Interviewee: Arthur D. Graves
Interviewer: Tess Evans
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Transcriber: Tess Evans

Abstract: Arthur D. Graves was born in Tuscumbia, Alabama, and currently resides in the same town. He grew up in a segregated society where he could not attend the same schools as whites and had to sit in the balconies at movie theaters. He was involved in extra-curricular activities as encouraged by his father, who was a fireman on the Southern Railroad. He joined the Air Force in 1945 and was trained as a pilot. He served overseas in France and then came back to the U.S., when, after repeated sickness, he retired and was given academic positions at the University of North Alabama. After retiring from UNA, Graves bought the oldest African American owned and operated funeral home in Northwest Alabama. He currently is the funeral home's director and is 85 years old.

Tess Evans: So your name is Arthur D. Graves?

Arthur D. Graves: That's right.

Tess Evans: And are you originally from Florence, Alabama?

Arthur D. Graves: No, I'm from…I'm living on the corner where I was born in Tuscumbia, Colbert County, Alabama.

Tess Evans: Oh okay, Tuscumbia. So what was that like growing up there?

Arthur D. Graves: Oh, in a segregated society we had segregated schools, sitting in the balcony at the theater, no cafes you could go to, most of the cafes had a window in the front of it and you'd go there and knock on the window and they'd come and serve you through the window, but my parents wouldn't allow us to do that. We didn't do that, because they said now you're not going to pin [?] and folks going to serve you through a hole so I never did bother, but all of the stores were segregated, and you had the white water and the colored water and all of that. But you know it was bad, we had…got hand-me-down books and desks and chairs like that from the school, we went to a segregated school. I can remember starting off in school; we had the little heater sitting in the middle of the room and all of that. All of the people here laugh about, uh I played football in high school and we had old equipment that was from the white high school and my pants split…

Tess Evans: [Laughing]

Arthur D. Graves: …during the game.

Tess Evans: Oh, no!

Arthur D. Graves: So they put tape across my behind…

Tess Evans: Oh, goodness.

Arthur D. Graves: …but we didn't have libraries, we didn't have laboratories, we didn't have counselors or anything, we just had principle and the teachers. But we had some foundations that, really schools don't have now. We had to learn to recite poems and read poetry and make presentations, oral presentations, and I think that benefitted me more than some of the things that I see…going on in the schools now.

Tess Evans: Sure.

Arthur D. Graves: And the parents were very interested in the schools and your performance in plays, singing in the choir, playing football and participation like that was how they evaluated you. And that's what I remember about high school.

Tess Evans: Excellent. So tell me a little bit about your family. Did you have any brothers or sisters or what were your parents like?

Arthur D. Graves: Yes, there are four boys and three girls. My father was a fireman on the Southern Railroad. He was on the Memphis division, which means he went out at 12 o'clock one day and spent the night in Memphis and the train left in the morning. And Sheffield, Alabama, was the midpoint between Chattanooga and Memphis and that was where they changed crews and changed engines on the railroad. And so his job was what you considered a good job because at that time a fireman was one of the good jobs on the railroad because you couldn't be a conductor, you couldn't be an engineer like that. So my father went out one day at 12 o'clock and he came back the next day at 12 o'clock and what I remember most about it at all is that there were four boys and three girls but we all wasn't at home at the same time because as soon as my brothers or sisters reached the tenth grade…now there was a high school in Tuscumbia, but as soon as my brothers or sisters reached the tenth grade, they sent us off to school. We either went to…my sisters all went to Spellman College to high school and my brothers all went to Tuskegee to High School. Now Alabama A&M and Tuskegee both had a high school department at that time. They later cut out the high school department and you just had to enter as a freshman in college, but when we were coming up, when we got to the tenth grade, mama and daddy would send them wherever…the girls would go to Spellman in Atlanta and the boys would go to Tuskegee to high school. That's what I remember up…now my sister, Gloria…well there were seven of us, four boys and three girls, and my sister Gloria was the baby girl and I was the baby boy. So that we were the only two to finish high school in Tuscumbia. I finished high school one year and I went to Tuskegee and entered as a freshman and she went to Howard University in Washington as a freshman, but the rest of them were either graduates of Spellman or Tuskegee. Now another thing I remember about high school…let me tell you two things about my home life first. I told you about my father was a fireman, well, and he went out one day at 12 o'clock and he came back the next day at 12 o'clock. Now the days that he went out we would always have dinner at 11 o'clock before he left and we had to be there for dinner.

Tess Evans: Um-hum.

Arthur D. Graves: Okay. Now his philosophy behind that was they were at home when I left; when he came back the next day he would come in at 12 o'clock and we usually have dinner between 12:30 and 12:45 and those of us that was at home had to be there for dinner and his philosophy was they were at home when I left and they were at home when I got back. So we enjoyed that meal, you didn't just say well what you having for dinner well I don't want that I'm going to get something else…no, you came and sat down at the table and we didn't, we had family service; you fixed your plate, but you didn't try to put it all on your plate at one time, you took what you want, if you ate that you wanted some more. So I remember that now and even with my own family we had that family…we usually get together for Sunday dinner and we still do it now. And I think that's a carry-over from my training because we always had to have family dinner and everyone was there and you didn't talk about anything unpleasant, I remember that. Now this is another thing; my father was not illiterate, but he couldn't read and write. And at our home we had two daily newspapers. We always got the *Commercial Appeal* that was delivered in the morning and we got the *Times Daily,* which at that time it was called the *Tri-City's Daily* and the paper was delivered in the evening. Later on they changed it and you didn't get the morning paper, but we always had the *Commercial Appeal*. And we had subscriptions to at least four magazines. We always got *Time* and *Life* and the *Saturday Evening Post* and *McCall's* so that my home had reference books; encyclopedias and dictionaries that was at home. The high school didn't have that. I was exposed to reference books, newspapers, and magazines; I was exposed to reading at home.

Tess Evans: Ok.

Arthur D. Graves: I have many of the books that is still in my basement now that are carry-over from that was left, you know, passed down from the ages and I tell them all the time we had two sets of encyclopedias; we had World Book and another set, I don't know…encyclopedias. I still have all those books now. Of course you know, this computer, people don't use books anymore.

Tess Evans: Yeah, it's mainly all electronic now.

Arthur D. Graves: Now what I said about my father, I said he couldn't read and write, but he wasn't ignorant. He was up to date on current affairs because we had a radio and he always listened to the news and my mother would always read the paper, what the headlines, what was going on in the world and she'd read the paper to him. And to talk to him you wouldn't think he couldn't sign his name. Now let me tell you something else. He could, and I remember this experience, we would be riding in the car and he'd be sitting on the back seat and he'd tell you how fast you were going within two or three miles. And we used to laugh about it; I said daddy, how you do that. And he just smiled, but he finally explained to us how it was done. You see, on the old railroads the lines of communication were landlines, telephone poles. And you'll notice if you drive down the highway now you don't see many because there're not many landlines now.

Tess Evans: Yeah.

Arthur D. Graves: But you drive down the road, all those poles were the same distance apart. And he would count in his mind…one…two…three…four. As you passed this pole, he'd start

counting…one…two…three…four and see where he was when you passed the second pole. And he would convert time and distance to miles per hour by how fast you were going from one pole to the next. Try it sometime, and you know if you say one-thousand one, one-thousand two, one-thousand three and you past that next pole, you're going about 50 miles an hour. And I've tried it, actually tried it, and he taught us how to do that. But being a fireman on the railroad, they had to figure their time and distance on how fast they were going from one pole to the next and you probably don't see it now because passenger trains are going out of business and they used to have a sign that was on the railroad; it would say station one mile and that would give the engineer time to start slowing the train down because he knew how fast he was going. And you may not know this, but railroads operated on time and distance; a train had to be at a certain point at a certain time. Airlines do the same thing; you know they can depart, and usually sometimes they're late on their departures, but they could make up or use the time up in the air in order to arrive on time. Railroads did the same thing; if he was running late when he left here he knew how fast to go because he had to get to that next station, and you probably don't see it now because you don't have railroad stations. You used to go in and it'd tell you what time the next time the train was going to arrive and what time it would depart. If you want to see that, there's a railroad museum in Huntsville, and go in and they got some of those old schedules up there and you know, it'd tell you what number train, what time it'd arrive…

Tess Evans: That'd be neat to see.

Arthur D. Graves: …and it's something to see, but I remember it very well because my father being a fireman on the railroad for 44 years…he'd tell us stories about that, but that time and distance, how a man that couldn't sign his name could convert time and distance into miles per hour to tell you how fast you were going.

Tess Evans: Goodness.

Arthur D. Graves: In my home, when you asked about that, we had books to read and magazines and we kept up to date because we had to tell daddy, you know, what's the latest news, plus he was listening to the radio. He always listened to Walter Cronkite, not Walter Cronkite…anyway, announcers at that particular time and he knew what time they were coming on so everything was cut off so daddy could do what, listen to the news. So it had great educational value. Now, another thing about that is that I was in the 5th grade before I found this out. I would bring my card home and I'd show it to daddy and he'd look at it and he'd hand it back to me. I'd say daddy look I made a "A." But I didn't know, I was in the 5th grade and he didn't know that. But what he based his evaluation on is your participation in events. I had to sing in the choir, I had to play football. I had to have a project and make a poster, you know, different little projects that the teachers would have for us to do. I can remember in Botany and Biology how we had to catch bugs and put them in a jar and we had to learn the different insects and we had to learn the different plants by the shape of the leaves and all of that. High schools don't have that now, so you'd have a little project that we used to catch butterflies and put them in a bottle of alcohol and be very particular with them because you had to preserve them and put them on poster boards and pin them out and you'd identify them, and even insects…any bug we saw you had to capture it and any tree around you identified by the shape of the leaf and all of

that. I don't know whether they still do that now because everything's on the computer and all of that.

Tess Evans: Yeah, I definitely didn't do that in high school, so I think it's kind of gone by the wayside.

Arthur D. Graves: Yeah it's going by the wayside. And we had to learn recitations. We had to learn poetry and I recite many poems and I had poems and so forth. Old man going on and on how he can't leave the tide is cold and gray till child pass deep and wide, the sudden stream had no fear for him, he cross safe in the twilight dim, but when he was safe on the other side he turn and built a bridge to span the tide. A fellow traveler who was passing there said old man you're wasting your time and there and here your journey will end at the close of the day, he never again would pass this way. The old builder lifted his old gray head and said good friend along the paths of life that I [ ] follow [ ] day [ ] must pass this way; he too must cross in the twilight dim. That sullen stream had had no fear for me for that [ ] had made me pitfall be good friend, I'm building this bridge for him.

Tess Evans: Oh, goodness.

Arthur D. Graves: We just had to learn different poems, and that brings back fond memories to me now because mama wanted us to learn poems so we could recite to daddy and that's how he evaluated what we do.

Tess Evans: That's a wonderful way to do that.

Arthur D. Graves: Yeah. Okay, now what's your next question?

Tess Evans: Do you have any other ties to the area as far as other family members?

Arthur D. Graves: No, there were four boys and three girls and I have no uncles or aunts or sisters and brothers. The rest of them, my grade, when they left me, they went off to college and probably stayed. I had two sisters that resided in Washington D.C. I had one brother that graduated from dental school and he wound up in Detroit, another brother who was migrated to Los Angeles, California. And that's why I'm back in Tuscumbia right now, because I always said I wanted to come back home, plus you know I had a retirement and so forth, and I'm living on the corner where I was born, but I'm the only one there. And all of my aunts, uncles, cousins, I have no other relatives in the immediate area.

Tess Evans: Okay. Well, now we will move on to the Air Force. You were in the Air Force, is that correct?

Arthur D. Graves: Right, um-hum.

Tess Evans: What made you decide to join the military?

Arthur D. Graves: Well, what happened, I went to college in the fall of 1944. At that time the draft was going on, so in May of 1945 I was drafted and went into the Air Force and they sent me to Shepherd Air Force Base, Texas, and I'm an enlisted person there Shepherd Air Force Base, Texas. At that time I could type, had a little college education, a step above the usual. So I was assigned to administrative duties in the orderly room at Shepherd Air Force Base, Texas. At that time the war was over in Europe and there was a reduction in force and they gave us the responsibility of going through the files and everyone that had served 36 months, we had to pull that folder, type their name up on a list, and you sent that list up to headquarters, processed the folders and they'd send back orders for you to be processed for separation, and they were separating a lot of people so I just put my name on the list and it went up to headquarters and after 8 months and 29 days I was separated as enlisted, but if you had less than 36 years…36 months service you had to stay in the reserve so I went into the reserve, went back to school, and was commissioned to R.O.T.C. in 1948. But I didn't graduate from college until May of 1949. Now I'm still in the reserve from all this time when I first entered service, so, and then I was out teaching school and they called me to active duty and I went in the Air Force. I had just entered the Air Force, but my pay was based on six years service, you see, because I had been in and enlisted, discharged, went into reserve, and so when I was commissioned and called to active duty I was paid based on six years service, they gave you credit for your reserve time. That's how all that worked out. When they called me to active duty I went in and they sent me to pilot training school and I had finished primary and basic training and then you go to advanced and you either go to dual engine or single engines, all the single engines are fighters and all the dual engines were transports so I was in advanced training in B-25s at Amarillo Air Force…no, Reece Air Force Base in Lubbock, Texas. Stayed sick all the time. All of my teeth came out…not all of them, but I was losing my teeth and as a result, you know, when you go to altitude the gas around the roots of your teeth expand and when you come back down it decreases and it causes you, at that time it was causing people who did not have proper dental care growing up, you'd lose all your teeth and I had lost seven of mine, teeth just fell out. And that's the explanation they gave me because my teeth became loose because I had pockets of hydrogen gas around the roots of the teeth and then when you go to altitude that gases would expand and then when you come down that gas decreases your teeth were left loose, plus I was staying sick at the stomach all the time and the flight surgeon told me that in addition to that condition, plus the fact I had a latent fear of flying, you know like football players on the football field they're nervous before the kick off, but once the ball is kicked off they're over it, like sometimes you want to go swimming and you're afraid to jump in the water but you're standing there all nervous. Now, I had that fear of flying and what it was doing was causing me to develop gas on my stomach, creating ulcers. He said the reason that you're sick is because you have that latent fear of flying and you're gonna get yourself in a position sometime, an emergency condition and you won't know what to do and you're gonna kill yourself. So they took me off the firing status so I just decided to stay in service and they sent me to supply school and I just decided to stay on in until I retired. Glad I did, because I'm in that 42 percent that, Mr…. Romney lost his election and you talk about that 42 percent of people who depend on the government, well I paid social security, I served in the military, I've done all those things that's laid out that the government is obligated to you to look after you because you gave service to the country and I laugh about him, I mean, he never been in the military, got five sons never been in the military, he didn't even trust American banks because all the money he made was flipping industries and then deposit the money in foreign

banks. Am I lying? No, and you're not gonna see how he expected that he was gonna be elected president of the United States. Of course there's some other factors added into it…

Tess Evans: Oh, yeah.

Arthur D. Graves: …but and you know what he did? He did it without…Obama did it without southern support. He didn't carry…he didn't count pain in Georgia, he didn't count pain in Mississippi, he didn't count pain in Alabama…

Tess Evans: No, most of the south was Romney.

Arthur D. Graves: …he didn't count pain in Louisiana, Texas, Oklahoma, but he won because people had the reasonableness and the good sense to know there's gotta be something wrong with that man. Well, anyway, you didn't ask me that question. What's the next?

Tess Evans: [Laughing] What was your rank at the beginning of enlistment and then when you retired?

Arthur D. Graves: I went in as a Second Lieutenant and was promoted on time, all the way up; that was another thing that came along, I was promoted to the grade of Lieutenant Colonel and I might be crazy, but I ain't stupid. I had sense enough to know I wasn't going to get another promotion and I was a little advanced in age for my rank at that particular time. I talked to so many people who went in and they stayed for 30 years, but they were 50 years old when they got out. And when they tried to find a job, their age was against them. They had qualifications, you know, just like the unemployment is so high now and how people let you get 50 years old on the job and then they, you know, cut you off, or lay you off or fire you for some particular reason then they don't have to pay you your retirement see, but…

Tess Evans: Yes sir, I know about that.

Arthur D. Graves: …you know about that, see so hell, I knew that 30 years ago. How long have I been out? 40 years, hell, the same thing been going on 40 years ago, and if you reached that 50th birthday, well they base your retirement on age 65 so all they could invest in you in private industry was 15 years so I said no, I'm gonna get out before I get 50. So at my 48th birthday I had 26 years of pay, in the grade of Lieutenant Colonel, so I got out, retired 31 December, '74 and went to work at UNA 1 January '75.

Tess Evans: Goodness.

Arthur D. Graves: And that was the rationale behind it; I wanted to get out and apply for a job before I reached that 50th birthday because I had talked to so many people…and so when I read about the high unemployment, now I say well, hell, that was going on 30 years ago and you didn't recognize it. People will work until they…that's the reason I got out, retired 31 December and I applied for my job six months before I got out and that's how that came about.

Tess Evans: How did you gain rank in the Air Force? Was it easy to gain rank for you?

Arthur D. Graves: You had two things against you, wasn't easy, but you know some people made it on time, performance and color. I did not experience that as such, but I was promoted right on time every time, but I had sense enough to see that to me, to receive another promotion before I reached retirement age was highly unlikely, but it had its ups and downs. And I tell people about this now. See in 1946, President Truman signed the executive order eliminating segregation in the military. The law was changed, but the hearts and minds of the individual was not changed.

Tess Evans: Right.

Arthur D. Graves: I know I'm not supposed to do this, but I've been doing it all these years so I'm gonna keep on doing it. I mean, you just can't change people overnight with just a law, so I fell in that group. Course now death has changed many of those things which made many of those laws that was passed years ago effective now because you have a new generation of people now, see. So you talk to anybody now, you went to a segregated school, what is that? Yeah, but it still exist, it still exist, and the events of yesterday still proves that.

Tess Evans: I agree.

Arthur D. Graves: So, I've been through that, but it's nothing new to me because I've seen it before. And that's one thing that I give President Obama and the American people credit for. But it's a long time coming. It's a long time coming.

Tess Evans: So, were you ever stationed outside of the U.S. or did you always stay in the U.S.?

Arthur D. Graves: Yes, my first overseas tour was in Moulins, France, and Moulins was 60 miles south of Paris on the main highway, and it was 40 miles north of Vichy. Now if you study history, Vichy is the city south of Paris where the free French, the French hid the French government to Vichy during the occupation. I was stationed at Moulins, France, and it was an air force station where we stored all of the World War II vehicles that was left in Europe. They carried them to big storage facility at Vichy, France, and that's where I was stationed. In addition to that, they were building microwave towers, microwave is just coming in communication, so I was assigned as the supply officer for the 12th Communications Squadron at Moulins, France, and we were building microwave towers from Poba [?], France which is down on its western coast all the way up to Cala [?], you know, you see the microwave towers now, well we put in the microwave towers, and in addition to that we were responsible for putting in runway lights at all of the air bases and sergeant had two overseas jobs, one was at [ ] Saudi Arabia, but I had that experience through my duties as a communications, or supply officer for this communications squadron. So I traveled all, and I wanted to see the country, I wanted to see the world, so I enjoyed that tour in France, plus the fact that I lived with a French family there, gave you experience. I wanted to learn to speak French and Moulins and so I had this tutor; he was very bilingual, he could speak English and French and he was teaching French. He was trying to teach me to speak French, and so after one of the classes one night, he says, Lieutenant, you will never learn to speak French. I looked at this man, you crazy, what you talking about I'll never learn to speak French? He says because you don't know English. He was trying to teach me

French by being able to conjugate parts of speech, words and their usage; he knew what he was talking about. And I never forgotten that, you can't speak French 'cause hell you can't even speak English, you don't know English. I didn't know the grammatical correctness of the words and so I said well two things gonna happen, I got to speak it until I die so I made an effort to improve my grammar and yesterday was proof of my philosophy. What is the one trait that Obama has?

Tess Evans: Charisma.

Arthur D. Graves: What is his charisma based on?

Tess Evans: He can communicate.

Arthur D. Graves: He can communicate. He has a mastery of the mother tongue; words and their usage and their meaning. That's all he got. He's not handsome. He bounces a basketball, but he doesn't do it for a living, he's not a coach, he's not a financier, but he understands the market. And that's what I emphasis to my children; if you can speak the mother tongue and you know words, their meaning and their usage.

Tess Evans: You're right on the money.

Arthur D. Graves: But really, seriously, that's true, that's what they should tell students at UNA.

Tess Evans: Oh yeah, I firmly agree that communication is key with so many things.

Arthur D. Graves: Communication is the key, if you can master the mother tongue and you know words and their usage, and when to speak and when to be quiet.

Tess Evans: That's key right there.

Arthur D. Graves: That's key right there. And that was proven again, because in the first debate, what did he do? Said nothing, they thought he wasn't prepared so forth, but he knew that the unemployment rate was 7.5 so he just knew the way. What did he tell him? Continue governor, talk yourself right on in that hole.

Tess Evans: So with all of that experience, would you say that, if you had to do it all over again you would still go into the military?

Arthur D. Graves: Well, the circumstances…the military was the best thing for me at that particular time because there were no black policemen, there were no black churches, there were no black lawyers; unemployment other than in the post office was very limited to blacks, so the military at that particular time was the best thing for me, and that's why I chose to stay with it.

Tess Evans: Excellent. So you mentioned that after the military, six months before you officially got out, you applied for another job.

Arthur D. Graves: I applied for another job.

Tess Evans: And you became a UNA professor?

Arthur D. Graves: That's right. What happened, I applied for a job at Huntsville [ ], TVA, and University of North Alabama. I really wanted to come home and my two chances of employment at home would either be TVA or UNA. Huntsville was an outside thing, not employment…but I applied for a position, for a job at those three places and I told my family that the first one that hires me, that's where we're gonna settle. You go back to tax law again, see if you are in service, and you're in overseas assignment, six months before you come home, you can come home tax free, buy a ticket, you don't have to buy, and the cost of the ticket plus the expense of coming home is all tax deductible. So I brought my family from Panama to Tuscumbia. We came home on vacation in June because I knew 31 December 1 was gonna be separated. We came home and that airline ticket and all that cost and everything was tax a deductible item. Just tell me what the law is, I'll figure out how to…and I came home and that's when I applied for those three jobs at those three living places, and I was gonna retire, or I was scheduled for retirement December 31st, I knew that was my last day, '74. But what happened, I came home, they sent me home on 1 December and assigned me to Maxwell Air Force Base, Montgomery, because that's where I was gonna be separated. So I'm home on leave and I'll never forget it; it was Friday the 13th that we got home from Panama. So I said now I better notify all three of these places to check on the status of my application for employment to see what's going on.

Tess Evans: Sure.

Arthur D. Graves: So I came over to UNA and went in to see Dr. Guillot and Dr. Guillot sent me to talk to Dr. Crocker, he was Dean of the School of Education. He's retired now, all these people dead now, and I remember that it was Friday the 13th when I went over; I didn't think nothing about it, and my philosophy was I really didn't want to go to work until June, see, but if they asked you when were you separated from service and you tell them that you were separated in December and you're now over here looking for a job, they're gonna say well, he couldn't find nothing nowhere else so this is his last resort. See you gotta think ahead of folks, and growing up in a segregated society and knowing how they thinking, you better…military, don't wait until the last minute to do something. So I came over and talked to Dr. Guillot and he sent me up to see Dr. Crocker and I talked to somebody else at that time, Dr. Stevens, and I talked to all three of them…there was somebody else who was, I should never forget him, but anyway I drove on the UNA campus back to my mother-in-law's house where we were stopping in Tuscumbia and my wife was standing at the door, come here, come here you got a telephone call. I got a call from Dr. Guillot wanting to know could I go to work Monday morning. So I told him I said, well sir, that sort of complicates things because I won't be officially out of the Air Force until 31 December and I don't want to put my name on someone kind of payroll and I'm not officially out of service. I had a friend at Maxwell Air Force Base in personnel that I knew, a sergeant, and I called him. He was handling all of my…he said come on down here, we'll take care of this thing so that Monday, which was the 16th, Saturday was the 14th, Sunday was the 15th, Monday was the 17th, I drove to Montgomery and this man processed all of my paper work.

He said please don't get killed between now and January 31st because it's gonna be a mess for everybody. And I came on back home and I told Dr. Guillot I could go to work immediately, but don't put me on the payroll until 1 January. So he said well come on, this will be your orientation thing for ya. He assigned me to the School of Education as their Director of Student Teaching, and I was on the payroll, I was there you know, going around, getting orientated and all this, but I officially didn't go on the payroll until 1 January '75 because I wasn't officially out of the service until 31 December.

Tess Evans: It worked out perfectly.

Arthur D. Graves: It worked out perfectly. I was in the School of Education as Director of Student Teaching.

Tess Evans: Did you enjoy it?

Arthur D. Graves: I enjoyed it very much because I had an opportunity; let's see, from Lawrenceburg, Tennessee, in the north, to Hamilton in the south, to Decatur in the east, to Savannah, Tennessee, in the west…you draw a circle around there and that's where we used to send all the students to high schools within that circle to do their student teaching. So I had an opportunity to travel and visit other schools and all that. That was an eye opener. That was an eye opener. I saw so much human talent that's been lost. Now before I notified the teacher, I notified the student teacher and the supervising teacher, I gave everybody a schedule at what school I was going to be at and what day and I was always there before class, before the last bell sort-of-speak. The door sometimes would be right here, the door sometimes would be right here, the classroom door. When I would get there, and I had already notified the student teacher and the supervising teacher that I would be there, and I would always go in and get me a seat in this corner right here in the back of the room and that way I could observe the whole classroom. Integration was the greatest disservice that was done to teachers and students and the waste of more talent than any other situation that has ever occurred in America. Now let me tell you why. The teachers had no prior relationship with the students or their family, but families didn't socialize or have any connection. The teachers never been in a black church, never been in a black home, never had any experience with a black. So they were on pins and needles. The students never had any associate, relationship, contact with the other students prior to integration so they were on pins and needles. And the classroom was the most segregated thing you see because all of the whites would sit up here, or up here, or in the middle, and all of the blacks would go to the extreme. Now I'm telling you, when this thing first came about an all that. And I could stand/sit in that classroom and watch that supervisor teacher and she never made contact, eye contact, with any of those black students who were sitting in their own little corner. And the black student has the supervising teacher buffaloed because if they said something to them, you know you had to be careful what you said because the black student would resent it and the first time you say you picking on me and no supervising teacher wanted to be accused of picking on a black student. There were a few of them who were really trying and they put the effort in, but the other student had the second line of defense, I got my rights. And that would just scare the daylights out of the teachers so they said I'll just let you sit there. And even if they said anything on that case they'd always say you prejudice and didn't no teacher wanted to be accused of being prejudice so it was three strikes against the teacher to start with and these students didn't have

sense enough to know that all they were doing was being detrimental to their own welfare by using those three lines of defense.

Tess Evans: This is so interesting.

Arthur D. Graves: And I could sit there and see it just as plain as I'm sitting here talking to you right now, how you're wasting so much talent and why your efforts are being lost because of those three things. Now if you could kick a football or bounce a basketball, it was a different question. And as long as you kick that football or bounce that basketball they'd let you sit right there and sit right on through until your eligibility ran out and then they passed you out. But as far as meeting academic standards, and I'm telling you, I'm telling you, I saw that for years and I complained about it, I expressed my opinion about what I saw was going on. Even today, they don't worship together; they socialize together if you are elected to a office or miss something or on a homecoming court or something like that. I was right there during this initial period and I tried to talk and it fell on deaf ears, because they said I gotta keep my job, we don't want no disturbance. I said, but don't you see how you crippling that child? And how you crippling yourself? Not true in all cases, there were some teachers who…but they were the exception and that thing was distressing me so that Dr. Guillot said I'm gonna take you out of that, and he moved me from Director of Student Teaching over to his office as the token, as Assistant to the President. And all I had to do was see and be seen. [Laughing]

Tess Evans: [Laughing] That sounds like a great job.

Arthur D. Graves: It was a good job, I had an office right next door in Keller Hall and you go to the president's, used to be, I hadn't been there in so long, but go in the door and there's a office to the left and the secretary sitting right in and you turn right you go into the president's office. I stayed in his office and went to all the conventions with Dr. Guillot because he was paralyzed and he couldn't drive and I was his chauffeur. But my official title was Assistant to the President and I was called on to speak and everything going assistant to the president, I said this ain't nothing. I never will forget, Coach Jones was the basketball coach and his son was playing basketball down at Alabama. The father to the son is down there now playing football and we used to laugh and Coach Jones said my son's got your job; he's the only token on the basketball team. We had that type of relationship down there, and I finally, I told Dr. Guillot I said, I'm just really not happy just sitting here being the show off. So then they moved me over to, Coach Self retired in health and physical education and he was teaching golf, and he gave me that job.

Tess Evans: Excellent.

Arthur D. Graves: So I completed my career as…course I taught two academic courses, politics and administration and health…anyway, had a wonderful experience and the high school had their 20th anniversary of the class this past homecoming and my granddaughter was on the homecoming court so I went to football game. I can't sit down in that cold, and this young man, dressed very nice, walked up to me and said Colonel Graves, you probably don't remember me, but I was a graduate of Deshler and I took three of your courses while you were teaching over at UNA and I'm now vice-president of a bank in Tuscaloosa and I remember so vividly many of the things you taught us in that class, and I used to tell the student teachers and try to emphasize,

they said the one thing you gotta be able to master is the mother tongue. I said words and their usage is the most important, I don't care what subject you taken over, and then I used to tell them, I said now this is the last semester of your four year program at UNA. You're going out to do your student teaching, but in 10 seconds, 10 seconds is all it is, the whole time that you have been here at UNA is going to be evaluated in those 10 seconds. When you walk in the classroom, you need to look like a teacher, and I said when you open your mouth, you need to talk like a teacher, because if you don't, those students are going to evaluate you on what they see and what they hear…

Tess Evans: Exactly.

Arthur D. Graves: …in that first 10 seconds.

Tess Evans: That is so true.

Arthur D. Graves: If you don't have command of the situation, in that particular situation, you might as well try something else. You might be successful after a long while, but you gonna go through a tremendous period of adjustment because they going to evaluate you in that first 10 seconds and if you don't know what…don't let the verbal pause kill…kill ya. You know oh God don't say that. Open your mouth and talk with authority and with knowledge.

Tess Evans: So did you ever have any problem with the students? Did you enjoy teaching the students?

Arthur D. Graves: No. I had one student that was a transfer from Alabama, who had a mental problem, and I don't know why, I think that's why they sent him home from Alabama and came to UNA, but he was very adamant about the class and he knew he had a problem and I told him, I said, man it's a good thing you're not black, you'd have a problem with you attitude. And that's another thing I emphasis to the students over there that 90 percent of what you know and what you do is gonna depend on your attitude. I mean, if you convey the impression to somebody that you got a chip on your shoulder when you start they don't wanna be bothered with you. It's just attitude. And that was the only student I ever had a problem with. I've had some other problems; I've had students come in, female students, that said shut the door, I want to talk to you. I said no leave that door open. I may be crazy, but I ain't stupid. I had another student, I had my grade book and I was doing something, and she walked up behind me and looked over my shoulder and I almost fell down, I said sugar don't get that close to me, I got a cold and I don't want you to catch it. I don't think it was anything by design; I never had no problems with students. My class would fill up quick. I enjoyed it and the relationship with the students. I told this in Tuscaloosa, you'll never get rich working for somebody else, I don't care what you go into, you be part owner or better or if you be the owner. There are some things that you enjoy doing. My daughter teachers over at UNA, she's been there for 26 years. She's been offered Ph.D…..oh I'll tell you about that story, how she got into Vanderbilt. But she just loves UNA and she just loves being close to home. I should tell you about that story. She got a Bachelor's from UNA and she wanted to go to Vanderbilt and she applied, but she never heard from them. She wanted to get her Master's and applied to the School of English and she told me the name of the professor. So I got an appointment and I saw him and told him my daughter had applied from UNA for graduate

school, so he said you see that stack of folders? Those are all applications for graduate school and they all good. So her application is in there somewhere and what he do when a new application come in he put that one on the bottom and raise the other ones up, you see. And I said that's true sir, but I had to play the card. I said they all are not black, they all are not female, and they all cannot pay their way. He went down that stack until he found her name and he pulled it out and put it on top and I thanked him and came on back. I said sugar you been accepted. Her first semester there, not necessarily grades, but they were so impressed by her personality and attitude that they gave her a job grading papers for the undergraduate. The second semester she taught English, undergraduate. After she got her Master's, they encourage her to stay for your Ph.D. and gave her a part time teaching job teaching freshman English, working on her Doctorate. She's got her Doctorate from Vanderbilt. Remember what I told you? Female, black, Ph.D. from Vanderbilt; could go anywhere she wanted to go, but she wanted to come home and been at UNA for 26 years. I don't know what course, what school you're in, but you might have taken her freshman English, she teaches freshman, two or three courses.

Tess Evans: I'm sure I may have seen her.

Arthur D. Graves: Dr. Minor.

Tess Evans: Minor, hum. I've never had her, but I think I've heard of her name. Of course I'm in the History department so my English is long over, about two years ago, so…but I've heard the name. That's wonderful. So when did you retire from UNA?

Arthur D. Graves: I'll tell you what happened. What year did I retire? If you take 74 and add 14 years to that, that'd be 84, 86 when I retired.

Tess Evans: 74 plus 14 years would be 88.

Arthur D. Graves: 88. That's a long time. I knew there was an 8 in there, been out for a long time. I enjoyed every minute of it.

Tess Evans: That's wonderful.

Arthur D. Graves: But in the same time in 1982 I bought this…I'll tell you how I got into the funeral business. What happened, this is the oldest, continuously black owned and operated business in Northwest Alabama.

Tess Evans: Wow.

Arthur D. Graves: Established in 1922 and was owned by one family right up until 1982 and it was right in my neighborhood in Tuscumbia. Lady had one son and he died and she was trying to sell the funeral home, had some other people who wanted to buy it, and I had been involved in a few real estate deals, had my real estate license and so forth, that's what I was going to do and I said I can work that deal for you. In two weeks, we had consummated transaction so I went to these three people and said now I got it, this is what is involved. I gave them a copy of the contract and said now you can get it for the price that I paid for it plus 6 percent commission

because I worked a deal, that what…that was 25 years ago; two had died and one was still around, but I found out why they couldn't deal with Ms. Thompson, they didn't have no money, couldn't get no money. So my relationship here with the funeral home has been pretty good, pretty good.

Tess Evans: How does this job impact you emotionally?

Arthur D. Graves: I don't become involved in it. Now my son who is a lawyer and incidentally have three children; two of them are lawyers and one's a Ph.D. from Vanderbilt so they've done pretty good; he wanted to become involved, I wanted him to become involved in the funeral home, but it's not for everybody. He'd go on funerals and he'd come back and he was just like I was when I was trying to be a pilot. I said man when you leave a cemetery that's it; you go on to the next one. He applied for and received a scholarship, he went into the military first and applied and received a scholarship to Cumberland School of Law at Birmingham Southern. They gave him a scholarship, now let me tell you something…no not Birmingham Southern, what is it? What's the other school? Samford.

Tess Evans: Samford, yeah.

Arthur D. Graves: Samford. When they give you a scholarship, thank God for the rich white folks that are Baptist in Alabama cause when they give you a scholarship you're gonna need room, board, tuition, books, 500 dollars for books.

Tess Evans: So it was almost like a full ride?

Arthur D. Graves: It's a full ride. He got a full ride scholarship to Samford law school. He's now chief legal officer of Huntsville Hospital. My baby girl, Sherry, she went one year at UNA and she transferred to Alabama and got a full scholarship to Samford Cumberland Law School, she finished there. She wanted to work for one of the large law firms in Atlanta and is doing very well. She was hired by Coke and was on the fast track at Coke. They sent her to Canada to do an internship for six months at their Canadian headquarters. Coca-cola when they put you on that fast track they raise world-wide and she came back to Atlanta and was there for a year and she was ready for her next intern, what they call it, overseas headquarters and she was going to Budapest…no Vienna, Austria.

Tess Evans: Oh, wow.

Arthur D. Graves: That's Coke headquarters in Europe. They told us you'd have to stay over there two years and usually they require what they call an executive examination before, executive physical before they send you to European location. They discovered that she has some [ ] on her colon, she's been fighting that cancer for five years. She's on disability retirement for Coke right now, she still lives in Atlanta. She's written several, they're books based on the mascots of the Southeastern Conference schools and she's doing very well. She can't practice law again because that would jeopardize her retirement from Coke, you can't be on their disability retirement and then practice your profession, so all the time she's been on this chemo she's spent her time reading and writing books so her first book they're gonna have a,

what is it, book signing at Coldwater in Tuscumbia sometime this month, and then the University of Alabama is gonna have on campus during the Iron Bowl for a book signing and introduction for the book…it's a nice little outfit, little cost for me because I paid for the publication…she doing fine, I mean she's still on chemo, but she didn't spend her time moping over her condition, she just spent all her time reading and writing.

Tess Evans: That's great.

Arthur D. Graves: Attitude, attitude about the whole thing, plus trust in the good Lord.

Tess Evans: Absolutely.

Arthur D. Graves: Let me tell you something. When I left going into the service the first time and enlisted, my mother gave me a little Testament, you know back in those days in the army they give you a little pocket New Testament. In that Testament she marked the 91st number of Songs: He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most high shall abide under the [ ] law [ ] my refuge and my God in Him I trust and so forth, and she wrote herself little notes up there and she said read this everyday; place your faith here. Okay, so when this situation with her cancer came up I gave her that little New Testament and I spoke…you see how long I've had this because mama gave it to me and put these little notes in there and I've kept it all these years and every once in a while I go back and pick it up to just remind myself that you're in the prayers of others, that's what you oughta remember. So she's kept her little Testament. Well during her illness she got on Facebook, she's been writing for the Huffington Post in New York, and she sends in different articles and publish them all over, and all she talks about how many hits they got over, whatever you call them, but anyway she received this one, a young lady. Her subject for this particular thing is that she's now in the 91st number of Songs and she went on to tell the story behind how she got that New Testament and she got her latest in her [ ] down in Georgia somewhere, and she said I too remember the 91st number of Songs because your grandmother taught me that many years ago in Tuscumbia, Alabama, in Sunday school.

Tess Evans: Wow.

Arthur D. Graves: You know some good things can happen in your life, and you never know. What's your next question?

Tess Evans: Well, this is our last question. Looking back from everything, being in the Air Force, being a teacher and your duties at UNA, and then being a director here, what all do you think you have taken away from all of that? What lessons have you learned, what, you know, life experiences, any advice you can give people, that kind of thing.

Arthur D. Graves: It goes back, it goes back to the three fundamentals that have been more to me and what I try to pass on to my children, is that a command of the language; words and their usage, and attitude, plus one other: a strong faith and self respect. If you're concerned about your own welfare, make sure you have self respect. You have to live with yourself. I always want myself to know just what kind of person I am; I don't want to be a bluster in the show to try to fool people that think that I don't know. I see things about myself that others don't see; I know

things about myself that others don't know. I want to go out with my head held high; I want to be able to look any man in the eye; I want to be self respecting and conscious free because I'm concerned about what people think about me. Little point…that if you can just keep those things in mind; attitude means more than others, always maintain your self respect, learn words and their meaning, and a mastery of the mother tongue, you're alright. Let me tell you another story, this is true. I told you about my dad, my father. He wasn't formally education, he was intelligent; I remember I came home from Tuskegee and they were sending me to Fort Binning, Georgia. We used to have to catch the bus, you know, every month they'd go down with the draftees getting on the bus going…old days…so my mother said no, she didn't want to go down to the bus station with me, so my father walked down to the bus station, getting on the bus. The last thing he said to me, well before the bus departed, was…he always referred to his wife as mama, we always referred to her as mama, mama can I do that? So he said now don't you do anything that you don't want to tell mama. Now you think about that, college student. Don't do anything at UNA that you won't tell your mama. And I remember that so emphatically, and then in Tuscumbia right now, this is the Palace Drug Store and this is Fifth Street and this is Main Street and they had a side door and you know blacks usually had to go through the side door, so the bus came up and it stopped right here, and there was about twenty of us, we got on the bus and I sat down and I looked over there at my daddy standing there by that door, you go in the Palace Drug Store, and that's the only thing that ever happened to me that I regret it, and I tell folks of that time. I never told my father that I loved him, and you know back in those days men didn't hug. I've always regretted that I knew he loved me, and I knew I loved him, and I tell folks that now, said he was standing there by that door and that's the only time I ever saw him cry, and Mr. John D. Rather, who was a prominent attorney in Tuscumbia at that time, he was walking up the street and he came there and he asked Frank, he saw my daddy standing there crying, he asked him what was wrong. He told him my baby boy was going off to the army, and Mr. Rather put arm around him and the two of them were standing there together, and I remember that when the bus drove off. And that's one thing I still think about. In my mind, I still think about the fact, now I knew he loved me and I loved him because he provided for all of us, he gave us a home, he did everything, but you know I never really hugged him and told him that I loved him, and I tell people that now. I have a radio program on Sunday morning and there is no largest listening audience, people wait on me in the morning and I tell them now go to church today, hug somebody, because there is no substitute for the human touch.

Tess Evans: I like that.

Arthur D. Graves: That goes back to the fact that not necessarily because I came from a loving home. Now I remember telling mama, we bought mama Mother's Day presents and we always hugged her and all that, but my dad…I've lived for that for 85 years, you know I'm 85 years old?

Tess Evans: 85, hmm.

Arthur D. Graves: But I still think about it. If I had to go back and do one thing over again, I would have hugged him and told him I loved him back when I went to that bus station, but you know you have to ride it off, go on to the next, just like the funeral business. You know when

you leave the cemetery I'm through with this one, I look forward to the next one. It's been a good ride.

Tess Evans: I believe you.

Arthur D. Graves: I had my son's birthday this past week and we always have Sunday dinner together, even now, they come home. My granddaughter, Lisa's daughter, she finished Alabama and stayed there another year and got her Master's and is now working for State Farm Insurance in Atlanta, but do you know, she went all the way through high school and never had Sunday dinner at home. It just automatic, we always have Sunday dinner together.

Tess Evans: It's definitely lost now.

Arthur D. Graves: It's lost now.

Tess Evans: The whole concept of sitting down with your family…

Arthur D. Graves: Sitting down with your family.

Tess Evans: …I mean my family did that. I loved sitting down and having meals with them when I was growing up through high school and then of course I left for college.

Arthur D. Graves: Where are you from?

Tess Evans: Originally Kansas.

Arthur D. Graves: Kansas. How'd you get all the way to Alabama? That's a long story, huh?

Tess Evans: Well, I moved here about eight years ago, but my dad is actually in the National Guard so he was relocated to Birmingham, that's where my folks are now.

Arthur D. Graves: Well, you can't do better than a military career and retirement see, 'cause when they run out of money hell, they just print some more. [Laughing]

Tess Evans: [Laughing] I like that.

Arthur D. Graves: And this man we were talking about, the 42 percent, you become accustomed to it, but they work for it, you working for it, you paid the price.

Tess Evans: Yeah, well, thank you very much, I really appreciate it. Thank you so much, this is wonderful information.

Arthur D. Graves: Well I enjoyed it.