

# Great On Purpose

*Christian Wells is a 48-year-old African American woman who moved to Tacoma at a young age. She is originally from Baltimore, Maryland, where the rest of her family is from as well. She was raised by a young single mother, Cynthia Terry, who dropped out of high school and moved in with her sister in Washington. The interview was conducted over the phone.*

**Me:** *What's your name?*

**Mom:** My name is Christian Wells.

**Me:** *And what is your relation to me?*

**Mom:** My relation to you is I am your mother.

**Me:** *Would you like to say anything about yourself, like what you do for a living, your hobbies, anything like that?*

**Mom:** Yes, well once again I am Christian Wells, I first and foremost am the mother of three wonderful kids, one including Ciona Wells, married to a great wonderful husband. I work for Boeing, I have been here for over 25 years. I love to participate and watch my children play sports, uhm.. Yeah that's just a little background about me.

**Me:** *I wanted to talk about your childhood a little bit, how old were you when you moved to Washington?*

**Mom:** I moved to Washington from Baltimore, Maryland when I was about 5 or 6, so back in roughly 1979,1980.

**Me:** *Do you know why you moved across the country?*

**Mom:** We moved to Washington because I had an aunt up here that moved via military, she was married to a military man and ended up being stationed over here without any family. My grandmother actually thought it would be better for my mom to start fresh up in Washington, so my mom moved up here with her sister.

**Me:** *How old was you mom when she had you?*

**Mom:** My mom was... she had me three days before her seventeenth birthday.

**Me:** *Do you have any memories of your childhood in Baltimore?*

*When I asked this question, her tone seemed to light up, like she was excited to recite some happy moments in her life.*

**Mom:** I do, I have many memories of my childhood in Baltimore, a lot of them had to do with sitting on the stoop, eating watermelon, playing tag, running up and down our little block, that was pretty much our zone of how far we could go. But yeah, lots of singing games, playing tag, eating crab, yeah...lots of memories.

**Me:** *So you liked it?*

**Mom:** I did.

*When I was young, my mom always told my siblings and I that we weren't allowed to pass the line where the grass and pavement met when playing in the front yard, so it was funny hearing how she had the same rule as a kid. She's always loved quality family time: just talking, playing games, having fun, and I can now see that a lot of that enjoyment is rooted in her upbringing.*

**Me:** *What's your earliest memory in Washington?*

*She paused for a moment and sighed.*

**Mom:** My earliest memory in Washington was the ride to Washington. We took the Greyhound Bus, which was about a four or five day ride from Maryland to Washington because we stopped every freaking 45 minutes, it felt like. Just all the trees and the greenery and the grass. You know, the difference was Baltimore had lots of sidewalks, and Washington had lots of grass, and places to play and run. So, that was my first memory in Washington.

**Me:** *What was your environment like growing up, economically and emotionally?*

**Mom:** Well, when we first moved here we stayed with my aunt until my mom got on her own feet and could afford her own place. We actually moved a block over from my aunt and uhm...it was funny because we were very low income, but I at the time didn't even know it because of my upbringing, I mean it was just so fun and there was just so much love uhm... and I got everything I needed, my needs were always met. So yes I came from a single parent home, because I only had one parent, but she did the best she could with what she had and it allowed me to still flourish without ever really feeling like I didn't have, I guess I could say.

*My mom's father was killed before she was born, so she never got the chance to meet him. I don't know much about what happened, but my mother has never seemed bothered by the fact that she grew up without a father. Every Father's Day, she gets her Mother gifts because she's always played both roles in her life.*

**Me:** *Did you ever feel like you "didn't have" because you only had one parent?*

**Mom:** I did not. I think because I involved myself in a lot of extracurricular activities; before school and after school programs, I had a lot of friends, so it wasn't like I felt like I was totally missing out. Uhm.. Yeah I was good.

**Me:** *You were just talking about extracurriculars, what kinds did you participate in?*

**Mom:** I did jump rope for the American Heart Association, I ran track every summer, I also ran track throughout the school year, I tried out soccer one year. I also participated in Bible Study classes,

which were fun, and other youth programs at the youth center near where I lived. You could just go there and you know, be a kid.

*We paused and got side tracked on the fact that she played soccer, I had never heard about that from her. My mother is a great athlete, but I can't see her playing any sport other than track, which was her passion. She went to college on a full ride scholarship to run and coached track at the college level as well. I then went back to my intended questions.*

**Me:** *How did athletics help or hurt you throughout your life?*

**Mom:** Athletics have helped me throughout my life because it allowed me to become a team player, it also allowed me to learn how to kind of... prepare for things. You know, the same way you prepare for a game or a race, you prepare for work. So I can relate athletic preparation to work life preparation because in sports you stretch, you acclimate your body to the environment you're about to put it in, and it's the same for work environment, you have to learn and grow, you have to deal with people, you are expected to have a team mindset, so they correlate a lot with one another. Yeah, I can say sports have totally prepared me for the work life environment.

**Me:** *Alright, now that we're on the topic of sports, I know you ran track in college. What college did you go to?*

**Mom:** I went to Eastern Washington University.

**Me:** *Was college track what you expected? Did you enjoy it?*

**Mom:** Uhm... I did eventually enjoy it.

*She laughed, I could envision her shaking her head and smiling.*

**Mom:** Coming from high school track to go into college track, it was just a different environment as far as coaches. I think in high school my coach was a little more lax, I got to college and I had a real life, actually drill sergeant. She was a sergeant drill sergeant in the Air Force, so she was very militant. So for the first few weeks of track in college, I didn't even know if I was cut out for it because it was hard, it was demanding, put a strain on your body. I said I would give it a month before I walked away, but then my body got used to it, my brain got used to it, and I started seeing improvements.

*My mom has always been very close with the role models she's had in her life, I've met most of her coaches and teachers that she is still in contact with, and all her chosen family. She's very good at expressing her gratitude and being intentional with spending time with those she loves. A few years back, her college track coach passed away, and she bought a ticket to fly across the country to attend her funeral.*

**Me:** *What did you major in?*

**Mom:** I majored in construction technology, and then I got a minor in communications, and then I got a Masters in industrial technology.

**Me:** *Do you feel like you chose the right profession? If not, what would you rather be doing?*

**Mom:** Uhm... I do feel like I chose the right profession. You know, there's always room for improvement, and there's always that question in the back of your head saying "should I have done

this? Should I have went in to this?" Whenever I get those questions in my head I tend to go volunteer my time, or go be a track coach, or help out a youth center with jump rope. So I can still satisfy things that I want to do, even if that's not my sole profession, I can still help and participate.

*Both my parents are very active in the community, my father has worked in recreational sports my whole life, so I remember spending my weekends at tournaments and football games that my dad was coaching, working concessions with my mom, and seeing all the extra time and money that they put into these activities to give kids a positive outlet in their lives. I find myself wanting to be involved in the same kinds of activities because of how I was raised.*

**Me:** *Can you say that being an African American woman in your field has affected you in any way? She hesitated when answering this question.*

**Mom:** Yes I can say that, there have been many times, being that I went to EWU in Cheney, near Spokane, and at that time there were not very many African Americans on campus. That didn't deter me from going to college, it just made me aware that I was one of few. There are times in the work place where I'm either the only African American or the only woman in a room; whether that be in the classroom or in a meeting. So I have had those situations where people thought that because I am female, they'd assume that I wasn't in the right place. You know, the degree path that I went was predominantly male, so they'd assumed I was in the wrong class... But like I said, as long as you know information and can prove your skill set and that you are good enough to be where you are at, people will totally accept you and let your work ethic do the proving.

**Me:** *Have there been instances where you have felt discriminated against?*

**Mom:** You know, there's a lot. Sometimes it's kind of blatant, but if you call folks out on it when you feel discriminated against by repeating what they've said back to them, and say "So what I heard you say is," and put them on the spot where they have to clarify what they are meaning by what they are saying, they'll start backpedaling, but if you let it go unnoticed and don't bring attention to it, they'll continue to do it. So in my history, I have learned to call it out on the carpet and deal with it, because a lot of work places have zero tolerance for any type of discrimination, but you have to stand your ground, know your worth, and know your value.

*I thought back to a time where my family went out to eat dinner. My mom sat on one side of the table next to my brother, and my father, my sister, and I sat on the other side. When we finished eating, our waitress looked at my parents for a moment, then asked how we'd be splitting the check. Even as an 8-year-old, something felt off about that situation, and I wondered why she didn't assume that we were family.*

**Me:** *Has discrimination ever affected you and dad's relationship?*

**Mom:** You know, when we first started dating, being an interracial couple, you'd get the looks, you'd get the stares, you'd get the little smirks and sly remarks, but again, I believe that everybody has a choice, and you can allow things to affect you or you can choose to have your own inner peace with whatever you are doing. Yeah, you could allow people's comments to drive your feelings, but you

know, why? What good is that going to do? So, I think that everyone has a choice, and people can choose how they want to feel about certain things. You can be angry about something, but you can also take that anger and put it to good use. Ignore other people's insecurities and move on, because people are brought up in different ways, different background and different histories, but they don't pay my bills either, so-

*We paused and laughed.*

**Mom:** I choose a higher path and move on.

**Me:** *What would you say your purpose or main goal of life is?*

**Mom:** I would say to be happy. I would also like my family to be happy; to get up and do the right thing, show my kids the value in having a good education and being a good citizen, and being productive in the community would be my purpose. If I could leave an imprint on my family so that they can make an impact on their environment and surroundings, I'd feel like I've done a great job.

**Me:** *What's one piece of advice you wish you were given as a young adult that you would like to give me now?*

*I sighed, and we talked about the fact that I'm going to be 18 next year. She gives me advice often on whatever I am struggling with, so she had to think for a moment to answer this question.*

**Mom:** The best piece of advice I've ever been given is that you have a choice, you know, we tend to say "oh so and so made me mad, that person made me do this," no one makes you do anything. You ultimately have a choice in life, and you get to choose whether you want to be mad, whether you want to be happy, whether you want to-it's all about choices, so make the right choice, and even when things that are negative affect you, use them and create them into something good, learn from them and move on.

**Me:** *Any final comments?*

**Mom:** Nope, I just hope that you have a blessed and wonderful day miss lady, on purpose.

*I laughed, because my mother always tells me to "have a great day on purpose" and hugs me on my way out of the door.*

**Me:** *Alright, thank you.*

**Mom:** Alright, I love you dear.

**Me:** *Love you too, bye.*