Reading of Text on Catawba Education

Southeastern Indian Oral History Project (SIOHP)
CAT-163

Monologue by:

Emma Reid Echols
March 3, 1984

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CAT 163 Catawba Education (Text)
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41 minutes | 17 pages

Abstract: Emma Echols reads a text entitled "The Long Road to Education for the Catawba Indians." Starting in 1887, Echols chronologizes the Catawba struggles with poverty and the lack of quality education, detailing how children had to find innovative strategies to learn how to read if they wanted an education. The Catawba built a school in 1897 and convinced nearby teachers to visit and teach lessons to the children, and Echols lists many of the teachers through the years and includes several quotes from them about their first impressions of the Catawba reservation and their experiences with teaching. The school lessons incorporated art, music, physical education, and life lessons as well as traditional subjects to create well-rounded and engaged students. In 1966, the Catawba Indian School was closed and students were sent to public schools in Rock Hill, where they struggled with education but were given more opportunities for success in their careers.

Keywords: [Catawba Nation; Chief Samuel Taylor Blue; South Carolina--Rock Hill; Education; History]

CAT 163
Speaker: Emma Reid Echols
Date of Interview: March 3, 1984

E: This is Emma Reid Echols, Route 6, Box 260, Rock Hill, South Carolina. March 3, 1984. “The Long Road to Education for the Catawba Indians.” The graduation exercises for the Rock Hill High School was held on May 31, 1983. The Burns Auditorium at Winthrop was filled with 450 students graduating with many friends and relatives to see the diplomas and hear the special awards. Then came the time for the valedictorian. **Ginnie Trimnal**, a Catawba Indian girl, a great-granddaughter of Chief Sam Blue, came to the rostrum. She began her speech with this: "Well, we made it." Yes, you've made it, but what a long, difficult road to education it has been for the Catawba Indians. The earliest time that we know of any training for them—at the end of the Civil War some lady near Lancaster opened the doors of her school to take in a few Indian students. We do not know the name of the teacher or who the students were. In the year 1887, the annual yearly appropriation from the State of South Carolina was only eight hundred dollars, or about thirty dollars per person, this to provide medical care and education facilities for all Catawbas. Their homes were log huts of one room, a rock chimney and no windows, and from the rocky soil of six hundred acres, less than one half could be used to farm, raise the corn, potatoes, and cotton. Dr. Scaff’s account of his visit to this tribe in the spring of 1893 shows the tribe's destitution and poverty. He said, "I found neither a church nor a school. Turning my horse diagonally into the woods on the left, I went about a hundred yards and in the midst of a small clearing I saw an old weather-boarded one-room hut which appeared to be on the verge of falling in. Going around to the door, I saw a very

old Indian woman, all alone, sitting on the floor with a book in her hand. It was truly a peculiar abode for a human being. It appeared more like a corn crib for all around the room was a kind of loft with six or eight bushels of unshucked corn. The woman proved to be the widow of Chief Harris, who had died a few years ago, and the book she had in her hand was a Bible which she could not intelligently read. No school for two Indian boys dressed in shabby, faded clothes, clutched within their hearts the dream to get an education. Ben Harris had a part-time job doing odd jobs for Mrs. Molly Culp at the top of the hill, and best of all, she had a newspaper and could teach Ben to pick out words. When his chores were finished, the wood box filled, the water drawn, and the animals cared for, he had a warm place in the corner of the kitchen and a real schoolbook to study from. What he learned he soon taught his brother Robert, for he too wanted desperately to learn to read. Ben grew up to be a farmer and that meant long hours of toil. But night after night, he was studying alone in his small home. He married Mary George. They had eight children and he became an elder in his church, teaching others what he had learned, and also served as a Chieftain about 1895. His brother, Bob, put his hard-earned education to good use by keeping a detailed diary of events recalling births, deaths, and any events important to the Catawbas. In 1895, Bob **Howard** Harris was elected Chief to serve a four-year term. He carefully kept records that were taken to Tennessee by his wife but later returned to Rock Hill, where they are placed in the Rock Hill Public Library, and part were kept by his niece, Sally Harris Wade. Mrs. Mary Harris, the wife, age ninety-six, says, "There was no chance for me to learn to

read. I've never been to school a day in my life. I just worked in the fields all day, then made pottery at night. Work by day, work at night. Then go up to that college—Winthrop College—and sit in the street and sell my pottery."

Time moves on to the year 1897, when the Indians wanted a school so badly that they agreed to use 150 dollars of the state educational appropriation to build a small schoolhouse. According to Sally Harris Wade and Doris Blue, this small building was made of undressed slabs of pine and heated by a wood stove. The small group of students used slates for writing, and books and teaching supplies were very meager. Bethel Platt Presbytery also gave 150 dollars for educational work. Mrs. V.E. Dunlap was employed as teacher and walked each day from Lesslie, about four miles away. The Indians persuaded her husband to move to the reservation, rent land from them, and teach them how to make better use of the poor land. So, from personal funds, the Dunlaps built a small home, and thus began Mrs. Dunlap's long and fruitful ministry among the Catawbas. She not only taught the children and had parties and picnics for them, encouraged and helped seven Indian boys and girls to attend Carlisle school in Pennsylvania, she helped the women to sell their pottery by sending large orders to Charleston to be sold. She took a firm stance against all immorality, drinking, and gambling, and resisted the efforts of the Mormons to take the school away from her. Again and again pressure was brought upon her to leave and once she was locked out of the school. She spoke in discouraging tones of her work as great but unpopular, and, surely, she was not understood and urged to leave for the Indians were divided among themselves. In 1899, the enrolled pupils were: Sam Brown, Lucy

George, Moroni George, Nelson Blue, Early Brown, Wade Ayers, Annie Ayers, Sally Harris, Lily Blue, Edith Harris, **Vinnia** Harris, Leola Watts, Artemisia George and Arzada Sanders. The Indian agent, J.M. Simpson, terminated Mrs. Dunlap's services, claiming there were only two pupils, and engaged another teacher, J.N. Leslie. Mr. Leslie was then a student at Erskine and working to earn his degree there. It is thought he taught during the summer, when Erskine College was not in session. He later became a minister of distinction in the Associate Reform Presbyterian Church. Later his brother, Mr. **Sep** Leslie, also taught at this Indian school. This school building that they used was built by the Indians in 1907. The other White people who taught here were Sarah and Inez Henson from Lancaster who came over for a short time, but it's not recorded whether or not they used this particular school building. When Mrs. Dunlap left the reservation of her own free will in 1905 and after the two Leslies taught here, a number of Mormons came in to teach for a number of years. Mr. J.C. Davis, Mr. and Mrs. Orlando **Barris**, Elder Berry and his wife were teachers, although we do not know the exact dates that they taught. These Mormon missionaries usually stayed at the home of the Chieftain, Chief Sam Blue. From the years 1904 to 1908, the school was supplied by Mr. John Sparks, who walked to the school from his home near **Roddy** Station. He was a good teacher and especially noted for his penmanship. In 1905, 1906, Mrs. Sparks replaced her husband, arriving to the school with a horse and buggy. After one or two years, she stopped teaching to care for her small children and Mr. Sparks replaced her using the horse and buggy this time. Another early missionary teacher was Ms. Macy Stevenson, who

is lovingly remembered by many of her former students. Ms. Macy, as she was affectionately called, was a missionary of Associate Reform Presbyterian Church **through** Mexico but was living with her brother, Reverend Stevenson, in the **mass** at Lesslie. When she was asked to undertake the work at the Catawba School, she looked upon this as a God-given opportunity and she made the journey each day by horse and buggy. One of her former pupils, Mrs. Doris Blue, remembers: "I was just a small child at this time and my family were living in Rock Hill, but because we were Indians, I was not allowed to attend the public school there. My father applied for and received citizenship papers, but even so, we were still refused admission to the Rock Hill schools. My parents, realizing the great value of an education, made plans for me to stay with my aunt, Mrs. Rhoda Harris, and my cousin, Betty Harris, during the week and return to Rock Hill for the weekend. Transportation was a real problem, but my father drove me to my aunt's home each Sunday afternoon so I could attend school. Ms. Macy was my teacher. On Friday afternoon I stayed at school until Ms. Macy had finished all her work. Then she took me in her buggy to Lesslie and took care of me until I boarded the 8:00 train for Rock Hill. I think I did this for one year. After this, my father hired private teachers for me and later for my younger sister, Edna. I especially remember Mrs. Joseph Hall, Mrs. W.C. Sullivan, Mrs. John R. Williams, and Mrs. Dan Hollis. When I was fourteen, in the year 1918, my parents moved back to the reservation and my mother, a graduate of Carlisle School in Pennsylvania, became the teacher of the Indian school. I attended school one year in Cherokee then returned to complete seventh grade at Catawba School.

Never have I been permitted to attend a public school." Sally Harris Wade also remembers Ms. Macy, and especially her love for song and music. She says, "I remember Ms. Macy. I liked her. She was a nice lady, but she couldn't hear good. She wore hearing aids as I remember. She loved to sing and play the organ. This organ Mrs. Dunlap had there. She taught me and Sally Beck and Lily Blue—that's Chief Blue's oldest daughter—to play the organ. She kept one of us an hour after school and taught us to play the organ. She taught Tom and Bob too." Beginning with the fall of 1918, many changes were taking place in the reservation. Mr. and Mrs. Archie Wheelock, after paying for private lessons for several years for their daughters, Doris and Edna, decided to move to a home in the heart of the reservation and enter their children in school there. These girls were fortunate to have their own mother, Rosa Harris Wheelock, as their teacher, as she was well-trained and highly qualified. She had attended school in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, where she met her husband, Archie Baldwin Wheelock, who was also a graduate of Carlisle and an all-American football player, subject of many newspaper articles. This family brought culture to the Catawba Indians and inspired them to strive for an education. Rosa Wheelock was closely involved in the needs of the community because hunger and illness were everywhere. The flu epidemic was especially hard here and many of her pupils became ill and died. One family of Browns was especially hard hit by the dread disease, for as the family returned burying one child from the cemetery, another child had died and must be carried to the same place. One mother and her five children were buried together with a marker in the old cemetery. Mrs. Wheelock also helped the

Red Cross as they set up tents and food kitchens and White people nearby, like Mrs. Grider and others, brought big pots of soup for the sick people. Mrs. Wheelock taught all grades—one through eight, with approximately fifteen to twenty children enrolled—four years, 1918 to 1922. In the fall of 1924, a young bride from Catawba Junction, Mrs. Ernest Patton, came to be the teacher. Her husband, Ernest, was a rural mail carrier, so brought her by car over the bad unpaved roads and returned for her when the mail was delivered in the late afternoon. At this time, she taught grades one through eight and her salary was paid by Mr. Sowers, the agent for the Indian affairs. Mrs. Hall **Spenser** was the next teacher for the school, 1925, [19]26, [19]27. She especially enjoyed teaching language and math, but disliked science, including little green frogs placed in her desk drawer as a prank by the young students.

[Break in recording]

E: In 1935, an outstanding elder of the Mormon Church, Mr. Willard Hayes of Daphne, came as teacher. The first year he had as his assistant Ms. Ethel Smith of Columbia. She taught grades one and two. Mr. Hayes taught the upper grades, up through the ninth grade. At this time, none were going to high school because of a lack of transportation. The county did nothing. The second year there was **no** assistance, so Mr. Hayes taught all the grades. The room was jam-packed with students. He gave the assignments to the ones at the back and all the way at the front he was teaching. The materials were provided by the Indian agent, a certain amount given each year. Mr. Hayes' salary was ninety dollars a year and he never made more than 135 dollars. School started early in the

morning. As he made fires, the girls swept, the boys brought water from the spring. He taught the girls and boys how to make paper cups. A bucket was in the back corner of the room with a dipper also handy. The agent furnished the texts, the tablets, and the pencils. Spring was a difficult time for school because the boys always went home for lunch and if the fish were biting, very few of the boys came back. The art supplies were practically nothing. Mr. Hayes started working with needles and thread to make little designs for necklaces and bracelets, watch fobs, and things of that kind. He made especially one for Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt: a map of the Indian reservation, 134 thousand acres, and in the very middle was one little black bead to show the amount of the land that was now owned by the Indians. Mrs. Eleanor Roosevelt came to Rock Hill—Winthrop College—and Chief Blue presented this to her with a note of thanks from the Indian school. Every pupil put on a few beads on this necklace. Both boys and girls enjoyed participating in this beadwork. They also sold some to the visitors and they started sending some to sell in other places. Busy little fingers kept them out of trouble and the boys began to adapt wire, making designs with wire, to sell as souvenirs. He also started baseball games and other sports. The **bat** was made by wrapping string around a ball of rubber over and over again. The boys seemed to enjoy this and get along well together. Mrs. W.C. Cornwall kept Mr. Hayes from 1938 to 1939, and then Mrs. Mel **Limeburger** worked with him, 1937, [19]38, and [19]39. Mr. **Greer** Leslie became the agent for the Indians after 1935. He was concerned about the Indians, their health, their food, their clothing. At this time, they were all alike. They were poor as church mice. The average

income was very, very small. A lunchroom was added on the left side of the school building and lunches were prepared there with foods given by the government. There was no charge for these lunches. These years were outstanding years because of the great interest of the students in their school and the intelligence they showed. Some of ‘em were sharp students. They enjoyed especially math because they could figure these things out in their heads. They were not as good in reading. Haywood Canty always played marbles standing up. He would not kneel down on his trousers, and someone asked him why. "Oh, it's too hard work for my mother to wash these clothes," he said. He always kept himself immaculately clean. Some of them were very quiet. They would not speak out to answer in class, but they knew the answers and they could write them down. On one occasion a missionary came to visit and asked questions, but the Indians, being very timid and frightened of this stranger, did not answer at all. Finally, the missionary said, "You act like a bunch of wooden Indians." They never cracked a smile, but years afterward, whenever that missionary's name came up, they would laugh and laugh about their strange sense of humor. One of the interesting things Mr. Willard Hayes did was to start a Scout troop for the boys, and his wife, a camping group for the girls. They enjoyed this very much. Chief Sam Blue took an active interest in the school and often came to visit. He knew all the children and they knew him too. He knew also the Indian medicines and often would tell the children about different kinds of medicines, roots, barks, berries, that could be used for their illnesses. Mr. Hayes was probably one of the very few who remembered hearing the Catawba

language. Chief Blue and Sally Gordon, his sister—lived back of the church—drew water up on that village well and they would stop there to talk to each other in the Catawba language. It was this time that Dr. Speck, of the University of Pennsylvania, came to try to record all he could of the language, the stories, the history. At one time, Chief Sam Blue said, "I don't feel good today. I feel very bad because Mr. Speck asked me to give him all the bad words, the dirty words that I remember in the Catawba language." Chief Sam Blue wanted me to teach him to write his name and so I did, so he could sign his wedding certificate. He was thrilled over that trip to Salt Lake City and he had his daughter, Lily, to read prayers and work with him day after day so that he could repeat these letter perfect. He wanted to be able to make a speech at the temple in Salt Lake City and so he did. Off in the city of Rock Hill, some of the men went to work in the textile mills. There was little farming on the reservation because there was little land suitable for that. There were no paved roads leading in here at all. No one seemed to care. The federal government then began to take an interest. As far as the money was concerned, every summer, whatever was left over would be divided out among the Indians and the heads of the family. This was called "drawing money." During the years that Mr. Hayes was here, he saw changes taking place in the Indian life. The log cabins began to disappear. The people took a pride in their heritage and in their past. They began to tell the stories of things that happened long years ago. They were proud of their ancestors and the stories that were behind them. They began to want an education. Sammy **Beck** drove a large, old car into Rock Hill to take some of the ones to the high school

and that was the beginning in the right direction. From this school a number went on to high school, the outstanding intelligent students such as Hayward Canty, Alberta Ferrell, some of the other Blues, the Harrises. And he lived to see them graduate from high school with honors.

[Break in recording]

E: During the summer of 1944, Ms. **Marion** Baker **Hoke** was attending summer school at Winthrop College when Mrs. Dunlap, a former teacher of the school, asked her to ride with her to the Indian reservation. They drove the nine miles from Rock Hill by a carriage pulled by two horses, and Mrs. **Hoke** said, "Little did I dream that I would be teaching there the next year at the Catawba Indian school." Mrs. **Ratery** taught the older children, while Ms. Helen **Ratery** had the younger children. “The thing that impressed me most," said Mrs. **Hoke**, "was that the people were so terribly poor. I had seen poverty before, but never anything like this. I tried to start a school lunch program but was unable to do so. People told me I should never let the Indian get into debt, for they would never pay me. However, I went to York and got the workbooks for each child and at the end of school, every workbook had been paid. I was very devoted to these children and I felt they looked to me as a friend as well as teacher. One year, my students enjoyed writing poetry and when I showed these to my teacher at Appalachian Summer School, she was greatly impressed. I only wish I had saved some of these poems. The pupils helped to make fires, carry water from the **Avon** Spring, and sweep and dust and clean the rooms. The little boys knew exactly how to gather twigs from the forest to start the fire, and I was always at school early,

about 8:00. The larger boys loved to pull the bell rope, especially at lunch time, which meant they would run home for a little something to eat and hurry back to play ball. Even the girls loved that. One thing the children enjoyed was music, and at Christmas and at the close of school we always had an 'entertainment,' as it was called. I well remember the year 1942 when so many were in service, eighteen at that time. So, for the school closing we had patriotic poems and we sang all of the war songs of the Army, the Navy, the Marines, and the Air Force. The parents and children all seemed to enjoy that. And my daughter came to play the piano." In the summer 1947, Mrs. Annie Walton Brock received a surprise telephone call. "Mrs. Brock, I am Fay Cornwall, a teacher at the Catawba Indian school. We need a teacher so badly. Will you come and help us?" Mrs. Brock knew nothing about the reservation, but after a visit to the school and over the reservation, she felt strangely stirred to teach those older children. It was a chance for her to do the same type of artwork in which she was strangely talented and gifted. Around was a natural setting, tall trees around the school building, but a dirty, muddy road leading in. Her day began by driving slowly down this dirt road, picking up children along the way. Fay Cornwall would come behind and pick up some of the others. Usually around twelve children they would bring to the school in this way. The only other person that seemed to go down this road was a rural mail carrier, who somehow made it. “The appearance of the school was an old, dilapidated building. Three rooms: a main entrance, a T-shaped, and two rooms. The desks were shabby, unpainted. Years and years before I came, it looked like that and it did not change. The boys were good to

help start fires. The older girls prepared lunch over an oil stove, soup and sandwiches. I loved to work with art because I had been an art major at Winthrop, and this was a chance to express my talents. But they showed me many things too, for these children were very talented, and all I had to do was stimulate that interest and they went to work. Also, in this new school, Arzada Sanders took over the lunchroom. She was a very talented pottery worker and after lunch was served, she would sometimes come into the classroom to work with a group of boys and girls, showing them the old methods for using clay and sanding stones. There were very few pleasures in life for these children and I was glad for them to have this opportunity. Our people started corresponding with a school in North Carolina and they bought some thirty or forty pieces of the pottery that we had made. When Christmas time came, we wanted a special time for the children—'a gathering,' they called it—with recitations, songs, and so forth. My husband came to play Santa Claus and they were very thrilled. A little boy tugged at his beard and said, 'I know he was the real thing because when I pulled on his whiskers and beard they did not even come off.' Another nice thing about this gathering, there were gifts from the North Carolina children. Much nicer gifts than we would ordinarily have. One event that I remember at this time, Chief Blue came to talk to the children about Christmas long ago. 'Right here on these school grounds,' he said, 'the men got together and demonstrated the shooting with the bows and arrows. There was dancing.' And then he told them how they must all believe in the supreme God. They did the bear dance and that was very interesting to the younger group and certainly it was to the teachers,

too. The discipline was very easy because the children were interested. It was good to walk and to work with this pleasant group. After they got to know you, they gave you a respect, but you had to be accepted and then things went very smoothly. I was impressed by their poverty. Their homes were very poor. Usually two rooms. Some had blinds for windows and most of them had open fires. And yet, I saw in these that they had a future. The future would be very, very good for these diligent, intelligent children, so anxious to get an education." Mrs. Brock was the teacher here, 1947-[19]48, [19]48-[19]49, [19]49-[19]50. In 1950-[19]51, Mrs. Price and Mrs. **Levata** Cornish came to be the teachers. Mrs. Price taught the upper grades, and Mrs. Cornish, grades one through three. Mrs. Cornish had been teaching district number three, Rock Hill, and so when she applied for this vacancy, they were glad to have her as a teacher. She received the same salary as other teachers in the district. The supplies were very difficult to get. They had to improvise and do without. Sometimes it was difficult to get textbooks and workbooks for each child, but the children always paid for these. They would go to York—the teachers did—to get the books and then they would be given out. The children were very quiet. They were busy. There was good discipline in the room. There were no teaching aids, no music, but there was a great deal of artistic ability in the school as the children learned to draw and to paint and they loved to sing. Later on, Mrs. Robinson came, and she taught them a great deal about music. The old school burned and so the teachers moved to a new building at the top of the hill, close to the church. This gave the children a great opportunity for many things. There was plenty of space to play ball, to run, to play

jump rope, and they always used their chants as they jumped the rope. Mr. W.C. Sullivan, the superintendent, and Mr. Pope were interested in providing the students with all the materials that they could for sports. Every day, the children would attend devotionals in the nearby church and this Bible teaching was done by parents. There was no conflict in this religious teaching. The basic learnings were the same as in other schools. In math they were very good, very quick, reasoning the answers out orally. They were logical, they were observant, more so than other children. In science they enjoyed excursions into the nature: the walks to the spring, the leaves, the berries, the moss, the rocks. They enjoyed all of this. They brought pottery that they had made at home to show or to give away. And Arzada Sanders, the cook, was still interested in coming in and showing them how to make pottery. Many visitors came to see the school. Sometimes the parents objected to this. Winthrop girls put on parties and other schools joined in to help make this an enjoyable experience for the Indian children. Mrs. Sarah Robinson joined with **Levata** Cornish in 1953 and worked with her until 1966, and she brought a great deal of interest to these children. In fact, a whole new world was opened up to them as visitors came from Rock Hill, from Columbia, and other places. One of the interesting things they did was to put on a Thanksgiving dinner and the children were all dressed as pilgrims or as Indians as there were years ago. This school was heated by gas, two little gas heaters for each room, with a large coal heater for the auditorium. And so this gave the children more time to work on their lessons, since they did not have to sweep or make fires. The parents, too, were cooperative and friendly. They were

open and willing to discuss the problems with their teachers. And so, this was a period of time when the Indian children really went forward. They were recognized and known in the city of Rock Hill. Just before Christmas, there was a big parade in Rock Hill sponsored by the city and the Indian school was invited to participate. And so, the parents got busy making costumes for their children. Mr. Sullivan provided a large truck and this truck was decorated with trees and wigwams and things of that kind. Then the boys practiced on their dances, led by one of the Indian boys, a Canty. When the time came, the children were very, very excited. The large truck parked on the side street, pulled out into the main stream downtown for everyone to see. And every time the truck stopped at a stop light, the boys would jump up and do their dance. The old timers well remember because there are pictures to show this. These Indian children really stole the show on the parade in Rock Hill, 1955-[19]56. In the fall, September of 1966, the Catawba Indian school was closed and all these students were brought by bus to the Lesslie Elementary School. The principal was Mr. Herbert Crawford. At that time, his wife, Gwenn Crawford, was teaching the third grade. In her class, there were a group of Indians, a group of Whites, and a group of Blacks. And these had little to do with each other. They sat in little groups all by themselves. They played this way on the playground. Mrs. Crawford was a very loving and talented teacher, very talented in music and art, and she did everything she could to integrate this class and bring them into a happy relationship. But she felt that it was a real failure. Until one day there was a fight on the school grounds and she went out to see what she could do. After hearing the story from each child, she

sent the White boy to the principal and the little Indian boy continued to play on the grounds. That won their hearts and after this she had no other problems. Today, these children are scattered all over the Rock Hill school districts and high school and other places. Many have graduated from the high school. It's interesting to note that Doris Blue's daughter was one of the first ones to graduate from the high school, the very schools where her mother was forbidden to enter or to study. And so, today, great changes have taken place because from these schools have gone forth talented, trained, educated Catawba Indians. They have integrated into the life and the activities of the community and of the city. Today, there are secretaries, teachers, dental assistants, nurses, technicians, electricians. They are working everywhere: in mills, in factories, Bowater, Celanese, York, the hospitals, everywhere. And from the Carolinas to Florida and far out to Oklahoma, the pattern of their life reaches out to help and to teach and to inspire other people. So, the Catawbas live on. Not only in our memories, but also in our daily life. And for them, we give thanks.

[End of interview]

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