anyone else. So whether it's the Pope or the Queen or the President, your voice is just as important. You have a responsibility to speak up 'cause if you don't… speak up,-

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-not only for yourself but speak up for others, because this world is too filled with people who are so willing to let other people speak for them, and I learned that. I learned that when I had a recital when I was in third or fourth grade to play Moonlight Sonata and I was so scared, I remember telling my dad, "I can't play this." And he said, "Look, let me tell you something. Look into the audience. Because most people are so empathetic, they want you to succeed.-

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-They want anyone who's standing up- Because you're doing something that they can't do. So whether you're speaking or whether you're playing, just look into the eyes of people who will give you the assurance that it's okay. And if you feel that people aren't with you, then to heck with it. Because you know what? They wouldn't do it 'cause if they could, they'd be up there." And I always remember that. And I remember that I would always have a voice because I never ever wanted to feel as I did.

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And it was a defining moment and so whether I coached Cheyney, Iowa or Rutgers, the point was that I want to push young women to lift their heads up and speak their mind and to know that you're worthy, and to do anything less. Sometimes I challenge them in lots of different ways, but when they finally find their voice and when they speak up, I just have a smile and I think, "Mhm. That's what I was trying to get to."

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JULIE COHEN:
And with the challenge to their keeping you off the squad, was that in court or it was you going before the school board?

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VIVIAN STRINGER:
It was the presentation of me to the school board. In retrospect, I realize that one of the school board members was a member of our community. He saw me play with the guys all the time. He knew that I… I was really… I could throw whatever. Like I said, I really even thought about becoming a gymnast so I could throw the round-off, the hand, new handsprings, all of that. I was no doubt the most athletic person there.

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JULIE COHEN:

In college, you played college ball?

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VIVIAN STRINGER:
I played basketball in college. I didn't have a scholarship because that was pre-Title IX, but… I so enjoyed it. It was my life. It was everything. I played college basketball. I played field hockey. I actually had a lot more awards in field hockey than basketball. And volleyball. Played volleyball. And for fun, really honed my skills on tennis. I love tennis. I love all sports really, except swimming.

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JULIE COHEN:
Okay. I want to talk about moving from playing to coaching. When did the idea of coaching first enter your mind, and what was the attitude in general about women coaches and women's abilities to coach players? Tell me about those things.

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VIVIAN STRINGER:
Okay. First of all, coaching never entered my mind. I thought that playing would last forever. Oh my God, that's all I ever wanted to do. Just play and play and play. But as any athlete will tell you that day, that last day, will come. And when it does, even though your coach or others may tell you or you may

be consciously aware of it, it's like a lead brick. Wow, it's over. It's over. It's over.

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And so, I wanted to continue to be… to continue to be involved in sports and I was fortunate because my college coach, Dr. Griffith, invited me to become a graduate assistant. And that meant working with her and the basketball team and that was the love. Oh my goodness. That was my true love. And I didn't even… and I thought, "Gee. It must be boring to be a coach. Don't you want to run and jump and do all these other things?" But I found my passion there.

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Now how was I looked upon as a female coach? Keep in mind that I worked for eleven years at Cheyney University which is my first coaching job, and fortunately for me I started right there at the collegiate level. I did not get paid a dime, but I would've paid them. I was just so happy. I was an assistant professor at the university. And when I say that, it was the love of the sport. The vast majority of coaches of women's basketball were not paid anything.

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And for those that were paid, they were paid peanuts. I was not paid. The only thing I asked my department head to do was, "Please don't schedule me for a seven-thirty health class the night after a game, when I get in two or three o'clock in the morning." That was it. That was it. I was excited. I was excited about this.

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JULIE COHEN:
So explain to me, you were basically a paid teacher and they just made you … you threw in the coaching absolutely free?

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VIVIAN STRINGER:
They didn't throw it in. I volunteered. We just had a departmental meeting and I wanted to coach basketball so bad, and my husband worked at Lincoln University, which is not too far from my school, and I was telling him, “We're going to have a departmental meeting and they're going to let us you know decide what sports we want to coach. And I hope that I get a chance to coach basketball.” But I'm thinking, “Surely that's not going to be left.” So what ended up happening is they said, "Well, who wants to coach the softball team?" And I thought, “I better go ahead and take that because I love softball too and I probably won’t get a chance to coach basketball.”

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So I raised my hand, “I do.” And he said, “Okay. That's good. Okay, Stringer you're going to be coaching the softball team. And now who would like to coach the volleyball team?" And I thought, “I do.” So I raised my hand again and he said, "Well, Stringer you're going to be coaching the volleyball team." I thought, “Wow. This is great.” And then, the one that I was waiting for, “And who would like to coach the basketball team?” And I looked around thinking I don't want to be greedy, but I sure hope… and I didn't see anyone raise their hand.

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I said, “I do.” And he said, “You've got it.” I thought, "Yes! Yes!" I was so happy. And this was the first year, my husband and I had gotten married like September 4th, and so all of this was taking place within weeks. And I called him up and I was so excited. “I'm coaching the volleyball team. I'm coaching the softball team. I'm coaching the basketball team. Do you believe this? Yes!” He said, "Well, what's going to happen? Like volleyball runs into basketball.” I said, “I know, but I can get the girls to go over to the cafeteria and get me a peanut butter and jelly sandwich.” And that's what I did. I was so happy. So very happy that I wouldn't think of asking for pay.

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Are you kidding me? And so I want to point out that that when Title IX came about, it was no doubt the most wonderful thing that could happen to women, and I think that so many women have benefited and people who were not even involved in sports—they as moms and dads benefited because their daughters had an opportunity to get a scholarship and she could become the doctor or the dentist or anything else.

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Because the government was basically saying, “Look. You have to give equal opportunity to the women. They're paying those taxpayers dollars.” Oh my goodness, and we can never forget- And while there were many- Billy Gene King and how she stood up in her organization and what she's doing for so many women, and so many fathers that became involved. I would like to

believe that maybe they didn't have sons and they were thinking, “Well, my daughter deserves an opportunity.”

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If they saw the love and the passion and the heart that I did—I knew why—but then some parents also realized that, "You know, wait a minute, you know she can save us a lot of money. She can get a scholarship at so and so places." So there were many reasons and it gave women stature and rise and it changed the thinking. It changed the thinking of women, but I need to say this to you.

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Keep in mind that ninety-eight percent of the coaches of women's sports were women because you did not get paid anything. When they started to pay anything and when the pay became significant, when television began to cover women's sports, the face of women's basketball as it relates to who is coaching that sport, changed dramatically. Dramatically.

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And so that's why some of us will say, “Just for the love of the game.” We were there, always. We were there from the beginning, just because we loved it, and just because we wanted women to have a sense of fulfillment. You know what I mean? Just a sense of satisfaction. Not thinking that she would be able to parlay that as they can now into a profession where she can seriously make a living or earn a living, certainly abroad and somewhat here in the United States.

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JULIE COHEN:

Tell me about you as a coach. What kind of coach are you? What's the message you're trying to give to your players? Do you think that you as a woman has something to do with the way you coach? Or do a man and a woman coach the same?

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VIVIAN STRINGER:

I don't know. I don't know. Obviously I just know what I as a woman do and what I deeply feel in my heart. And as I said to you, I carry the sense that I want that woman, that female, to know that she's no less than the stars in the skies. She's just as good as the guys. It doesn't matter whether there are fifteen or twenty-thousand people that are coming to the men's game. She shouldn't think of herself as any less and I'm going to continue to harp on that.

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And to let her know that she has a voice. I think that we can't sort of cut ourselves out, carve ourselves into a corner and think that we're just supposed to play the sport. I think that we have a responsibility to try to grow the sport in all things that we do. And I do remember as an athlete at undergraduate school going to see our president. I spoke to our president, our vice president and the dean, and I said, "Why is it that you never come to see the women play?"

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He said, “Well, we've never been asked.” I said, “Well, good. You're being asked now. Why don't you come to see us play?” We happened to be playing a field hockey match, so I never said anything to my coaches but I was telling the girls, I said, “Guess what? You know, the deans are going to come and the president’s going to come.” And I think it was Dr. Abrosole but it doesn't really matter the name so much as it was that day or later that week, these guys in these trench coaches, our president and the vice president, were sitting on top of the hill and it's raining and they’re watching us play.

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And the girls were like,”"Oh my God. This is so great. Wow. You know we're worthy." You know, “We're worthy.” So, I think that Title IX gave us all an opportunity to lift women, and let me say this: I would never sacrifice good coaching for any woman, to any woman, to have a female coacher. That's unfair. I want her to have the best of coaching. She deserves that.

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If I had a preference and there's equality, a male versus a female, I would prefer that she be coached by a female. That's not sexist. That's not anything. It's just that we need role models too. We need role models too. That I want to believe that woman is looking at that other female and say that she can be strong, she can be a leader, she can be the head of something, she can run the show. She really can.

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She can have that power if you will. I just believe there's something special to that. All I have to do is recall my own experiences. Now would I sacrifice poor coaching just to have a female? No, absolutely no. But between the two? No question in my mind. I think that Title IX began to open the doors and to change things for a lot of women. Is everything okay still? No. We have issues as it relates to societies acceptance of sports. And really there are misgivings about a lot of things that are going on.

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JULIE COHEN:
What kind of a coach are you?

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VIVIAN STRINGER:
I'm intense. I really am intense. I'm sensitive, extremely sensitive. Compassionate. And there's a passion. I can't coach what I call oatmeal. It's just, I can't coach walls. I coach through your eyes and through your heart. I want people that love this as I do. The people that you don't have to scream at. You know like, we're here. I'm here because I want to be. This is my love.

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You're here because you want to be. We're trying to be the best that we can be. Isn't that good enough? I'm a person that pushes excellence. I expect excellence and some of that, and so much of that is because of what I saw from my father and my mom. No excuses. No. Why are we excusing

ourselves? We're fortunate to have breath in our body and the good Lord has given us legs and breath.

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We have a dream and a hope in our heart. How dare us make excuses about what we can't do? I didn't see that. So I do have a difficult time understanding what you can't do. To say that you can't, you're wasting time. It's that you choose not to. To say that you can't… The end of that statement needs to be, "I can't be at this time. But I will. And I want to start the process." I think that is true with anything and I try to instill that. We can become, we can do anything.

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We are the masters of our own destiny and of our own fate. So who am I? I'm the one who sets dreams. I want to hear your dreams and your heart. I want to be the one that makes you smile, the one that says, "You didn't think that you could did you? But you did." I want to be the one that loves you enough to tell you what it is that you're not doing, but not the full use, so at those precious times between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two, so that I can keep on babying you and telling you what you want to hear. Telling you your big time, you're this and you're that. But I know better.

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Or I can be that person that you're not happy with sometimes, but that person at the end that you're just going to hug me and say, "Thanks for helping me realize my dreams. Thanks for helping me realize my dreams."

So… I just, I pursue excellence. I love with a passion. I'm sensitive. Players will say, "She's always crying." And I care about… I really care.

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I genuinely, honestly do care about each of them. I care about our fans. I'll cry as quick about disappointing our fans because I just want to always make people happy. I want to make people proud and I want to feel good about what it is that I'm doing and give you the best that I can of me.

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JULIE COHEN:
Tell me about winning and losing. How much do you care about winning? What do you teach your players about losing?

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VIVIAN STRINGER:
I can't handle losing too well. I really don't, because once again I'm not going to blame anyone. I look first within myself. That was something that I'd learned a long time ago. You should emphasize this. You should've taught that. I can't sleep so I'd rather practice as soon as I can because I'm not going to sleep that night. It's going to go through my head a thousand times, "What do I need to do?" The pursuit of excellence… Yeah. Yeah. Is that attainable? Is it perfection? No. It's not.

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It's something that you reach toward. It's like, to me, it's like a conductor that's conducting a symphony, and all the music coming together is what you're creating. You want to see the smiles on everyone's faces. I really need to enjoy more the wins, because I can remember the losses like they were yesterday, but not appreciate enough the wins. And so what do I want to do?

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I want to appreciate that more. Now that doesn't mean—I've come to learn and to know—that doesn't mean that I satisfy myself with less than, with second best. It doesn't mean that. It just means that I have come to learn that success is not measured in the wins or losses, but it's measured more by where you were and where you've come from and where you are now.

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And in that case, then we continue to win. So we'll just continue to get on that continuum and keep on pursuing and try to be the best that we can possibly be.

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JULIE COHEN:
Tell me a little bit about Rutgers. What made you come to Rutgers? How's their women's basketball program? What was it like to get that opportunity and take it?

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VIVIAN STRINGER:

My life has been parallel with great triumphs and great tragedies, and I left Cheyney State University in Pennsylvania—that I absolutely loved and never thought I would ever leave—but I left because our daughter contracted meningitis at fourteen months, and they had the largest teaching hospital in the world, and the people were wonderful and the love that we got, and they were going to take care of our family on the medical side.

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So it was an ideal place for us. And my husband and I basically didn't have what you call traditional roles. We did what we needed to do to take care of our two sons and our daughter Nina who, like I said, had meningitis, and was left without being able to walk or talk or speak ever again. And we were getting along, we were making things work. Our two sons and Nina and then my two sisters moved to Iowa City with us, and somehow we were making it. It was a family, everyone was helping us make it.

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And then, suddenly my husband died to a heart attack. And then my life was just thrown into… Oh my God, what am I going to do? Because he was the love of my life, the wind beneath my wings. It was everything. And so, how am I going to make it? And the kind of work that I do is all consuming. Psh. It's all consuming. So how do you go on? How do you be a mom and how do you continue this profession?

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It was the only thing I know and you need to take care of your family aside from the fact that it's something that you love. You thrust yourself into your

work, but how do you do all that? I really couldn't handle the fact that while I was in Iowa City and I loved the team—I had what was considered perhaps the greatest team that had ever been assembled in women's basketball—Finally I got those elements in place,-

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-but what I've come to learn in life is that you can think that you love something, but when you are hurt by what's most important, which is your family, then nothing else really matters. So I decided to do what I talk to young women about all the time—deal the hand that has been dealt to you. You look back and you say, "Woe is me," and then again, "Ooh, am I going to live? How do I teach? How do I grow? How do I take care of my children?"

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And I decided that it was more than I could bear. I couldn't handle living there in Iowa because that's where my husband passed. Actually twenty years to the day of my father's passing… I mean the same age, it's crazy. So I did need to leave and I did. And Rutgers had been pursuing me. It wasn't something that I thought about. It really wasn't.

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But I think like most people, we all like to have the comfort of security, being in the same place. Iowa, I felt would take care of me. They knew, they loved us but it was too much, I think, for my sons and certainly for me because in their honest attempt to, "We feel so sorry and we love you. We're going to look after you and the boys and Nina." And it was too much. We could never get away from that.

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I accepted the position at Rutgers and when coming back to the East Coast, ‘cause like I said, I started off at Cheyney, which is near Philadelphia, Cheyney University. And so here I am. Accepted the position at Rutgers. And what I found out too is that while I want to pursue basketball at the highest level and I pursue excellence, the team hadn't really won any major games.

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I mean, they hadn't been invited to the Field of 64. I had just finished playing for a National Championship so here I am, at the pinnacle of the success, much like what happened when I left Cheyney, I would've stayed there for life but we had just played for the National Championship at Cheyney. And there, I went to Iowa. Iowa had only won seven games the year before. So you just start over. Because one thing that I learned is that what you have in your head, no one can take from you. No one can take it from you.

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And so I took what was in my heart and in my head and I took it to Iowa and now all the sudden… and I've got to go again. I've got to go and I've got to start over again. And I just threw myself into my work and here I am.

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JULIE COHEN:
Do you remember the first time that day you took a team to the Final Four?

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VIVIAN STRINGER:

Yes, I do and yet, it was so vague. Keep in mind that my daughter had contracted meningitis in November. She was fighting for her life, for maybe three or four months, and she remained in intensive care even in April, which is when this Final Four is going on. I lived in a hospital. I may have gone home maybe three or four times from November through April.

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I went back to work, to coaching, after about a month, maybe five or six weeks, after Nina… We knew she was out of the woods but it was still touch and go. My team came to the hospital and they talked to me you about, "Just come back. Just…" And my husband was like, "You know, it would be good for you to get out of the hospital and just wrap yourself in the basketball."

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So I would leave the hospital for a couple of hours at a time, and leave from Philadelphia Children's Hospital, go to practice, and come right back from there and come back home. It almost all seems like a blur. But I do remember my assistant, Ann Hill, who called me to say, "Vivian—" Once we'd qualified and had won the games and here we are, we're at a Final Four, we needed to go to Norfolk, Virginia—

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She said to me, "The NCA has a rule that you have to be present for a-" What do they call it? Some kind of administrative meeting like two days, three days before the Final Four. Well, heck, I mean, what am I… I'm in a hospital. I have just my sweat suites. I really don't have any clothes and so, she and another

friend, assistant, Bonnie, went to the store, bought some clothes, underclothes and everything else. They said, "We'll pick you up from the airport. We'll take you to Norfolk," which is where I was.

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I just… I remember sitting there and I was thinking, "This could be the greatest moment of my life. Isn't this what it's all about? You're playing for the National Championship." Little old Cheyney State. No scholarships, three thousand dollars period. No…. weights. Nothing. One gym that Coach Cheyney and I shared together. We come from nothing. You know, we were like the giant killers of the world. We have nothing but yet we had in our midst the possibility of a National Championship.

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And yet as I sat there, I thought, "No one knows what's going through my mind. No one knows." I looked at our band. Wow. we couldn't even afford to bring our band. The band's colors were green and white. Good thing that television was in black and white cause the Cheyney colors are blue and white. You know? But people felt sorry for us and they said- Norfolk State said, "You can have food at our cafeteria. And you know what? Our band will play for you."

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And our students got whatever they got together and they got a bus and they came down to Norfolk and they were screaming. They were so proud. I felt so proud, because you see it didn't matter if your school size was twenty-five or thirty thousand students. Little old Cheyney with its three thousand students

would bring everybody down. 'Cause you see it wasn't about the clothes on your back or the band or anything else like that. I learned that a long time ago. What's the basis for my being born in the childhood that I had?

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Everything. Everything was there. I continue to appreciate anything that I have and that I get beyond that, and so yeah, I mean, here we were. You know, playing for that and I can just tell you that in going to Rutgers, I thought, "Isn't this a shame? Wouldn't it have been nice just to stay in one place and develop your life?" Like Cheyney, I could've lived there forever but you see, the have-nots, the great schools, the big schools were then saying, because at the time the NCAA allowed you- If you're foolish enough, if you will, to play, our school had three thousand students maybe, to play against a school that had twenty-five or thirty thousand, then you have to be foolish to do that.

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But if you think you can do this, then you go ahead. You can always play up and- which is what we did. But in this situation, all of the sudden, after I go there to Iowa, then this happens, I lost my husband and my whole world was rocked and probably, the release of me being able to come to Cheyney were to do with my oldest son, David, saying, "Mom, this is what you really love. This is you. Coaching is what you do. We're okay. Let's move. Let's get started again."

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And I thought, that was the only voice that really mattered. What did he have to say about this? Of course Justin, being the youngest, said that he felt the

same way, and there we got started and we started from scratch. But that didn't really bother me, to get started again because I believed that we would rise just like we did at Cheyney, just as we did at Iowa. And I believe that would be what would happen.

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JULIE COHEN:
And did you rise?

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VIVIAN STRINGER:
We rose. We rose. We rose. We rose. Yes. Yeah, we did. It was pretty special. I mean, the fans were special. The kind of support that we got was unprecedented. I mean just, people were so hungry for a winner, I think that the New York Press by its own nature tend to be more focused toward the professional side so they weren't really paying attention to us.

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And next thing, we were fortunate because people came from all corners of the Earth. One young lady came from Belgium. The young lady, our point guard, came from Chicago. They were coming. One of our centers came from Canada. And there, it would be just as I know, is that you have to deal with the hand that's been dealt you. You don't have time to make excuses, but you pick yourself up and you go on.

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And here we were with Tasha Pointer who's now my coach. We all rose and we played for that first… Final Four actually there at Rutgers and for the NCAA's. 'Cause Rutgers had gone to NIAW Final Four, that is the pre-Title IX. And not only that, we went twice.

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And I… it might seem strange that I forget the years. I'm not sure. I think it was 2001 and I think it was 2007. I think. But I'm not really sure. But yeah we went twice and we hope to go again.

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JULIE COHEN:
How did it feel taking that Rutgers team to the NCAA, Final Four?

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VIVIAN STRINGER:
What's interesting about this is that the first Final Four in 2001, I thought to myself, "This is amazing. When you went to the Final Four at Cheyney, your daughter was fighting for her life in intensive care." Because after we got out, that's exactly where I went, back to the hospital. You go to the Final Four at Iowa. I sat there numb because my mind really… It was there but it was like… See I don't know what it felt like.

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So when I say that to people, all you have to do is put yourself in my place, do you really know what it feels like? To be free and to have done this routine,

has done this and yet you are worried about your daughter that's in a hospital, the first time at Cheyney. Next time, I kept thinking about my husband and the smile that he must have on his face and how hurt I was that he wasn't able to be there to share it with me. And it just… It saddened me more than anything. And I'm thinking, "God. Why can't the highest of the high be just that? Period."

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And so then… I go to Rutgers and things started there and then I found, okay, you have breast cancer. Hm. Wow, that's interesting. How is this? The last one was the one that was free. You know. Everybody's healthy. Everybody's fine. We are going to the Final Four and that was as I've said before, it was clearly, I thought, the worst team I'd ever coached. I told them that a number of times. Just horrible.

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I thought that it was a very young group for one, there were no seniors and we had five freshmen I think, and a bunch of juniors, and one or two sophomores. That was it. And what was interesting was we had been beaten by the number one team in the country on our own floor by over forty points when Duke beat us. People were so disgusted they just got up and walked out. And I took a time out, just to say to them, "Watch them walk." Not that I blamed the people.

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"They turned their backs on you because you see, everyone wants a winner. But you thoroughly embarrassed me, this team, the tradition, everything, all

of what we are, because we think we know so dog gone much. You know, there are no shortcuts to the work that we have to do." See, I've known that and sometimes when you have young people, they don't quite know. But they would work, begin to work hard. We would continue to lose and then one day,-

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-the players who had been a part of championships and who made the name of Rutgers, at least under my tutelage, decided to come back. They came from Russia. They came from Turkey. Italy. And it happened to be the day before New Years. It was New Year's Eve. And we started practice at… We had started practice maybe at six o'clock. Here it is eleven forty-five. Those girls walked into that gym with their beautiful bags and beautiful clothes and they had three days in the States.

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They were coming to celebrate the New Year's Eve there in New York's Time Square. But they took their clothes off and put on practice clothes and they started to practice the drills and everything. And they started talking to the girls. There were so many instructional things that were being said, "Didn't coach tell you how to do this? Didn't she tell you to seal and close and come out at an angle?" And the player would say, "Yep." "Then do it. That's the reason that you keep getting the ball stripped. Didn't she tell you about going to a coffin corner and stopping just two feet or two inches over the half court line?"

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"Yes." "Then this is the reason why she said that." So there was a lot of-, "Oh, and didn't coach tell you to sit down and get low when you post up and wide? Didn't she?" "Yeah." "You're not low." So it was like, that kind of instruction. It was incredible. The intensity that they worked. And so our players looked at them and they thought, "Wow. It's eleven forty-five. These girls that came from another country gave up their New Years just to spend it with them."

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I think that the team really got a message. They understood the tradition. They understood what it meant and while we struggled just a bit going forward, the team would never go back. They would always remember what it meant to give back who they were.

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JULIE COHEN:
How did that team become? How good were they?

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VIVIAN STRINGER:
I think the measuring bar was Connecticut. And they had beaten us by twenty some points at our place. But for the championship, when it counted most, the team was so confident in what they had to do. To me, I don't think things like this happen by chance. I think that there's a lesson to be learned and here we are in Hartford, Connecticut, playing for the biggest championship. And they believed, they believed, they believed. And we won.

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They were able to celebrate that occasion. You see, earlier in the year we were at a tournament in November and we were supposed to play University of Arizona, but you see, sometimes, you don't know what you don't know. Being that they were so young, we were getting ready to play University of Arizona and they had a real unfortunate situation where one of the player's brother, who was eighteen years old, died. So we, along with they, decided to forfeit the game. No one wins or loses.

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But as I told the team, "We would've lost. Trust me. Because we were not able to handle this team." I would ask them, "How should we play them? Defensively or offensively?" And so young freshmen, "Yeah, we should play the man to man defense." And I thought, "They will eat us up. You have no idea what's going on here." Well, and I told them that. I said, "It's good that we didn't play Arizona because I promise you we would've lost." And I told the coach that too.

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Well, wouldn't you know that once we qualified for the NCAA, I think it was every team that we had lost to during that year, which is kind of interesting how that happened. But those were all the teams that were in front of us. Not only that we were- In order to go to the Final Four, we had to go to North Carolina, where Duke is. And play them. The number one team in the country. That's how you get to the Final Four.

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JULIE COHEN:
And what happened?

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VIVIAN STRINGER:
Well, you know what? The giant killers shocked them. Just shocked them as they did everybody, along the way. And here we are, we are going to the Final Four. Well, I'll tell you what. The NCA was so shocked that they didn't even have- When you go to the Final Four, if anyone has ever gone to an athletic event, there are like, bobble headed dolls that are replicas of the school. They didn't have a bobble headed doll for us. They had one for Duke but none for us.

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I thought, "Okay. That's okay. That's okay." We went there and we… Our first game was with LSU. It was the most incredible performance I'd ever seen. Oh my goodness. And we'd beaten LSU easily, handedly. And now it was Tennessee. I just remember looking above and I saw that neon sign that kept saying, "And then there were two." And I kept thinking to myself, "Two. My God. Two in this whole country."

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United States is arguably the best basketball place in the world. This team became that. Long story short is, we lost in the championship game to Tennessee. Now you can sit there and say, "Oh my God. You came short." But I

would remember something that I do know to be true, and that is that nothing is as good as it seems, or as bad as it seems. But the reality rests somewhere in between.

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So we thought we were coming home to triumph. And so I wanted to be on a high note, positive for the girls, like, "Man. You guys accomplished so much. You should be so proud of…" And then, then we heard the remarks and that's… "Wow. Are you kidding me?" That was just devastating to us.

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JULIE COHEN:
Tell me how'd you hear about it?

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VIVIAN STRINGER:
My media relations person, Stacy Brand, said, "Did you see this? Did you hear?" Well, I really couldn't comprehend what she was saying. I really, I really didn't. I remember… Because that day our school was having an assembly and our president was going to come and our governor and everybody was going to address us. They were going to give praise to the team for making… They had turned the Empire State Building red in honor of the success of this team.

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So we… were waiting for that celebration but I knew. But I really had no idea about really what was said 'cause I thought, "No. I know that was not said. That's not possible. It's really not possible." But I promised the team, I was saying to them, "I know some things were said and I promise you when you come back I will address it. I will have a comment. I will address things appropriately. So go home with your families. Enjoy, love and appreciate the great season that we had."

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And so that's what that was. I remember getting a telephone message from Moses Malone, one of the great basketball players of all times, and it just said simply: They hurt our girls. And I was like, "Well Jesus… What in the world was going on?" And I realized, this has legs, this is… Oh my God. The whole world… Instead of us coming to triumph with this great story that I can never talk enough about-

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-was being presented as this, and these horrible things were being said. Yeah, I was really hurt. Really hurt, angry to say the least. Very angry. It's important to calm what you feel and put into words what must be said. And it brought back this feeling that I had as a sixteen year old, seventeen year old. It's like, "What the heck?"

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And so I remembered the way I felt and I knew like, I told you, it was always my life thing, and at no time would anyone ever hurt… I would never let girls, women, feel this pain again. And I felt it. So I had the team come back. And we

came back and I asked them how their day was, how their weekend was with their family, which I knew should've been- everybody should've been like, "Oh my God. You guys went to the Final Four. Played for the National Championship. Just didn't go to the Final Four, played for the National Championship."

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And I heard various stories. Some that never even talked about it. Wait a minute. How could you play for a National Championship and be in that house and not talk about it? Or some whose eyes could not meet their moms' or their dads', because there was such pain. Are you kidding me? Oh, I heard them. They were just telling me. Or some who constantly got phone calls and was saying that, "I feel bad about those terrible things about your team."

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Even as I talk about it today, it draws a lot of emotion for me. And I shared with the team what happened as a cheerleader. I'd never talked to them about that before 'cause I needed to tell them that no one can ever make you feel inferior unless you allow that. And we wouldn't allow that.

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JULIE COHEN:
How hurt were the girls…

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VIVIAN STRINGER:

How do you explain that? I mean, think about the question that you're asking. How hurt… What do you want? How do I quantify that? Are we kicking doors in? Are we cussing? Are we fussing? Are we what? All you have to do is look in somebody's eyes and their heart. Don't you know what it looks like to be hurt? You know? "How hurt were they?" I just know that we were all very hurt. And I knew I was the one, just like my father and mom protected me as a youngster, as a child, I needed to protect my girls.

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And with everything in my being… No. Close the curtain and forget about it? Without talking about it in great detail, that wasn't going to happen. I would always stand up for what is right 'cause I learned that a long time ago. See, I know that our world, we appreciate people who are leaders, people who speak their minds. How could you go to sleep? Like I was trying to go to sleep, when my father asked me about, if I wanted to stand up. I learned- That was a defining moment. You don't go to sleep ever, I try to teach my players that today.

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Don't leave a practice trying to guess about things. Ask the question. I have a responsibility to speak for them. If no one stood up, I needed to stand up. But you see, I believe in the goodness of people. And I did believe, as I try to figure out, what do I say and how do I say it, and I try to get rid of this anger and this hurt at just being angry inside, and I know that never carries you very far.

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That as I try to put into words what was going on, because I thought of all the teams that I've coached, do you realize that this one had the greatest story of them all? This is the one that you can tell little girls, "It doesn't matter." Or little boys. This was a dream come true. It wasn't like we were born, we had this and that. We were nothing. We were the worst team. We were absolutely nothing. We had filled every expectation that there was.

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These kids were so young, like I said, they had braces on their teeth and their hairs up in ponytails. They were sitting on a bleacher less than twelve months ago. And they were on national television. I mean, they were being seen all over the world. And this great event was now being trivialized. They were cute. Some people were cute and some people weren't. How could you hear this? How could you see this and not be touched at all?

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But you see, the one thing that I think allowed me to share how I felt in the best way that I should, was my sister Rickie, who called me and she just said, "You know what dad would've said? Speak your heart Vivian. Just speak your heart V.I. Don't worry about it. Just speak your heart. You know what dad would've done." That was it. That was it. That was clearly it. I had a smile on my face. Yeah. I can do that. That's why I said what I had to say,-

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-because all I had to do was remember what my father would've told me and… it was easy. It was easy. Just speak my heart. Not with any anger or to hold on to something that's passed, because what has been done has been

done. But somebody needed to speak, and these girls needed to know that people loved them and they didn't feel like a few people would express their voice. And I think that as I reflect on it now, my father always taught me to try to help people to empathize, try to help them to feel what you're feeling.

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Because if they can say, "Well I wouldn't have felt that way." Then hm, that's just how they are. But I tried to relate what had happened to these young people to every mom and dad and uncle and aunt and grandmom and grandpap. I tried to put everybody in that same place. How would you feel? When you can answer that question, then we can no longer close our eyes and act as though we didn't hear and that it's okay.

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The problem that I see as we try to shape the world and try to do our little bit to make a difference is that people are so insensitive and so in the position of, "That's them and that's not me," without ever embracing and putting yourself in the same place as another. 'Cause that to me is a remedy for a lot of things but we don't. We divorce ourselves from that. We somehow are always looking at, "Well, that's what happened to them."

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And I just tried to ask the question, "Was I any different than any other mom or dad would've been? Was I? Then why is it that we can sit here and accept this? Don't we have a responsibility with seventeen and eighteen year olds? We keep…" The whole conversation in this country has been about what's happening to our youth. Who are "we?" We keep talking about Wall Street

versus Main Street and the money and all that. At some point, when does this all stop? When do we find our moral compass? And you know what? I had no idea nor did I expect the outpouring of support as we received.

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JULIE COHEN:
Can you just describe how your and your players handled Imus' remarks? How you handled the media and what you thought of your players' composure in that situation.

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VIVIAN STRINGER:
I just needed to step up. I needed to speak. I needed to be the protector of my girls and I knew that I would. How could I? As I said, many times, my parents protected me and there was nothing that these girls had done wrong and I knew as my father would say, "You do the right thing and I'm going to defend you. In the meantime, you need to look within yourself." And the way that this team has always been presented has been in a very class and a very polished way; And for the kind of remarks to have been made were just totally uncalled for, unconscionable and it made us all feel bad.

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So I was really proud of the girls, because how can you prepare for a moment like that? Can you really prepare for a moment like that when it just guts at- gets right to your inner gut and it rains on your greatest moment in your

career, I mean your basketball life… But the ladies handled it, I think, with a great deal of dignity, poise, composure… Man, I was so proud of them.

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The stories that they shared… is it possible that you could be more proud of them than you were, that they played for a National Championship? They assured my faith, or they continued to restore my faith in… people, the dignity of a human being. They had grown. You know, just that incident just allowed them, put them on a stage that you would think they couldn't handle.

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I said there was such admiration as I watched them speak and to handle questions and I thought, "Wow. That would be so tough for me to do." You know I share one incident with Essence Carson, the young lady who actually spoke the longest. And she said, "You know as coach said, we stand." And I thought, this girl is a brilliant kid. I mean like A student, musical genius of sorts, and never said anything.

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She was always, "Yes. No. Maybe." And she stood up and she articulated so well and I thought, "Ooh." You just want to hug them and it continues to let us all know as coaches, as we all are, that it's not just the winning and the losing. Far from that. It's the young women that they become and I thought that they came of age. In some instances, the age of innocence was lost. The realities of life.

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Because I listen to so many questions, I thought, "You really are seventeen. You really are eighteen. You really don't know." You know? So that was lost but yet it was an awakening of sorts and I was just proud, just proud of the way they presented themselves to the world. But surprised? No. Surprised at that level was just a special moment and it's a moment that I'll never forget.

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JULIE COHEN:
Do you think that Imus' remarks were just a sign of something more troubling or general, larger attitudes from the public?

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VIVIAN STRINGER:
I think it… Unfortunate that I think that it was probably a sign of other more troubling issues in our society. And quite frankly the least of which is just race and gender or being misogynistic. I mean, that was not a trivialized event that took place. This was a National Championship. You know? People aren't cute in those things.

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There was a lot of things that were said but that he said it, is not so much the issue now as much as it was said in- And unfortunately whether people say it or not, there are too many things that have happened that speak to a mindset that's there. But I do think that he revealed the greater good in people. I think

that it caused people to talk a lot more about a lot of things. And it's not to put this on anyone, even including Imus.

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It caused people to have an open dialogue. It caused us as adults to ask ourselves, what role are we playing? It's caused me to see that a lot of parents want to do something about what's been going on in this world. But sometimes we get so wrapped up in the work that we do that we don't have a chance. Are we to blame? We seek to find another way to be good parents and to lead our children in a proper way.

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It spoke to a lot of issues. It spoke to a lot of issues that we all had to take a check. Look, the simple thing of, so what are the stations going to do? That's a lot of money. He's a very popular person. That's a lot of money. It became an economic issue. It became one of what's going on on the music side of it. What's going on on the teaching side of it?

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Who are we as adults? Are we responsible as adults? What can we do going forward? Can we talk about that? You know, and it's not to put this on anybody, but it caused us to stop and think about, we are role models, we really are. And we need to speak up. It wasn't about the Rutgers women's basketball team or the coach. It really wasn't. It's like at what time do we as a nation stand up for what we believe to be right?

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When do we actually put ourselves in the same position as everyone else? And like I said to you before, I really do believe that so many of the things that happen today that we're quite frankly appalled with and upset with, it wouldn't have to be like that if we just put ourselves in the place of the people that are involved.

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JULIE COHEN:
Was there ever a conflict between being a good mom and a good coach?

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VIVIAN STRINGER:
I'll never be satisfied as a parent. Because I think that something's going to suffer, you know? And while coaching is important, what is most important and would haunt me all the days of my life, is to have not been the best mom that I can be. We can only hope that we are because I know the importance of parents. I know what my parents meant to me.

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Being critical and knowing that I've done the best that I can, am I the perfect parent? No. 'Cause you know what I think maybe is the perfect parent? It's a parent that can stay home and just… That's the truth. My mom was home. But I had to work. The fact that I enjoyed it… So you know you're going to come up short and I think that's something that all moms experience.

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But not only moms, this day, people don't give men enough credit for their children. They don't want to be away from their sons or their daughters. But they do. You know it's something that we have to go through. And so you hope that your children will come to understand at a later time. One lady gave me the only thing that I can give myself now and that is an incident where after my husband had passed, I had to be at a recruiting event and all the coaches, that if you care about one of the kids that are playing in this sport, you have to be there.

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Well, I didn't get there because this lady couldn't come and watch my daughter. So I showed up a day late and I was so stressed out about this. I felt stressed because I'm leaving Nina. Now my husband's not there to look after the kids. My sons are, "Wow, I'm leaving mom," I mean, "Mom's leaving." So as I climbed to the top of the steps, I sat there and I started watching and tears just came from my eyes and I started to cry. But I was sitting there by myself and a lady climbed to the top of the steps, and she said,-

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-"You're not always going to be the best mom all the time. You're not going to be the best coach all the time. You're different and you're special and you need to accept that." She said, "But all you can be is the best person that you can be at that time. Be at peace and don't be so rough on yourself." Well, keep in mind that I don't even know this lady. I've been blessed because this was an angel and I kept thinking, "No. Not the best mom." All of us, if we have children, I know that we feel guilty.

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And you feel like, “Jeez, I came short on my work. I came short…” You're always feeling guilty and she gave me a peace of mind. As she walked down the steps, one of the people who was there, who happened to be a former player of mine came up to me and she said, “Coach, you know who that was that was speaking to you?” And I said, “No.” She said, “That was Willye White. Four time Olympic Gold Medalist.” And I thought, “Yeah. Yeah. Thanks.” I mean we can always give each other words of encouragement.

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JULIE COHEN:
Do you consider yourself a feminist?

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VIVIAN STRINGER:
You know what? That's a generalization. If you mean a person who is conscious and would fight for the rights of women, yes. If you consider this male bashing and all that, no. So I mean, people want to put you in a category. It's just like I'm a person that believes in equality and the opportunity for all people. You know, call it what you like. I just believe in truth as much as I know it, and that's the way I would speak up for us.

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JULIE COHEN:

What do you think of the women's movement overall? Do you think it accomplished something, for women in general? Or did it accomplish something for you particularly?

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VIVIAN STRINGER:
There had to be a voice. And the women who stepped out, that gave voice and rise, I continue to thank them to this day. I think that we all should. I think that we too often in life, just sort of get the remnants of other people's sacrifice and go on and we think that it just existed just because we showed up and that wasn't the case. There are people who lost jobs and a lot of other things behind that made the sacrifices-

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-and I think that we have a responsibility, each and every one of us in our own way, to make life better and in my way, I can make basketball a little better. But did it give rise? It made people more conscious. Much more conscious of what's going on. And some of us have benefited. I got to believe that most of us have and don't even realize.

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JULIE COHEN:
You said quite a bit about Title IX. Do you remember hearing about it when it first came into law?

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VIVIAN STRINGER:

It's interesting when you ask me that question, “Did I hear about Title IX?” Yeah, I knew about it because I was coaching at the time. But I'm going to give you my impression of that. It's been good. Real good. But on the other hand, I question the intentions, the initial intentions, because the women who were heading the organization, the AIAW, didn't have the money. They didn't have the money for the lawyers or any of the other things.

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The law had come down and so it was important that each university basically instituted- they received federal dollars, the opportunities for women. You can take it one-way or the other. You can either stand on the outside and dole the federal dollars or the monies that were there out, or you can control it. So you wrap it up. Everybody’s together and so now I decide to give you your portion however I decide it is, and whatever.

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So that's basically how I saw it. So it was a piece of federal legislation that to this day benefits millions and thank goodness for that. But I think that it's unfortunate that the AIAW wasn't a little stronger in their opportunity to expose women to opportunities to play and get scholarships.

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JULIE COHEN:

What were the resources like for college women's sports pre-Title IX when you were in school?

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VIVIAN STRINGER:

Slim to none. The resources were slim to none. You almost felt like you had to keep begging and asking, "Gee. Could we please…Could we practice in the gym? Can we have six balls? The guys do. Can we have a sub? Or can we have a hot meal? The guys do. Gee, we got our sandwiches from the cafeteria." Are you kidding me? Like that bothers me, because remember I said that it would be my intention to always know that we were equal too.

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Why should I have a peanut butter and jelly sandwich when someone else is going to have a hot meal or some of the other things? People don't realize, see, sports is the last bastard of male dominance. We're not going to be stronger. We're not trying to be stronger. We're not trying to dunk. We're not trying to be powerful. That's foolish. But can't we coexist? Can't there be a fulfillment in the female athlete? Can't there be a fulfillment of the female that's a CEO? There are prices to be paid. There's a price for excellence.

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But see, I would also say that, "Ladies you shouldn't expect people to spend their money to come to see you play just because you're a girl." That's… hm. Nah. No. And I don't think anybody would argue with that. I don't think anybody would argue with that so I just don't think that: equality, equality,

equality, equality, opportunity, opportunity, opportunity. And that's really what's out here now. It's equal opportunity.

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JULIE COHEN:
Being in the world of women's college sports now, in the post-Title IX era—or in the Title IX era, how have things changed? How are the resources like now? What do you have because of that?

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VIVIAN STRINGER:
I think that there's a lot more scrutiny on the equality of the programs. And because there's always going to be the financial support, to whatever extent that it is, at a university, then it's kind of tough to not give relatively equal, if not equal funding and support of the women's programs. Without getting into a great deal of detail, whether we're talking about promotions, marketing and the whole likes of it, I mean I have a lot of questions about a lot of those kinds of things but it is better.

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It's gotten much, much better. And it continues to be a need to educate and I think that for the powers to be in particular, they are probably being administered and run by a predominance of men, as men have their own daughters. And as men are equal thinking and really some women too, 'cause it's not just the males. I think that it can't help but get better and when it's

getting better, it's not getting worse I don't think. When it's getting better and it truly is getting better, then I have a smile on my face.

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I think that we have a responsibility as coaches to not just wrap ourselves up in the game itself, but the promotion of the program And the education of people as a society, the exposure. And I've just seen so many women, whether they're doctors and surgeons and lawyers and the likes, they said, "You know what? I didn't have a chance to do those things." I heard that, for example, Senator Clinton wanted to become an astronaut. Was she? They weren't taking women at that time.

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So, but now, I really do believe that most girls, most moms and dads can look at their daughters and say, "So what do you want to be? This is the price you have to pay and you can be that. It's going to take some work. A lot of work, but you can be that." And that's the greatest news of them all.

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JULIE COHEN:
I wanted to ask you about a couple of moments in recent women's sports history, or not too recent maybe, but do you remember the 1973 Billie Jean King, Bobby Riggs tennis match?

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VIVIAN STRINGER:

Oh yeah. Don't I? Yeah, I do. I do with a great deal of pride. I was hoping that she would win, praying that she wouldn't embarrass us and believing and knowing that all of the people's- I believe that the vast majority of opinions of women as athletes was resting on her performance and convinced that boy, if she doesn't, what are people going to say? We're the laughing stock.

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And then feeling like, "I wish I could take some of the pressure off of her. She shouldn't have to be the only one that carries this." Because my mind said, the way I think is I want to help. I want to help. I really will. I do want to do- I want to do anything. I can help. But Billie, you're in this by yourself. This is a monster. This is a monster. I can't even imagine. My legs would begin to just buckle with the thought that so much of everything and all of our dreams, I mean we're riding on this.

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It's good. I hope that they shielded her, didn't tell her… I hope they didn't tell her what was all laying in the balance. But from my mind, the world. What opportunities were we going to be given? How are we going to be perceived? And I was really just so proud of her. And I thank her to this day.

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JULIE COHEN:
How about the '99 Women's World Cup?

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VIVIAN STRINGER:

I was so excited. Let me tell you something. When Brandy, Justine and that group… I'll tell you what.. I remember calling to the Women's Sports Foundation. I think I was trying to speak to Donna Lopiano who was heading it at the time along with Billie Jean. I just want to say, what a wonderful moment. Having been in the sport as long as I have, this is not just something that I've picked up. This has not been about money.

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It has been much more about furthering a sport for all of us. So I hold my breath with the World Cup Soccer. I hold my breath because I'm just cheering and I'm hoping that they do something special. For once, people paid attention. It was like the most recent soccer match that the women were approaching. It doesn't matter whether you play soccer or you don't play anything. Don't you realize that everyone's talking about something that women are doing.

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And this was in a very positive way. And I realize, honestly realize, that every time I put a team on the floor, it's not just the game. It's what people see and what their impression is. So I feel it necessary for me to do the positive things to further our sport. I think that those of us who've been in the sport as long as we have have always felt that. We need to grow it cause I remember where it was and where it must go.

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JULIE COHEN:

You know, even though women are more than 50% of college students, and I think kind of moving to substantially more than that at this point, women's athletics certainly still lags behind men's college athletics in terms of resources and public attention and that kind of thing. What do you think is the reason for that? Is there hope for that to… What do we do to make that change?

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VIVIAN STRINGER:

If I did what I needed to do, we would change it right now but here's the thing. The vast majority of dollars are doled out by athletic directors of whom most are males, okay? They always want to tell you about how women aren't making money. Well, I guess we're not. You know all I can do is just coach and do the best I can. But if we don't have the marketing dollars and the promotion dollars, if there aren't people that's willing to put out the money and see, they don't say, "What sports are really…"

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There's a mystique, there is a fallacy with regards to how much money sports is making, period. Male and women's sports. Women's sports does sports does not make money, does that mean she doesn't deserve an opportunity? We're relatively new to this game. And should we look forward to doing that? Yes. But the women shouldn't be the scapegoat for what's happening when

the truth of the matter is that quite frankly I believe that there should be some sanity in all of sports.

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Just sanity. Sanity. Sanity. You got great professors that are being denied basic things. There's an imbalance. We as a society talk about one thing out of the side of our face and then we don't do the right thing as we talk about balance between athletics and academics, and so you say, “Why would she say that? She's a basketball coach.” Well, you know what? I have opinions and one thing, I'm not a speaker so I don't always do the best but I'm just giving you my own opinion about that. It's way out of whack. It's out of balance.

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But unfortunately no one's going to pull back. It's like an arms race. No one's going to pull back unless somebody says, “Stop this madness. Let's bring about equality.” Well guess what? That's the presidents. All of the presidents. No one person can do that. And here's the problem, so let's say one person steps out and decides to do that on their own, then you put that university at a disadvantage. There are so many great benefits to athletics. Don't get me wrong on that.

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But as I do believe with everything, because I have a lot of opinions about policy, politics, it really means something, it has always meant something to me. But right now if you pull back, then you put your organization, your school, whatever, at a disadvantage. But I think that there should be a lot of

things that are looked at, but I can promise you, women's sports is not what it's made out to be.

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And we don't have the same exact resources. There needs to be a serious balance in terms of what should be happening across the board in everything.

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JULIE COHEN:
Alright, here's our speed round. What's the most meaningful piece of advice you've ever received?

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VIVIAN STRINGER:
Truly the most meaningful piece of advice was that of my father and truly what my mom and dad demonstrated is that your voice matters and that you have a responsibility to speak up, that to deny yourself, that to deny an opinion and not speak it, is to deny yourself and God gave you a voice that is no less than anyone else's. It is your opinion. As long as it is just that. You know, that it's as valuable and it's just as valuable as anybody else's.

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Speak your mind. And it might not be right, but don't look for others to agree. The problem too often is we all look to see, to our right and to our left, "Does someone agree with me?" Don't worry about whether people agree. Is that what you believe in your heart? You know, that it's right? Why? Because you

thought it. You believed it. And I've always been taught that and I think that I've demonstrated that all of my life, and that was something that mom and dad both taught me a long time ago.

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JULIE COHEN:
What one piece of advice would you give a young woman about creating a work-life balance?

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VIVIAN STRINGER:
It is extremely difficult. It can be done, but don't ever expect to be at peace. You'll never be at peace cause you can't… Just to kiss your babies. It's just a warm feeling. You know, when you're playing with your kids, oh my God. That's the greatest feeling in the world. Just to love them and hug them and yet have to walk out the door when you see them standing there. And pretty soon they're going to grow up, and you're going to wish that you had all those times again.

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But then that's why I say it's so difficult because what if you didn't work? Then you wouldn't be in a position to give them some of the things that are there. It's going to be difficult. You're going to pursue your dreams because you have to pursue it with a tremendous amount of passion. I just don't think that you should do anything unless you just have all the love and the drive

that there can possibly be. But honestly it's almost like, if you will, sports is like a jealous God of sorts. It's the time that you're never through.

01:38:25:00

People just see the games but they can't imagine how much time you have to spend doing so many other things. So how do you balance that with your passion, your love, your family? As much as you can, you try to separate it and then again as much as you can, you try to involve your family, whether it's the trips. I wouldn't worry so much about being the professional. I know that I was so concerned about that in my early years and I'm thinking, "You know what? I didn't need to get on a bus. I should've just let my assistants be on a bus.-

01:38:55:00

-I should have driven or ridden in the van behind the bus with my two sons and my daughter and my husband." 'Cause they were always going. I'm trying to be a professional. Like those are times that I miss. So if I were really very specific, I would say that all these times come in your life once. You're never going to be totally satisfied. You're not. Do the best you can but try to involve your family in the activities that allow them to smile, that keep them not having to be measured by your success or what you are doing.

01:39:30:00

Why should a child go to a mall and be asked, "What does Santa want to bring you? I bet some games." You really think so? You really think a kid wants to hear that they want their G.I. Joe's or they want whatever? So it's a tough balance, but it can be done.

01:39:46:00

JULIE COHEN:
Alright. We know what you wound up doing, what did you want to be when you grew up?

01:39:50:00

VIVIAN STRINGER:
I dreamt of, like I said, becoming a concert pianist and I didn't because I didn't work hard. I wanted to be a track star and then I realized that was a lot of work, a lot of running for that one lap and then I thought, "Okay. I'll be a lawyer. No. I'll be a judge." 'Cause I have been always socially conscious about equality and opportunity and then I realized that, "There is a lot of books that you have to read." So, I didn't do those things because I wasn't willing to pay the price. I did what I love and that was my passion. It was basketball.

01:40:19:00

I wanted to be a physical education teacher because see, at the time I didn't even think… Keep in mind that I didn't see women coaching basketball. No one coached women's basketball. We weren't playing. You know? So then when I had a chance to coach, that would be the form that I would be able to actually coach and it's like, I have been truly blessed as a lucky- I got the best job in the world, coaching basketball, something I love.

01:40:45:00

JULIE COHEN:
What's the accomplishment you're most proud of?

01:40:47:00

VIVIAN STRINGER:
Seeing the young women, seventeen and eighteen year old, evolve. Just evolve. In their profession. The way they stood up. There are so many markers that I look at and I think, "Wow. They were just…" And really as I have, three of my assistants are former players and I sort of smile and I think, "Hm." Can you imagine that I have so much respect for their opinion and what they think and what they're doing, and yet it wasn't too long ago that they were that seventeen and eighteen year old woman that was there?

01:41:21:00

And so I'm just so proud of them, but they represent what this is really all about. Evolving, doing something in life that they enjoy, and making a positive contribution to society in any number of ways. And that's what it is.

01:41:38:00

JULIE COHEN:
What was your very first paying job?

01:41:40:00

VIVIAN STRINGER:

My first paying job was working at Moss Supermarket. Downstairs, you had groceries and upstairs, they had clothes. And I worked upstairs where they allowed you to buy things on credit. And as a result for the first year and a half, I never took home one or two pennies because I always bought clothes and that was it.

01:42:00:00

JULIE COHEN:
Which three adjectives best describe you?

01:42:03:00

VIVIAN STRINGER:
Sensitive. Intense. Maybe I should say passionate. Passionate. Passionate. Because that would go on both sides, basketball, and compassionate. I'm just… I empathize and I put myself in other people's place. I know that I do.

01:42:25:00

JULIE COHEN:
What person that you've never met has had the biggest influence on your life?

01:42:29:00

VIVIAN STRINGER:

I would have loved to have met Dr. King and I read about him and I've heard of his teachings, his understanding of Mahatma Gandhi. To be at peace with yourself and to try to bring about the best in other people.

01:42:47:00

JULIE COHEN:
Alright, and here's a bunch of either-or questions. Very fast. iPad or notepad?

01:42:54:00

VIVIAN STRINGER:
iPad now.

01:42:56:00

JULIE COHEN:
Okay. Early bird or night owl?

01:42:58:00

VIVIAN STRINGER:
Night owl, for sure.

01:43:00:00

JULIE COHEN:
Spontaneous or methodical?

01:43:02:00

VIVIAN STRINGER:

Spontaneous.

01:43:04:00

JULIE COHEN:

Diplomatic or direct?

01:43:06:00

VIVIAN STRINGER:

Direct and diplomatic. Depends on when you catch me.

01:43:10:00

JULIE COHEN:

Okay. Type A or easy going?

01:43:13:00

VIVIAN STRINGER:

I think I'm easy going for the most part, except when I'm on that court, then I'm not easy going. It's like… This is what I am.

01:43:21:00

JULIE COHEN:

Higher math scores or higher verbal scores?

01:43:25:00

VIVIAN STRINGER:

Verbal scores for sure.

01:43:26:00

JULIE COHEN:

Patient or impatient?

01:43:29:00

VIVIAN STRINGER:

Impatient. I think that things should be done yesterday.

01:43:32:00

JULIE COHEN:

Prada or The Gap?

01:43:33:00

VIVIAN STRINGER:

Probably Prada.

01:43:36:00

JULIE COHEN:

Prepare or cram?

01:43:38:00

VIVIAN STRINGER:

No. Prepare. Basketball… I'm going to prepare.

01:43:43:00

JULIE COHEN:

Domestically skilled or challenged?

01:43:46:00

VIVIAN STRINGER:

Domestically challenged.

01:43:48:00

JULIE COHEN:

Ten minutes early or late?

01:43:51:00

VIVIAN STRINGER:

Ten minutes, maybe fifteen minutes late.

01:43:52:00

JULIE COHEN:

Book smart or street smart?

01:43:55:00

VIVIAN STRINGER:
Probably more book smart. For sure, book smart. I need to be more street smart. It'd help me with a lot of other things, but much more book smart I think.

END TC: 01:44:09:00