

Alphonso Norris, Jr.
(Recorded interview November 4, 2000)

I was born April 6, 1935, with the help of a midwife on James Street in a tenant house that belonged to a Mrs. Lee. We stayed there until I was six months old and then moved in with my aunt who was a maid for the late Dr. Dave Gray and his family. They lived on Church Street and the tenant house that we lived in faced Benson Street.

My father's father was John Norris and my grandmother was Mattie Williams Norris. The Norris name comes from the Anderson plantation which was down on the Abbeville Highway. My great-great-grandfather was a slave on that plantation. His name was Billy Norris. He took on the plantation owner's name. After the Emancipation Proclamation he continued to live on the plantation.

Descendents of the white Norris family were the founders of Perpetual Building and Loan. Julius Anderson descended from the Norris family. His great-great-grandfather on his mother's side was Bobby Norris.

Jim Gray Watson and John Watson were grandsons of Dr. Gray. We used to play together. My nickname, and what Jim calls me to this day, was Rabbit because my ears stuck out from my head. I was not allowed to go into their house. When it was time for them to eat they would say, "Rabbit, you go home." I never will forget sitting on the front porch of the Gray's residence on Church Street and eating my first banana.

Dr. Gray owned and operated a drug store on the Square. It was on the Benson side of the Square. Like most of the business people, he would walk to his store. Most of the people who had businesses downtown lived close to downtown and walked to work. Dr. Gray's route would be to go up Benson Street. He would come from the back of his house down beside where we lived. There was a gate. When I got large enough and would see him coming, I would run and open the gate for him. He thought that was the grandest thing. He would give me a penny every time I opened the gate for him.

I started saving the pennies. Later on, as years passed, my father started selling African-American publications, the *Pittsburgh Courier*, the *Chicago Defender*, *Jet Magazine* and *Ebony Magazine*. We had a big tin can and he would throw change in with my pennies. We decided we needed to put the pennies in the bank. We got a taxicab and went to the bank. The banker said, "No, we can not take those pennies like that. You are going to have to roll them." We went home and sat around the heater and rolled the pennies. We ended up with something like \$80 worth of pennies and carried them back to the bank. The banker got so interested that he called the newspaper. That was the first time I was in the newspaper. I must have been 9 or 10 years old at the time.

Dr. & Mrs. Gray had employees in the house including my aunt, Rosa Lee, who had been with them from about 16 years of age. Her family had lived on the Gray farm as sharecroppers. She was one out of several children who was not very strong. She couldn't do the work in the fields so she came to be a maid and worked for that family up until a few years before she died. She probably worked for them 60 some odd years. Dr. Gray had a butler who worked around the house and was also the chauffeur. I never knew his real name. All I knew was "Newt." I remember him being a very polite person.

Dr. Gray kept a Buick car in the garage for very special occasions. On Sunday mornings with Newt driving, me in the front seat, and Dr. Gray in the backseat we would go around and look at the property he owned. He owned a lot of land. I can remember just sitting up there on the passenger side, Newt driving and he in the back seat. He was a wealthy man.

My parents never owned a car. I didn't learn to drive until I was 22 years old. I was in college.

I was an only child. I had a couple of brothers who died at birth because of poor healthcare. When I was born on James Street, Dr. Breedin's hospital was right up the street. I believe St. Mary's Hospital was the name of it. Dr. Breedin was a very unique individual. At that time black physicians could not admit patients to the Anderson hospital. They could refer their patients to a white physician and they would admit them. But Dr. Breedin, who was white, started his own hospital and permitted black physicians to admit patients. As I understand it, he was also a lawyer. At any rate there were some malpractice cases where he defended himself.

They tell the story, and I don't know how true it is, that there was a man who for some reason had a problem that caused him to walk bent over. Evidently he had money and his wife didn't want to have a husband walk around all bent over. They tried different treatments. No one could do anything about it. Dr. Breedin attempted a procedure and the person died. He was sued. He defended himself, won, and was cleared.

I was allergic to milk. Dr. Breedin prescribed goat's milk and that saved my life. My parents always told me I was hardheaded because I was raised on goat's milk.

Back then lawyers, especially ones who practiced in court, were very flamboyant. As a pastime, some people would go to the courthouse just to listen to cases being tried. They would have a packed courthouse.

Everyone congregated on Church Street. Church Street was easily accessible. I remember my father came in the house one evening in 1941 and said that the United States declared war today. My mother looked at him and said, "What in the world are you talking about?" She could care less. She didn't know what he was talking about. She had no interest.

Although the house had no electric lights, it did have an outdoor bathroom, a commode out from the house. It was on the sewer line.

My mother washed and ironed in the home for a living. She would wash clothes around a washpot. Stores like Woolworth and J.C. Penney on Saturday afternoons would restock and throw out pasteboard boxes. We would get them. She would make a fire with them and boil the clothes she was washing. She had to stand and keep feeding the boxes around the fire to keep it going.

She washed for some noted people in the community like the Brown family who started a newspaper in Anderson. They lived over on Market Street. Before Jim Gray Watson married, she did his laundry. When he was a student at the University of South Carolina and drove a T model I remember him coming and picking up the clothes. Jim may be 70 now, and I am 65.

My mother actually washed for and did the laundry for black people. She went to the third grade in school but she knew more about psychology than anybody I ever knew. People would bring her something and she would just say, "Mrs. So and So, this is the nicest stuff, I so appreciate this." She would take it straight through the house to the back yard and burn it up. I would say, "Mama why do you tell those people that you need this and this is so valuable and you are so appreciative and you take it out and burn it up?" She said, "Well, if I do that, if I make them think I am thankful, maybe one day they will give me something I can use." I learned a lot from her.

Mother made the lye soap she used for washing. She may not have had a washpot full of clothes for one family or maybe they had a pot and a half so she would mix the clothes together and wash them and boil them. When she would iron them she would separate them into stacks. If you asked her, "How do you know that this belongs to this family?" She would say, "Oh, this looks like Mrs. So and So." If those white people had found out that she had mixed their clothes, they would have been upset.

She ironed the clothes at night. Because there was no electricity she had a charcoal bucket. A charcoal bucket is a bucket filled with charcoal like we use for grilling. She would heat the irons in the charcoal bucket. The light would be a kerosene lamp. She would iron white shirts and they would look whiter than when they come out of the laundry today. Once she heated the iron she would take rags and wipe it until she got all of the soot off and then iron the shirt.

My father was the second oldest of three brothers and three sisters. His father, John Norris, at one time owned a farm which is now a part of the city sewer treatment plant located on the Rocky River. He lost it during the Great Depression.

My grandfather was quite flamboyant. He was one of the first blacks to own a car in Anderson. His oldest son became a successful businessman in Atlanta during the war tearing down houses where they were expanding and reselling the materials.

My father did not get a regular full-time job until he was 41. That was at Appleton Mill. He was 35 years old when I was born. For a long time he made his living cutting wood in the mill village. He cut it by the cord using an ax. At that time in the textile industry blacks did not

work inside the mill. They worked outside on what they called the yard. They unloaded the train boxcars. They worked around in the mill village and did anything that needed to be done. My father later got a job inside of the plant cleaning the water houses, the bathrooms. He worked there until he retired at age 62.

In 1941, almost the time for me to go to school, Dr. Dave Gray died. Mrs. Gray went to Belton to live with her daughter, Mrs. West. My aunt went to Belton with her and became the West's cook and maid. They had a small tenant house in the back of their house in Belton. Here we were with no place to live so my mother asked my father, "What are we going to do?" He said, "I am going to build a house." She said, "You don't have any money." In fact, at that time, he didn't have a full-time job. He had worked with the Works Project Administration down at Santee Cooper. But back sometime before that, he had a sister who died and he had a \$200 insurance policy on her. He put \$100 on the burial expenses and took the other \$100 and bought a lot over on the west side on a street called Ila Street, the area known as Cemetery Hill.

The lot, and I still own the lot to this day, was 50 feet wide and 100 feet deep. In the back there was an alley. A lot of land over in that area was owned by the Geisberg family. Mr. Geisberg and a black man took a tape measure and laid out the lots. They put stakes down. There was no survey. There was no sewer and there were no paved streets. We had an outdoor toilet in the back.

My father went to Perpetual Building and Loan Association because of the family connections with his great-grandfather being a slave on the Norris Plantation. Julius Anderson approved a \$400 loan. This was 1941. That \$400 built a four-room house – a front porch, a back porch and four rooms. We had electric lights for the first time with light bulbs hanging down. There were no closets, no outlets. The house was built by Mr. John Linley, Jr.

Back in that time it was hard to get a white contractor to build a home for a black person but it didn't make any difference to Mr. Linley. That is who Linley Park is named after. About a year later Frank Mauldin's parents built a house next door to us and the price had doubled to \$800 – but they had one closet in the house.

The war was really getting geared up about that time. My father was too old. He was classified 4F. Things were rationed. For black people, and probably poor people generally, even if you had ration stamps it was hard to get certain food items like meats. Most of the stores were locally owned and the wealthy people usually went to the store everyday and got fresh meats. The storeowners would hold a lot of the rationing stuff back for their regular customers.

We didn't have a problem getting ration stamps. There were a lot of people who had large families and it was always a trade-off. My parents would give them something and they would let them have stamps. Sugar was a hard item to get.

Rationed food items helped build the business of the Richbourg Supermarkets. Richbourg would advertise in the paper that he was getting in a truckload of lard, meat or whatever. They had one store then down on South Main Street. I have seen people lined up from the store all the

way up to the side of the historical courthouse. It was first come, first serve. If you got there before they ran out you were able to get what you needed. Richbours became a real household name during that time. Eventually the predecessor of Bi-Lo bought them out.

In my community, World War II was an economic boon because of jobs. Before the war it was hard for a black person to get a job. If you worked for the mill, you had a good job. There were a few people who worked for the railroad. There were Civilian Conservation Corps camps and the Public Works Administration. The Public Works Administration built the old McCants school building. They worked a lot of men. I own a little piece of land that was a part of the black CCC camp on Amity Road. A lot of people transitioned from the CCC camps into the military. My father's youngest brother went from there into the Army. People who lived in our community who went off to World War II were able to send allotment checks back home. Even if it was less than \$100 that was still a lot of money back then.

I started at the Reed Street School. The principal was Professor S. C. Perry. In the second grade the teacher decided to teach me to read one day. She put me on a stool in front of her and every time I could not pronounce a word she hit me on the shoulder with a leather strap. When I got home my mother kept noticing me pulling on my shirt. She said, "What's wrong?" I wouldn't dare tell her that I had gotten those licks in school. I kept rubbing my shoulder and she finally grabbed me and saw the blood. She made me tell her what had happened. She got really upset. She said, "Come on. Something is going to be done about this."

We went to the principal's house which was right across the street from the school. She didn't think she got any satisfaction from him. The superintendent lived on East Franklin Street. Back in those days black people, colored people, didn't go to a white person's front door. You went to the back door. But this day she was so upset we went to the front door. I mean she was upset. He said that he would look into it the next morning. Before I went to school the next morning, around 7, the teacher was at our house. She was offering to pay for my mother to drop the issue. My mother said, "No. I don't want any money" but she said she didn't like what she did to me. When I got to school that day Prof. Perry called me to the office and said, "Do you want to be transferred to another teacher?" This was in the middle of the year. I said, "No, sir." I figured that if I stayed in that class I didn't have anything to worry about the rest of the year.

I have always worked. My first job was working in a local grocery store in our community. It was owned by Mr. Charles Duckett and he had a restaurant and a grocery store. I must have been about 11 years old or younger. They let me make change from the cash register. I will never forget one experience. On a Saturday we were always busy and some way I got home one Saturday night and had a \$20 bill in my pocket. I knew I shouldn't have \$20. Someway I had made a mistake and put it in my pocket. I remember carrying it back and saying, "I don't know how I got this but it's not mine. I am sure it belongs to the store."

Off and on I delivered newspapers, the *Anderson Daily Mail*, after school. The Independent Publishing Company office was on Market Street. You had to go behind the building where they had a little opening and they would throw the papers out at you. It wasn't too far from Mr. Wilton Hall's office, the owner and publisher of the papers. I could stand there and

hear him ranting and raving. The way he treated some of his employees I wondered how they continued to work there.

In 1945 I was delivering the *Daily Mail* when World War II ended. Normally I delivered the papers to homes on the west side of town but this particular day we walked down the street and called, "Extra! Extra!" Bells were ringing; people were on Main Street shouting. That was a good day for me because I sold a lot of extra papers. They published an extra edition. That was a happy day.

I remember when they were talking in the papers about the effect of Hartwell Lake on Anderson – how much it was going to mean. I couldn't believe it, but it all came true.

Most of my newspaper delivery was walking. I got my first bicycle for Christmas and it was one with skinny, small tires. It was a used bicycle and my father put it on layaway at John Gates' place at their location then at Murray and Whitner. My parents never tried to tell me there was a Santa Claus. They didn't try to fool me. I would sit on the bicycle in the house and waited until Christmas Day to take it out.

By and large being an only child with great support from my parents made life not hard for me. My parents were very supportive. If there was food in the house, I got the food. When we lived with my aunt, she would bring food home from Dr. Gray's house. She would bring food for me. The times were hard for a lot of people. We didn't know the difference. The biggest thing I worried about growing up was how I was going to make a living.

I remember I wasn't doing very well in school and thought, "Well, maybe I can work with my hands." I ordered a radio kit. I was going to learn to be a radio repairman. That was the biggest mistake of my life. They sent me all this stuff and I didn't know what in the world to do with it. They kept sending me bills. I think I paid about \$75 for it. I sold a lot of papers to pay for that. I was afraid I was going to go to jail if I didn't pay for it.

Before that time and during that time, I was a caddy at the Anderson Country Club. I would caddy after school. I can remember running all the way from Reed Street School to the Anderson Country Club just so I could get there in time to caddy. I was not going to miss school but a lot of the caddys on Wednesdays would not come to school because that was a big day for caddying. Downtown pretty much closed down and the people who played golf played on Wednesday afternoons. It was interesting to listen to the conversations as people played. At that time those were the people who ran Anderson. A lot of textile industry people played. I got a different perspective about things. They had tennis courts at the Country Club and we would see people playing. I guess that was the only way we knew tennis existed.

Mr. Brown Williams was my fifth grade teacher. He probably did not have a college degree. A lot of the teachers back then did not have college degrees. Before teaching he ran a drug store, filled prescriptions. That was when you didn't have to go to school to become a pharmacist. I think Mr. Pete Glenn was one of those people, also.

When Mr. Williams worked for the schools he had cadets he would teach to march. We marched in the Christmas parade when we were in the fifth grade. The discipline was a great experience. Even while he was still teaching he had a baseball league of black youth. They played down behind what is now the Jim Ed Rice Recreation Center. He got sponsors like Royal Crown Bottling Company. He worked for the city and the city furnished uniforms. He had a public address system and would do play-by-play. People thought that was just great. During the season, on the afternoons they played games, you could see folks walking from all across town to the game. He was also in charge of the football team at Reed Street. He was quite a dynamic person in the community and there is a lot of history related to Mr. Brown Williams.

In 1951 the new Westside High School was built and Mr. Bowen Wakefield became the principal. We had been attending Reed Street School. In the new school there was a gymnasium. Reed Street had played their basketball games outside. The students had put up a burlap fence and wood planks in the ground for seats.

Father Francis, the Catholic Priest at St. Mary's Church, had started a basketball team of male black high school students. Brown Williams had then gotten the city to build some basketball courts behind his house, outdoor basketball courts. By 1951 Father Francis had developed several players who were pretty good. They became a part of the Westside basketball team. The coach was Coach William Roberts.

I decided I wanted to be a basketball player. One of the people who had a great impact on my life was Coach Roberts. I finally managed to get to dress for some of the games my junior year and go on a couple of trips. He didn't do like most coaches during that time. Most coaches would give you a uniform at the beginning of the season. Coach Roberts would list who was going to dress out on the day of the game. He never cut anybody from of the team. They had 13 uniforms and only 13 players could dress for each game. There were a few times I was the 13th person on the list.

Mr. Wakefield had worked in Columbia, had contacts, and would schedule teams like Booker T. Washington and C. A. Johnson in Columbia. That meant the team would have to leave by lunchtime. They would pull the bus in front of the school and have a pep rally. Then the team would load up. If you weren't getting on the bus, you didn't want to be seen. I would just leave school and go home.

On Saturdays and Sundays, every chance I could get, I would be in that gym by myself shooting. The school was closed but I would always make sure that I left a window open in the locker room so I could go in through the window. Some of the really good players graduated after my junior year and I think I ended up being the second highest scorer on the team my senior year.

The thing I learned from basketball was that if I didn't have a lot of ability but worked hard enough I could have some success. That has been one of the things I have lived by all of my life.

They talk about children who don't want to study and don't want to carry books. That was the same way it was with us. We wanted to be viewed as being able to do our work without ever being seen with a book. We rented our schoolbooks back then. We would rent our books and keep them at home. It was always possible to find somebody who didn't care too much for his books and kept them laying around so we would pick them up and have a set at school as well as a set at home. People would see us going home with no books but we would go home and study.

There was not much mixing of white kids and black kids; but when I was in high school whites and blacks would get together on some Sunday afternoons at old Reed Street Park and play football against each other. We called it "outlaw football." Out of that experience I developed a very close relationship with a fellow by the name of David Hooper who served on the city council and later county council. We often talk about those days.

I mentioned earlier about being worried about making a living. Sometime during high school I got called to Prof. Perry's office. I thought, "Oh, Lord. I am in trouble now. What does the principal want?" He told me when I got there that a man in town by the name of Mr. Bob Curry who owned a place that made glasses wanted him to recommend someone to deliver glasses. He said, "I have been observing you and you seem like the type of person who would be good to do this." I said, "Thank you." He said, "You go by and see him."

Mr. Bob Curry and his brother Mr. Jim Curry operated Carolina Optical Supply. They were located upstairs on McDuffie Street behind what is now a county building. I started after school and in the summer I worked full-time. I made \$30 a week and walked around town to all of the doctors' offices delivering glasses.

After awhile, Mr. Curry said, "I need for you to quit school and work full-time. I need somebody full-time." I worked all summer but I knew I was not going to quit school. The secretary, Ms. Sutherland, would come and catch me alone and tell me, "You better not quit school." I will never forget her for that.

Then I worked for John B. Lee for Music. My job was to clean up and mail records to people who couldn't come into town to buy records. Mr. Lee ran a little form in the paper and people filled it out to order records. We would send them C.O.D. That was quite an experience for me. Saturdays were the biggest day and the only time Mr. Lee would leave the cash register would be to go to the Clemson football games. He would always come back after the games to check the register.

I decided that I wanted to be a plumber. It was something I could do with my hands and I applied to A&T – Agriculture and Technical College – in Greensboro, North Carolina. My father had gone to Tuskegee when it was a normal school. He had taken painting for a short period. He got homesick and came back home and regretted it. He always talked about me going to college.

After my senior year, I got a job working for the Jewel Box. Mr. Winestein was the owner. I would clean the front of the building, do the windows, vacuum and help in the

stockroom, but half of my job was to go up to Mr. Winestein's house. He lived on Moultrie Square. I would work in the house, do the floors, the grass and all that kind of stuff. That summer I saved all of the money so I could go to college. I would walk from the store up there. The bus was about 10 cents then but I would save it.

I took all of my money home and gave it to my mother to put away for me to go to college. As the time to get ready to go to school came, I said, "Mother, how much money have I got?" She said, "I don't have any of that money. I took it to pay my bills." My father was sitting there and it was just like the world came to an end. My father said, "You are going to school. We will find a way. You are going to school."

I had been accepted at Tuskegee in education. I had gotten accepted in plumbing at A&T. Probably plumbing was my choice. Westside High School was playing its first football game on that Friday night before I was supposed to be at A&T in Greensboro on Saturday. There was no way I could see that football game and be at Greensboro, North Carolina, that next morning. I decided I was going to Tuskegee. I didn't have to be there until Sunday. There were two other people in my class who were going to Tuskegee.

We stayed to see the football game and got on the bus the next morning. I had never been to Atlanta in my life. When the bus got to the Atlanta bus station, I said, "Lord, if I had known that Atlanta was like this I would have gone to school in Atlanta." We got on the next bus and had about a three-hour trip from Atlanta to Tuskegee, stopping everywhere. We pulled up to a place and thought we heard the bus driver say, "Tuskegee." We looked out the window and on one side were bales of cotton stacked three bales high – right in the middle of the main street. On the other side was a block building we figured out was the bus station with footlockers stacked up in front. We went up and asked the bus driver, "Is this Tuskegee?" He said, "Yes."

We got off and asked someone the way to the campus. He said, "You go down this way" and pointed. We started walking. About 4 miles later, we got to the campus. We noticed a sign that said Dean of Men Office. We went in and there was an elderly gentleman. He jumped all over us. He said, "What are you doing down here? You are not supposed to be here until tomorrow. We don't have any place for you to stay." We were standing there looking pitiful. He said his name was Captain Ecton. He had been there when Booker T. Washington was there.

He said, "Where are you from?" We said, "Anderson, South Carolina." All of a sudden his whole demeanor changed. He said, "Do you know W. I. Peek?" We said, "Yes, sir." He went on talking for a time. He said, "Yeah, W. I. Peek was an outstanding student and athlete here." He put us up in an upper classmen dorm which was truly a blessing. Freshmen were down on the backside of the campus in barracks and you couldn't sleep, you couldn't study or do anything. I would see these juniors and seniors studying all of the time and I said, "Well, I need to study." It was a great influence on me. That got me off to a good start.

My father had arranged for the tuition money. His boss, a Mr. Kelly at Appleton Mills, had gotten him in touch with a fellow at Carolina National Bank that was then up on the Square. My father borrowed \$300 by signature for my education expenses. That was something most

black people couldn't do on a signature. My father had previously borrowed some money and paid it back. He paid \$25 a month on that \$300. Tuition was about \$265 a semester at Tuskegee. This was 1953. Room and board was \$45 a month and we paid it by the month. My parents would scramble around and come up with the \$45. That was all I got, they didn't think I needed a haircut or anything like that. When my second semester fees came due a black man who worked with my father at the mill (and also worked for Mr. Kelly) would go to the bank, sign a note and borrow \$300 for my father. My father would give him \$25 to get it in his name and my father would pay both notes back. By the fall semester, 12 months later, he would have paid back all the money and would go back to the bank again.

My father had built a small store on the west side of the corner of Reed and Carver Streets. It was supposed to have been a service station. It was not much bigger than a room. My mother and father were operating the store. In the summer, when I would come home from school, I would help them. One summer I went to Atlantic City to work as a bellboy.

At Tuskegee, I lived in an old military barracks and was the liaison officer. I picked up the mail for other people in there and did things like that. I got paid a little bit. I think it was about \$20 plus I was getting a ROTC check for \$27. That was like a million dollars to me.

I had to do my practice teaching. I went out to Tuskegee Institute High which was all black. My major was physical education and biology. I checked into the principal's office and they sent me to the coach's office. The coach happened to be a Cuban. He said, "I am glad to have you. I think I've got a state championship basketball team. I am going to turn my classes over to you and you won't see me. I am going to be working with my team all of the time."

Here I was with five classes, three of them biology and two of them were physical education classes. I had my hands full. Sure enough, he won the state championship in his division that year.

I had to go up on campus one day to get some supplies for my classes in the campus bookstore. I started into the door and heard somebody behind me call me. I turned around and there were three young ladies. I recognized all three of them because they were all from Chattanooga and one of my classmates was from Chattanooga. Two of them were his sisters. One of them went on into the building and I noticed that two of them were kind of keeping me there. They wouldn't let me move. Every time I tried to get away from them they would say something. The other one came out of the building and all of a sudden the two disappeared and I was standing there with this one. To get away from her I said, "Would you like to go to the movies on campus with me?" That was the only way I could get rid of her. She said, "Yes." She was a freshman and I was a senior. She turned out to be my future wife – Elma.

I graduated in 1957 from college. My senior year I was selected for "Who's Who" and was a distinguished military graduate through the ROTC program. During my senior year I decided that I had a great future ahead of me and I was going into the military.

I went to Fort Sill, Oklahoma, for the basic officer's course. Elma and I kept in touch. I proposed in a letter. She wrote back and said that she would marry me. I finished the basic course in April, went to Tuskegee and we got married on April 25, 1958. After a couple of days I left going to Fort Bragg, North Carolina, for my first duty assignment.

When you went through the basic officer's course, if you were not successful, you could get drafted as a private. I had gone through four years of ROTC and there was no way I was going to wash out. The last person in the class, whatever score of points he had, automatically washed out. Gunnery was a big subject, it was a thing you had to pass and you got more points for gunnery. They had trigonometry. I had never had trigonometry. There was something about the way they read logarithms in the military that was opposite from normal. Since I had never had trig I didn't have to unlearn something. My gunnery instructor was a Marine and he would hold study sessions in the evening.

The first few days I was there they had a series of tests. They called me in and said with my reading speed there was no way I was going to be able to pass the course. They said we had a two-hour lunch break and I could spend one hour in a speed-reading course – which I did. With that and going to the classes the Marine held in the evening I really worked hard. There were 105 people in my class and at graduation they called the names from the first who had the highest points on down to the last. I finished 17th out of 105. I think that goes back to the experience when I played basketball. I knew I didn't have a lot of ability. I had to work hard. I had too much at stake.

My wife transferred to Fayetteville State in Fayetteville, North Carolina, where I was stationed.

The military was a great experience but I was trying to make up my mind as to what to do with the rest of my life.

One night I couldn't sleep and I was thinking about whether to stay in the military when I got a telephone call that my mother had passed away. She had had a cerebral hemorrhage and died in the little store. At that point I knew what I was going to do. I was going to come back to Anderson because she had always talked about me living in Anderson. My wife was not too happy about that. She was from Chattanooga, Tennessee, and she thought Anderson was too small. She had another year to go at Fayetteville State so I came back to Anderson and she stayed up there and finished.

When Elma came to Anderson she got a job teaching in Greenwood for the first year. Then she taught 29 years in Anderson before retiring.

When I got out of the military and came back to Anderson, I had about \$3,000. There was a man in town by the name of Mr. Cowan. He was a bartender out at Anderson Country Club. He was a black man. He had kind of a high pitch voice and said, "Son, I am working with Mr. Geisberg over here selling some lots. You ought to buy two of them." I said I would think

about it. Somehow, that \$3,000 got away. I wished many times I had bought those lots. I ended up buying the one where we now live and paid about three times what it then would have cost.

I couldn't find a job. It was the middle of the year when I got out of service so I went around to manufacturing plants looking for a job. They wouldn't touch me because I put down that I had a college degree. I stopped putting that down and got a job with a tobacco business.

They were experimenting with aromatic tobacco. They worked ladies who would bale the tobacco and run it through steam, soften it, open it back up and re-bale it. My job with another fellow was to take the tobacco, load up a truck, carry it to Morganton, North Carolina, and store it in a warehouse. We would eat lunch, come back to Anderson and load up and get ready to go back the next day. I got back one afternoon and the boss-man said, "I want to see you. Come to the office." I went up there and he said, "I am going to have to let you go." I said, "What did I do?" He said, "You have got a college degree and I can't use you." He was from Westminster. For a long time I thought the meanest people in the world were from Westminster.

My father was still running his store so I would work around there and get enough money to go around and look for jobs teaching. It was amazing. Even in a black community you could be from the right side of the tracks and you can be from the wrong side of the tracks. My parents were not professionals, they were not teachers. My father was not a minister. People who knew me wouldn't give me a job. They knew too much about me. The people who didn't know me were afraid. I would walk in and say, "I am a graduate of Tuskegee" and they would think, "No, you must not be telling the truth."

Finally, I got a job in Pendleton at Riverside School. One day I got in the mail the end of a piece of torn paper that said, "Professor if you want a job come to my office to sign contracts." It was signed "J. B. Ouzts." His office was a little white building on the village green in Pendleton. I went in and he had a short-sleeved shirt on. It was in the summertime. (He didn't want to call me mister because at that time white people did not address blacks as Mr. or Mrs.) He said, "Professor, I understand you can coach." I said, "Yes, sir." He said, "I am going to give you \$75 to coach." That district did not pay any local supplements at the time. We only got what the state paid. Pendleton was one of the lowest paid districts in the state. I took the job, stayed there nine years and coached football and basketball. I volunteered for everything – including being in charge of the buses.

I was very interested in working in Anderson School District 5 and finally told the people in Pendleton before one Christmas that I was not coming back. I didn't have a job but I was just not coming back. In the meantime, I had gotten to know Dr. Henry Cone who was superintendent of School District 5. He told the new superintendent that he should look at me. I got a job offer because integration was coming. I figured, and we always figured as black teachers, that there was going to be a problem with integration. White people did not want black teachers to teach their children. This was for the 1967-1968 school year. The job was teaching driver's ed at School District 5. I thought, "Well, maybe they won't have too big a problem with that. A black man teaching driver's ed." In the meantime I was still at Riverside finishing out the year.

In May two white gentlemen walked in, introduced themselves and said, "We would like to talk to you about a job at Greenville Tech." I said, "Well, I will talk to you. I'd be happy to talk to you." They said, "We would like to take you out to dinner. When you come over where would you like to go? They mentioned a few places and I suggested Ye Olde Fireplace. I went over there and talked with them and then they called me back for a second interview. What happened was they had no black full-time people on staff. They were interested in having more black students and they talked to some black people in the community who said, "You don't have any black counselors." They didn't want to steal anyone from Greenville County because they needed good relations there. I took my wife with me. They had asked me how much would it take to get me. I said, "\$10,000." I guess I must have then been making \$4,000.

My wife and I were coming back down Interstate 85 and the next thing I knew we were way on the other side of the Highway 76 turnoff. We were just talking. In that conversation, we decided that if they would give me \$10,500 that I would take the job. I got in touch with them and told them I had thought about it and it would take \$10,500. They said, "No problem." I wish I would have said \$12,000.

I commuted over there for three years and we were going to move to Greenville. Our oldest son was to start school that year.

An interesting thing happened to my wife. She became the first black teacher to work in a predominantly white school which was Concord Elementary. A couple of days before school started they had had a teachers' meeting and the principal had walked up and informed her, "I understand you are going to be working with me next year." There was no preparation or anything. What they did, to keep from parents saying, "My child has got to have a black teacher and the other three sections have white teachers," was departmentalize. The children rotated to all four teachers. My wife taught language arts, somebody else taught math, somebody else taught social studies and so forth.

She worked at Concord two years. During the second year she asked that she be transferred. There were problems all the time. For one thing, she gave the superintendent's son a C one grading period. The superintendent came to see her and wanted know why he got a C and she told him that is what he made. Anyway, she asked to be transferred.

Meanwhile, at Greenville Tech I thought I had died and gone to heaven – I mean, positive attitude. It was not, "You can't do this because we have always done it this way." It was a very progressive situation. It was just a great job. It changed my whole attitude, made me a more positive individual. In the meantime, Dr. Don Garrison came to Tri-County Tech as president. He started to talk to me about coming over to Tri-County. I said, "Look, I prayed hard and worked hard to get out of Pendleton."

Dr. Garrison contacted me two times about coming to work. I said, "No, I am not your person." The last time I was contacted by Tri-County it was by the new dean of students, Dr. Stockhouse. This fellow asked me to come up and talk to him on a Saturday morning. I went and

said, "No, I don't think I want to do this." I turned him down and gave him some names of people who might be interested. I came home that morning and went in the house. My wife was standing there with two kids with cereal all over the place. She was standing at the sink with her hair all on top of her head. She looked at me and said, "What did you decide?" I said, "I decided that I didn't want the job." She looked at me so disgusted.

About that time someone was at the door. It was Byrd Smith. He wanted to pick up something so I said, "Come on in Byrd." I said "Byrd, I just turned down a job." He said to me, "Al, are they going to pay you any more than you are making now?" I said, "Byrd, we didn't even get to that part. I turned him down before we got to that point." He said, "You know you've got responsibilities. You need to make all that you can." I have always been afraid of making a job decision based only on money because I felt if it was something I didn't want to do or if I didn't have the ability to do it, that I would be worse off in the long run and lose the job. Being a black person back then you didn't have a whole lot of opportunities. I felt if you get something you better hold on to it or you better have another job before you leave a job.

I thought about that and got on the phone and called Dr. Stockhouse. I said, "Look, I have reconsidered and I think I want this job." He said, "Well, let me call you back. I will call you back in a few minutes." That was the longest 10 minutes of my life. He called, and I am sure he had called Dr. Garrison. He said, "Yes, if you want the job you can have it." Then we got into the money part. It was several thousand dollars more per year.

With regard to salaries I remember somebody got upset with Tri-County and requested a list of the salaries of the staff and faculty. We were in an administrative meeting and Dr. Garrison was upset about it. He said, "If this gets out into the public, people won't understand." I was the only black person at the moment. He said, "Al, if they find out how much money you are making! You know a black person is not supposed to make that much money." I was sitting there thinking whatever I was making I earned and I don't care what they think. It was never in fact published. The person never followed through.

Dr. Stockhouse left after one year. He was a retired Air Force Officer and had taught at the Air Force Academy. He had moved into the Clemson community and was not, I think, accepted into Clemson society. I got called into Dr. Garrison's office and he said to me, "Al, Dr. Stockhouse is retiring. You are going to be dean of students." If he had said, "Do you want the job" I probably would have declined it but I didn't have a choice. If you did that now somebody would file suit against you with an EEO complaint. But it was a great opportunity for me.

I was the first black dean in any kind of a predominantly white institution in South Carolina. I guess with anything you do there is some pressure, some stress. I felt if this would work at Tri-County that other people of my race would get an opportunity. It has in fact happened. The person who replaced me when I retired happened to be a black. As a black person you are not only trying to be successful for yourself and for your family. You are trying to be successful for other people of your race. That was especially true during that time. If I had to pick a time to be born my life span would have been the perfect time. It is unreal the changes that I have witnessed. Things I never expected to happen – I couldn't dream of. I am always

discovering today things that are happening in this community that I think are just great, very positive.

I looked in the paper the other day and noticed that a black couple bought four McDonald's in Anderson. I think that is just tremendous. There are a lot of positive things going on in the community and it is being done not because there is some pressure to do it.

I remember one Saturday before the city election in 1968 when Republicans were running for city council. I was out trying to cut some grass or something and three men came by my house and said, "We would like to talk with you." I was courteous enough to ask them to come in and have a seat. I guess I didn't want to be bothered. When they got in, they said, "Look, we are running for city council and would like your support." One of them was Jack Hehn, another was Dick Willis. I don't know who the third person was, probably Bill Prevost. I lit into them and said it won't make any difference, black people would not have any opportunity to serve on any boards or commissions. But now when I think back over it, when the Republican administration was elected it was one of the most positive things that ever happened in government in the Anderson area. I was a staunch Democrat because I felt no other party was open to me. I was telling someone today, I think we sometimes, as black people, are closed minded. When I go back to that experience I know you can't write a person off.

People were afraid when Lyndon Johnson became President but he did more for civil rights than probably any other president. Positions can bring out the best in people.

I have learned more and gained more from what little involvement I have had in the community than I have given. It has opened up a whole different world to me. I have always had a positive attitude toward Anderson. I had always thought Anderson was a great place.

When I went to Tuskegee the attitude was that if you were from New York or the northern states, not from the South, you automatically had more credibility.

At one point I was in summer school down at South Carolina State. It was the 4th of July. I didn't have classes that day and a bunch of fellows were out on the student center porch talking. People started talking about, "When I go out of state I don't tell anyone I am from South Carolina." That hit me. I have never been ashamed that I am from South Carolina. I have never been ashamed that I am from Anderson. I think that Anderson is just like any other place. I feel comfortable here because I know Anderson much better than I've known any other place.

I know that some of the opportunities I have had come from tokenism. They had to have a black. Well, I have always said, "Okay, that may get me in the door but I am not going to be the token black."

I was appointed by city council to the Planning and Zoning board. That was a great experience. When I first went on there they would have the pros and cons on a rezoning request and go into an executive session, discuss it and then come back out and tell the people what the recommendation was going to be to council. I said, "No, I don't think that is right. I think if I

have got a piece of property up for rezoning I need to hear all of the discussion." They recessed on a particular night and I decided I was not going back there in that room with them. I stayed out there by myself. That was the last time that happened. From then on we all stayed out in the front and discussed the issue.

I never will forget a zoning application for property up near Concord School. Richard King wanted to develop the area. The opposition lawyer was Ross Anderson. There were people on the board literally scared to death of repercussions. Some of them were in real estate. They didn't want to alienate anyone. I decided I was going to do the right thing. Mr. King kept making concessions. He was not going to put carports on the houses at first. The lots were going to be smaller than in the area but he agreed to put carports on them. They had concrete floors. T. Ree McCoy had built the surrounding houses differently but times had changed. I thought he had made concessions, done everything he could to cooperate. I made the motion that the property be rezoned. Mr. Joe Bolt wouldn't say anything but he would always second a motion. Finally we got a majority to vote for it. I got the impression that deep down inside, Mr. Bolt was not political and not concerned about repercussions. After that vote, Ross Anderson walked up in his expensive suit, took an expensive cigar out of his pocket, and said, "I will see y'all later." But never anything came out of it.

We have more of an economic gap in the Anderson area between the white and black communities than we have a social gap. During the eight years I was on the Planning and Zoning board, there was only one black person who came in for rezoning. That was Mr. Walter Johnson at the funeral home. He wanted to do some additions to his building and found out it was a nonconforming usage. It was not zoned properly. I tried to keep the price down for an application but they would go up on the price. Back then many people were not going to make application when they had to pay \$150.

I am serving on a school board at the present time. I am the first black male to serve on a school board in Anderson County. I think it is different than a black female serving on the board. Black females are normally accepted a lot easier than black males. I think that goes back to slavery in that black females worked in the big house. White people were more familiar with them.

Through my involvements I have gotten to go places that I never would have otherwise had the opportunity to visit and have met people I never otherwise would have met. One of the things I cherished was having a conversation with President George Bush. He was campaigning for President and came to Tri-County Tech. I walked beside him and talked to him. He was a very different guy than he was portrayed on television – very compassionate – not a canned person as he appeared a lot to be on TV.

I said, "My wife collects autographs and she would like to have your autograph." I had something in my pocket and was going to reach for it for his autograph. One of the secret service men was to my left and stared at me. My hand quickly came out of there. Vice-President Bush pulled out a card and signed it. He is left-handed. Governors and people like that I had an opportunity to get to know.

Anderson has given a lot to me and I wanted to try to give something back.

I am sure that there has been some resentment in the black community of my success but that doesn't bother me. I don't pay attention to what people say about me. Being an only child, I am somewhat of a loner. I can entertain myself. It is interesting that people will come to you and say what people are saying about you. I think they come to you as friend but I don't think people are really your friend when they carry stuff like that. I guess I haven't cared as much about what anyone thinks about me as much as I should. My whole thing has been about trying to do what is right.

One of the things, too, that probably helped me is that I have been on only one board or commission that paid anything. There are black people who have been on things like bank boards. I did get on a bank board where it paid \$50 a meeting. My wife couldn't understand why all the other people I knew who got on bank boards were making \$100. One person is on a state bank board that I understand pays between \$20,000 and \$25,000 a year. The one board is the only thing that I have ever been on that paid anything.

I have given my time. I have spent my own money to be involved. One good thing about that, you are not obligated. You can stand on what you think and do the right thing rather than worry about what money or benefit I am going to lose if I don't go along.

I disagree with people, but that is the end of it. As far as disliking them, holding a grudge is not a part of me.

I grew up in an environment where white people were highly respected – where black people were highly respected. Everyone was respected. My parents had some good white acquaintances. In this area you could not get a white individual to say something that would help a group of black people but if you knew them, they would do anything in the world for you. There has always been a good white/black relationship on an individual basis in our community.

I was not taught to dislike anyone or to hate anyone. I was taught survival. You didn't talk back to a white person because you could end up being lynched. I remember when I was a child it was announced in the paper that the Ku Klux Klan was going to have a motorcade down Main Street. I forgot. I had a relationship with my parents such that I could go anywhere I wanted to as long as I was back home before it got dark. This particular afternoon I decided I was going to a movie. I came out of the movie and noticed that Main Street was vacant. Nothing was stirring down Main Street. I got home and my mother was about to have a fit. "You know the Klan is coming." It didn't faze me.

We grew up hearing about the Ku Klux Klan. Tuskegee has a quite extensive collection on lynching in the United States. I used to go and look at it. I can remember when people were lynched. One thing in history that is quite interesting and is documented in the South Carolina State Museum had to do with a white man alleged to have raped a black young lady up in

Pickens County. Some black men got together, found and lynched him. That is the first time I have ever run across a white being lynched by blacks.

Not too far from where we live there is a vacant lot. Frank Mauldin lived a couple of streets over from where we lived. About 10 or 15 years ago he came out to my house and said, "Do you have any kind of weapon?" I said, "No." There were loudspeakers. You could hear the Klan over on that vacant lot talking and making noise. They were using the "N" word and all like that. I got in the car with him and we went down on South Main Street. Somebody down there was selling weapons. He bought some bullets and I bought a cheap pistol. I never felt comfortable with that pistol. I kept it but always felt that I would get upset and shoot somebody I didn't intend.

A white fellow I was working with at Tri-County who had a farm out in Townville asked me to go in with him to buy half of a beef. He would keep it out there and he would dress it out. So finally I gave him the money and he, my wife and children went out there. We wrapped it, brought it home and put it in the freezer. He wouldn't charge me anything. I knew he liked guns so I gave him that pistol. As it turned out, that meat was so tough we couldn't eat it.

I was distinguished by being arrested and jailed in the city jail. What happened concerned my oldest son's dog. My son graduated from college and came back home. He always wanted a dog. He loved dogs. He went to the animal shelter and got a little puppy. My neighbor, who was a black lady, called the police and complained about the puppy being over in her yard. I was getting ready to go to work. Everyone was gone except for me. I went to the door and there was a policeman. He said, "I have a warrant for you." She had taken out a warrant. This was 13 years ago I guess. He asked me to come on down to city hall. I went into the courtroom, late for work, and said, "I need to appear before you." The judge said, "Sit down and be quiet." I asked him again and he said, "If you don't sit down and be quiet I am going to put you in jail." I said, "Do it." He had me arrested, locked up. I stayed in jail until 6 that evening. By evening it was all over the television and in the morning in the newspaper. The judge's name was Raymond McKay. He is a lawyer in town.

That night, Mr. Smith, who was on the Tri-County Tech board called me and said, "Al, there is no need to fight this thing. You are better off to just let it die." I knew a FBI agent over in Greenville who had tried to recruit me in the FBI before I left the public school system. I told him I didn't like weapons so I didn't want to be in the FBI. He called me and said, "Al, do you want us to look into it?" I said, "No, just forget about it." I had blown it. That was an experience. One thing I learned was that they needed a new jail. Incidentally, we got rid of the puppy.

Blacks did not have legal rights years ago. There were judges who owned farms and they would sentence the person to work on their farms. Once you got in the court system, you had no rights. A lot of the things that people complain about, protection of criminals' rights, came about because of that. If you look at the system today, it boils down to getting as much in the way of legal rights as you can afford to pay for. If you can't afford to pay for it, you don't have a chance. So that is why people need to avoid, if they possibly can, getting into those situations. That is a part of the survival.

When I was growing up, I was taught survival. That was a part of survival skills. You don't get yourself in a position where you have to deal with the law. But for some reason we have gotten away from that. Two things that every adult drilled into me was to stay out of trouble and try to get as much education as you possibly could.

Education is something that is available to everyone. It doesn't depend on where you come from. A lot of it is free.

The first thing most black people think of with regard to the Confederate flag is the Klan. Personally the flag does not bother me much. I think one thing the flag flying on the State House grounds does negative is give a lot of people a bad connotation of our state. When you go out of state and talk to people they think South Carolina is an awful place. People will say to you, "How do you as a black person live in South Carolina?" You hear white people say all the time that South Carolina is a backward state. When all of that was going on with regard to the flag my son, who lives in Virginia now, was saying, "I am ashamed to tell people I am from South Carolina."

I think that whole issue is detrimental, as it will hurt economic development. It will hurt the business climate in South Carolina. I know the politicians supported the flag primarily for votes. They knew the majority of the people would support keeping the flag up. Governor Beasley came out for doing away with the flag. It got him defeated but he may have done a great service to the state. Personally, the flag didn't bother me. I thought that keeping it up was just plain stupid. I do recognize the feelings of some people due to their heritage. Their forefathers fought in the war. Being a part of their heritage is fine but I don't understand why they should penalize the whole state for that. I think the issue over the flag was more about underlying situations that we have in this state. We are not addressing the real issues that bother people. That is why people got really upset about the flag. I think the flag was more of a symbol of deeper problems.

I am active with the NAACP to the extent that I pay my membership dues.

I am very enthusiastic about the future. I think a lot of people in this community have laid good groundwork to continue to be built upon. I think things are going to continue to be better. I think people are going to understand that inclusion is very important. We are going to have to include all people if we are going to continue as a community and as a nation to make progress. We cannot afford as a society to write anyone off.

Right to this day there are companies recruiting foreign people with technical skills for jobs. We have people here who do not have jobs because they do not have the skills. The competition of the worldwide economy, globalization, is going to drive us to become a much better society. It is based on survival. I think people only react when their survival becomes a problem. I think this transition period has proven that diversity is a positive thing rather than a negative. We are slowly learning that there is no difference in people.

I read all the time that all black people are supposed to think alike. They are supposed to support a certain candidate. But all white people don't think alike. They are different. Why should all black people be alike? I have gotten to know a lot of white males my age. There are no differences in my aspirations and their aspirations. We want the same things. We stand for the same thing. I may disagree with a black person but agree with a white person. I don't feel like I need to agree only because we happen to be the same race. I think I need to listen to what each one is saying.