Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History
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Arkansas Memories Project

Interview with

Gerald Alley
8 March 2006
Arlington, Texas

Interviewer: Scott Lunsford

Scott Lunsford: I have to ask you to say your full name . . .

Gerald Alley: Okay.

SL: . . . and spell your name so the guy that's gonna be helping me edit can get your chryon right.

GA: Okay.

SL: And then I'm gonna say that this is for the Pryor Center for Arkansas Oral and Visual History.

GA: Okay.

SL: And it will reside in the Special Collections Department at Mullins Library.

GA: Okay.

SL: Okay, so . . .

Franklin Evarts: Speed.

SL: Yeah?

FE: Okay. We got all that.

SL: Okay. Good.

FE: Just get the—the name.

[00:00:33] SL: All right. Let's have—let's have the name and kinda [kind of] sign in, please. [Laughs]

GA: My name is Gerald—G-E-R-A-L-D Byron—B-Y-R-O-N Alley—A-L-L-E-Y.

[00:00:47] SL: Great. Okay. Well—so let's talk about your early childhood, Gerald. What is the—what do you remember about it? What's your earliest memory that you have of your childhood?

GA: Earliest memory was my house in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. It was a small house, but big rooms in that house. Wasn't many big rooms, and I just remember most of all that every room had a lot of people in it, in my opinion. Every—at that time when I was growing up, my brothers and I stayed in the same room. It was three to a room—actually, three to a bed. But I remember that house having a front room that had—even though it was not an expensive house, my mother believed in trying to make sure that we had things of culture importance. So we had a piano, a black, small grand piano in the house.

SL: Mhmm.

GA: The floor was crooked, but—because of the weight of the piano and the foundation of the—of the—of the house was weak, but I remember wondering, "Why was a big piano in this house?" And that was my first recollation [recollection], because I used to play under the piano.

SL: [Laughs]

FE: I'm gonna [going to] pause for a second. I'm just gonna . . .

[Tape Stopped]

FE: And do my little mark. Okay, Scott, we're good.

SL: Great. Thanks.

FE: You bet.

[00:02:27] SL: What year were you born?

GA: 1952.

SL: I was born in 1952.

GA: Oh, same year.

SL: Wow. Same year.

GA: Good year, yeah?

SL: Yeah, it was a good year.

GA: Good year.

[00:02:39] SL: So we're in Pine Bluff, Arkansas. You remember a—a black baby grand piano in the front room—remember playing under it. So did your mother play? Is that . . .?

GA: She played somewhat, but mostly she did—she taught the children how to play. But she didn't play as much as she would normally play. It was more of teaching us the basics of music. And my older sister, which was approximately ten years older than I was, at that time as I was growing up, I remember her playing, and then her sister playing that had mastered the piano somewhat. And so that's why I heard the piano played is mostly. But I was the last of five children, so that's what I remember out of that experience.

[00:03:35] SL: So you'd actually play under that piano while they were playing, you think?

GA: I would be there—hear it ringing through the house.

SL: Uh-huh.

GA: Would be close to it. Would put your hands on the keys and just sort of rake 'em over to get sounds sometimes. And always felt it was a difficult machine to master in trying to make it according to the notes on the page.

SL: Uh-huh.

GA: And that's what I remember about the piano.

[00:04:00] SL: Man, that just—I mean, that—not only did it fill the room physically, but that had to just fill the house audio-wise. I mean, the sound—just having that sound and growing up with that sound is—is an item that most people don't grow up with.

GA: Right. But the little difference—I guess in the neighborhood I grew up in and maybe a couple years more—I lived across the street from a college campus. I mean, literally a block from a college campus, so . . .

SL: Mhmm.

GA: The other music sound I remember is that you could hear the musicians play in the music building from outside in the neighborhood, but that was sort of unique experience for us, 'cause we used to hear the bands play and even hear the—the—both marching band and the concert band play outside in the neighborhood sometime at night.

SL: So—gosh, you were treated to all kinds of music all the time. [ ]

GA: We were treated to music all the time, as well as in a household with—with so many people, you were treated to just the livelihood of a larger family. Even though our family wasn't the largest family in the neighborhood, it was sort of middle-of-the-road. We had families that had as many as thirteen, fourteen in it. We had families as small as three in it. But we were sort of with a family with the total family being seven. You know, we had a lot of friends and neighbors that would come through that neighborhood, so not only music, there was just communications, there was—it wasn't a very—for my neighborhood it was sort of busy street because it was a main street sort of comin' off from the campus. So we—we—we saw and heard the sounds of just a lively neighborhood.

[00:05:58] SL: Now, your mom was a teacher at Philander Smith [College]. Is that—did I read that?

GA: She—yes, she—she taught at Philander Smith prior to her marriage.

SL: Mhmm.

[00:06:19] GA: And after she married—maybe a year later—which was sometimes before I was born . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

GA: . . . she left and she came to Pine Bluff to be with my father, who had a service station business. So she—she was formally educated and she formally taught, so her radar screen was education. You gotta [got to] get a education and—and try to get the very best education you can. So she was very much a big advocate of education and how we would be educated.

[00:06:43] SL: Was she from Little Rock?

GA: She was from North Little Rock.

SL: Uh-huh.

GA: She was from North Little Rock, right off from downtown North Little Rock.

[00:06:51] SL: Mhmm. And do you know much about her folks—what her mom and dad . . .?

GA: Her father—her father was a—worked on the railroad.

SL: Mhmm.

GA: And I think he worked as a mechanic or a labor mechanic on the railroad. And it was the Missouri-Pacific Railroad. If you've been to Little Rock or North Little Rock, they have the trains and the [viaduct?] where the trains go under. So, one interesting thing about that was he grew up on the railroad near the [viaduct?], and in his house in North Little Rock there was always soot around because of the train yards that put it in the air. So, I remember very young going in his house, and they would always have to wipe their furniture down every day because of the soot in the air.

SL: Wow.

GA: So—interesting.

SL: That is interesting.

GA: His—his wife, though, died—my mother was grown—died the year I was born—my grandmother . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

GA: . . . on my mother's side. And she was stricken with, I believe, polio and other disabling diseases, so there was always a absence of not having a grandmother. I

never had that, ‘cause my father’s parents had passed by the time I was born, ‘cause I was the last one in the family.

SL: Uh-huh.

[00:08:18] GA: So—but the heritage of my mother’s father was working on a railroad. He was a hard-working individual, and he believed a lot in family as well.

[00:08:30] SL: So did your grandmother pass early in your mother’s life or . . .?

GA: Early—I mean—well, I was just born, so . . .

SL: Mhmm.

GA: . . . in retrospect—she was forty, probably . . .

SL: Mhmm.

GA: . . . when—when—when he passed.

SL: Right.

GA: So, from that perspective—I said early—I mean early from the standpoint that I never knew my grandmother on her side.

[00:09:07] SL: Mhmm. Did—so I guess I’m trying to—your grandmother was not—was not very well. Did—I wonder who—who instilled the education side or the influence on your mother. I mean, did she just—was that something that both her . . .

GA: I think . . .

SL: . . . that her mom and dad . . .

GA: I think . . .

SL: . . . in . . .

GA: I—I think her parents [in]stilled it because I think her father—while he was a

good laborer, he still worked on the railroad. He felt like the—and I'm sort of thinking through her conversations was . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

GA: . . . that at that time you had to have a education to be a Pullman if you were black.

SL: Yes.

GA: And he was not a Pullman. He was a good worker. But he probably felt that if he would only be a pull—if he was educated he could be a Pullman and work . . .

SL: Mhmm.

GA: . . . as a Pullman on a train. So the train was a very big thing, and probably his aspiration to her—you get a education, you can do more with it.

SL: Yep.

GA: And from that, maybe came from he's seeing that he probably could've done more with it if he had a formal education. And I really don't know how far he went in education. I think he went through high school, though . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

GA: . . . but I don't think he had a college education.

SL: Well, even getting through high school . . .

GA: Yeah, yeah.

SL: . . . was pretty remarkable . . .

GA: Right.

SL: . . . back then, 'cause folks—I mean, you didn't have to go to high school.

GA: Right.

SL: No one had to go to high school . . .

GA: Right.

SL: . . . back then.

GA: Right.

SL: You could just stop when you got through with the junior high level. A lot of people did 'cause they had to work.

[00:10:51] GA: And—and the interesting about her—she not only went to undergraduate school, she went to graduate school at the University of Kansas. So she had not only gone at one level of college, back in her day she'd gone to another level of college in her day. So I think her mission was if she had children, get 'em educated. Or whether you use it in a formal teaching or non-teaching area . . .

SL: Mhmm.

GA: . . . get 'em educated.

[00:11:25] SL: Now, this is your mother you're talking about.

GA: This is my mother.

SL: Yeah.

GA: Okay.

[Tape Stopped]

[00:11:31] SL: So, let's talk a little bit about your dad.

GA: Okay.

SL: Now, what I've read is that that's—he stressed becoming an entrepreneur . . .

GA: Right.

SL: . . . with his kids, and that's understandable. He had a—a service station, and it

was the first black-owned business or service station in Pine Bluff. Is that . . .?

GA: It was one of the first. I don't know if it was the first . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

GA: . . . black-owned business. As far as we can recall, it was the first black-owned service station.

SL: Mhmm.

GA: I mean, it might've been some as he relates 'em, "shade-tree mechanics" out there, but as far as an established service-station business . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

GA: . . . okay—in Pine Bluff, 'cause he went to school. He was from a place called Dark Corners, Arkansas . . .

SL: Wow.

GA: . . . which is right outside of Cotton Plant. And you can imagine why the name Dark Corners got coined for this suburbia of Cotton Plant, which it's hard to find Cotton Plant in the first place. But he had a unique background because even though he was from a small town outside of a small town, he went to what I heard—a small, little black academy.

SL: Okay.

[00:13:01] GA: So—and after a very young age—I'm—I'm thinking fourteen, fifteen—he left Pine Bluff—I mean, left Cotton Plant and went to Pine Bluff and he end up eventually gettin' over to the trade school on the campus there. At that time Arkansas AM&N had—was called Arkansas State and then it added A&M—AM&N because it became Agricultural, Mechanical and Normal College. And he

was in the trade school part of the auto mechanic area where he worked in that field—sort of like a trade—a little past high school to learn the skills of mechanics.

SL: Mhmm.

[00:13:51] GA: So after he worked there a while, he ended up believing that he could learn a trade and then start a business from the trade, and that's what he did.

[00:14:03] SL: So do you know much about his mom and dad?

GA: Only what we found out later after he passed. His—his—both his parents when I was around had passed. He was, I believe, next to the youngest in his family. But they were basic workers. His father worked, I believe, on a farm. His mother raised the rest of the family. It was—I'm not sure, but I believe it was one girl and five boys. He was next-to-the-youngest boy. The youngest was Byron, which I was named after my middle name. And the other family members migrated—his brothers and sisters migrated—Chicago [Illinois], St. Louis [Missouri] and Detroit [Michigan] and Los Angeles [California]. He didn't make it as far. He went to Pine Bluff, Arkansas, from Arkansas. So, his line of thinking was that if he stayed, got a trade background—after he worked as a trade background, he felt like he could do it and get paid enough to fix cars. And he did that, and he rented a little building that allowed him to do that. And then from there he—he bought that little building from the people who he rented it from. And his goal then was to sort of raise a family, and somewhere during that time he met my mother and convinced her to move out of Little Rock . . .

SL: Mhmm.

[00:15:46] GA: . . . to come work with him in Pine Bluff. And—and I would believe—you know, when you really think about people's motivation—you know, I used to ask Mother, "Why would you—?" And she would always say, "Well, you know, I went with your father because I felt like he—he knew what he wanted to do and I was impressed with his ability—the drive he wanted to do." And I think for her, while Pine Bluff made sense, it was next door to a college campus.

SL: Uh-huh.

GA: So it met her educational osmosis, you know, for lack of another thing. If it would've been another town with a—without a higher education, it might of not been enough to tilt her.

SL: Mhmm.

GA: So I always say, "Well, he had the college workin' on his side." And—far as—so she was satisfied from the standpoint of her move from Little Rock—Philander Smith—to AM&N because AM&N then was a land-grant college that seemed to grow a little bit bigger than . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

GA: . . . Philander Smith at the time.

SL: Mhmm.

[00:16:56] GA: So I—I—that's the most I know now. I know his parents came from Nashville, Tennessee.

SL: Okay.

GA: So as we try to track our lineage, we really came from Tennessee and—to Arkansas, and before Tennessee, I'm not sure.

SL: [Laughs]

GA: I mean . . .

SL: My—my dad was—his family was from Tennessee.

GA: Is that right?

SL: Uh-huh. He grew up in Des Arc.

GA: Okay.

[00:17:29] SL: But what was your mother's maiden name?

GA: Gray.

SL: Gray. Okay.

GA: Gray. My father's—my grandfather's William Foster Gray, and she was a Gray, and she was—she was not the youngest, she was next to the youngest. But at that period of time I know she lost a couple a sisters to polio, so there was a lot of health challenges and pneumonia during that period of time when she was growing up, so—and she lost brothers. I—I understood it was a larger family. They were having children, but there was also, you know . . .

SL: Pretty high mortality rate.

GA: . . . high mortality rate.

SL: Yeah.

GA: So . . .

SL: Yeah, there was a—a polio wave that . . .

GA: Epidemic. Yeah.

SL: Yes.

GA: That—that hit them pretty hard. And I—I think because as growing up as a child,

she was very loyal to my grandfather, 'cause she would drive—always back to North Little Rock. She seemed to be the—the sister that checked on her father more. She seemed to be very conscientious of making sure she brought us, which was that point in time a pain in the you know what to go to North Little Rock . . .

SL: [Laughs]

GA: . . . and was nothing to do in his house. But she made a strong commitment that we would get there and spend time with our grandfather, even though we had very little in common. He—he—he was of the age that he had raised a family. He was tired of working, and to have a bunch of wild boys and kids running around. He did it as "I like you to be here, but I'm not gonna cry when you leave, 'cause you're gonna be back next week." So . . .

SL: [Laughs]

GA: . . . he sort of bit down hard and accepted our presence, and—and—and from time to time we have sparts [spurts] of good connection, but most of it, it was more of a—a obligation on our part and a obligation on his part and a commitment on her part to make sure that we saw that connection.

[00:19:50] SL: I think that's—I think that's a really strong—says many things about your mom, and it also puts you in a car and on the road and connects you to your lineage. I mean, there's some—there's some strong values exhibited there that . . .

GA: You know, I think about—and—and my mother, even though she was not what you would consider a perceived real strong person, but in reflection—and we talk about later—in later years we'll talk about how strong she was, but she would

drive, and she would drive in the day and she'll come back at night. And up through the road of Highway 65, you know, where you have the little towns and you have, at that time, you know, with the—the—this was prior to civil rights and beginning of civil rights, back in the early—the late [19]50s.

SL: Yes.

GA: She was independently—nowhere—you couldn't stop at certain designated areas. The car—it should perform, but sometimes a car would break down. And I remember very, very young—even before I went to school—we drove to Little Rock. It was around Christmas, and some happened to the car on the way back and it was raining.

SL: Mhmm.

[00:21:11] GA: And it was just she and I, and I—I'd never forget. There was—I remembered Christmas, 'cause it was—there were gifts in the back of the station wagon, and she says, "Okay, we're gonna get out of the car. We're gonna go up to this farmhouse and we're gonna call and get help." And even though she was a small lady and I was a kid—hadn't started school, I really wasn't afraid because she didn't demonstrate there was fear, even though you get off on the side of road and it's raining, and you going up to a farmhouse somewhere you don't know anybody. There was no cell phones, so—so we go on up to the farmhouse in a area at a part of the area we wasn't familiar with, but she had a level of quiet confidence that gave me confidence that it'd be all right. And we made the phone call and we went back to the car, and I remember her continuously trying to entertain me until—'cause she called my father and he had to drive up to get the car and

pick us up. And I remember that I really wasn't—if I knew now what conditions we were in, I shoulda [should have] been more fearful of it. But it was—she just said, "Okay, the car's not working. I need to make a phone call. Let the rain slow down a little bit." And it was raining when we got out. But I do remember the—the thing I remember, it was—it was a gift, and it had Scotch tape that had—that had Christmas tape, 'cause normally we have Scotch tape and it didn't have any colors, but it had the hollies and the things on it.

SL: [Laughs]

GA: And I just remember that being in the back seat. And she said, "You can get the gift when we get back to the car." And that was a . . .

SL: That was the incentive to . . .

[00:23:11] GA: Instead of the—she laid an encouragement out to me. She didn't address the fear. She didn't demonstrate much fear herself. She demonstrated that she was in a situation, but she would—gave a level of peace that I woulda [would have] think that she had to been nervous about it. She had to been nervous about it because we were on the side of a road, you know, and we were thirty miles from Little Rock and twenty miles from Pine Bluff in the . . .

SL: Middle of nowhere.

GA: . . . middle of nowhere—not anywhere near Pine Bluff, and she is a lady going up to a house. I don't even remember the house. I remember going—walking on the side of the highway, and—and I noticed her not stopping from the standpoint of trying to catch a ride, but going to a house. And, that was a little strange to me. I was—you know? But, you know, when you go back to the early recollations

[recollections] . . .

SL: Mhmm.

GA: . . . of your parents.

SL: Mhmm.

[00:24:15] GA: And the other time I remember her thing was the first time I saw a funeral, I was with her. It was somebody that—it was a young lady that had died and we went to the funeral. And the first time I'd seen somebody who had died in a casket. And—and the lady had a white gown on. She was attractive, and I remember my mother said—I said, "Why is she laying there?" And this was all prior to school.

SL: Mhmm.

GA: And she said, "Well, she—she's—she's died." And she didn't sugarcoat it, and—and I—I took from that, but she didn't make it frightful. She just said, "We—we are born, we live and we die, and the timing of it comes not when you see it to be." And I remember going to that funeral. That—that's sort of—my trips along with her that makes me think that she's always—was a realist in—in everything she did and—and when she communicated with us, she—she was nice, but she was very much—"I'm a lay out the information as accurate as I can. I'm a be sensitive to you, but I'm not gonna give you illusion that stork came and got this person."

SL: [Laughs] Right.

GA: She—she was much more . . .

SL: Not gonna fill you with any fairy tales.

GA: Yeah, yeah.

SL: Yeah.

FE: I'm going to just caution you just real quick, just—when you hit your chest like that, be careful of the mic.

GA: Okay. Thank you.

FE: That's all I needed. [ ]

SL: So . . .

GA: I don't know. I sort of got off on . . .

SL: Oh, no, that's—that's all incredibly valuable memories, and it's so good to watch you rediscover that. I mean, to find that and to get it out. I—it's really a—it sounds like it's meaning as much to you now or more, now that you're thinking about it that it did at the time.

[00:26:31] GA: You know, it—it really does.

SL: Mhmm.

GA: It—it says to me, when I think about as we—I grew up and became older—as we faced life together, she was very consistent about, "Here's the reality. Here's my opinion. And even if you disagree, I'm a give you what I know from my experience and I share this wisdom. And I'm not gonna give you an illusion of what is real and what is not." And I guess from a personal side, I had a younger sister that passed when I was about four—three . . .

SL: Mhmm.

GA: . . . three and a half.

SL: Was that after funeral that you went to?

GA: I'm not sure.

SL: Mhmm.

GA: But I remember my—my—my—my sister had a special challenge. She had water on the brain [encephalitis] . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

GA: . . . and I was a—only thing I remember about it—I remember she was pretty little light-skinned girl . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

GA: And I could look over in the bassinette and see her.

SL: Uh-huh.

GA: And I remember my older brother said, "She's sick." And then I remember one time my mother said, "Okay, we gotta go somewhere 'cause your sister is no—not gonna be with us anymore." And I remember going to the funeral, and we were in the—the—the—the family car, and it was raining. It was outside the same church, and I remember two things. The sign of the church that was neon in blue that said St. James United Methodist Church—a little church in Pine Bluff—and that it was raining, and the size of the coffin. And my mother was—you could tell she was—she was affected, but she wanted to make sure she presented a sense of—not strength, but strength—quiet strength. She—she—she never—I don't remember her breaking down and just—she cried, but not . . .

SL: She was calm.

[00:28:53] GA: . . . just calm strength. And her whole philosophy through life was represent strength for the family. And she—she did that from that day as a kid

that I remember all the way to the day that she left us. She never—you know, I coined the tease where I said, "You never let 'em see you sweat, do you?" And—and—but a quiet strength. And if anything consistent came from her was, this is all part of life, so in a way, sort of deal with it. And even—and even from the standpoint of my sister, after she passed—I think she concentrated—"Okay, that happened, but I got five others here, and let me move them forward and let their lives be fulfilled," versus—'cause we really—we talked about my sister, but we didn't relish on that she was no longer there. And she was only a—let's say, about a year. But my mother really didn't go back and—I mean, we would visit the grave for a period of time. After a while, we—we didn't as much. But she—she tried to get the most out of the rest of the five she had. So—and she would always say that when she started talking about certain challenges we face as family. She said, "I'll never be right until all of you guys are doing all right. So it's not good enough for two or three. If you had a brother, you got a challenge. You got a sister, you got a challenge. I need to go address that to get ya'all through it, sort of like the shepherd with the lamb. If you're missing one, get the lamb that's—that's missing. You know, lead the rest the herd that all right. Go get the lamb that's missing and get 'em back to the herd before you get comfortable." So from her, she saw her family as the key to "we do as a unit." Not so much as individual—if one is great and one is down, then she's gonna work hard to get that other one to the best position they could be in. And that was pretty much her legacy, and that's—you know, you asked that question—makes me think about how far did that go back. And that went all the way back prior to me starting school.

[00:31:32] SL: That's good. Remarkable. Remarkable woman. At—at—and just an entirely different set of circumstances than we have now—the kind of environment and the—the politics that were going at that time and . . .

GA: Right.

SL: . . . for her to have that strength and commitment. I mean, I feel like from what—what I'm hearing, that she just took what was in front of her and—and promoted it, and did what she felt was right in every instance.

[00:32:21] GA: I—I think you're right, and I—and I believe—you know, it—it—it seems as though my father was strong, and he was a strong individual to deal with—the challenge he did in—in being in business and—and knowing he was responsible, not only to feed his self, but feed six other mouths—mouths in a—in a performance hands business you—where there was very little leveraging of other resources. You had to get out there, fix the car, collect the money enough every day to feed you and six others. And from the first perception, I guess, growing up, and especially in a—in a male environment, I saw him as partly a monolithic strength. Later in years, not to take anything away from him, it became so aware that, yeah, he earned the bucks, but who we were and who we are as a family came from—what she added that may not have been judged as quantitatively measured that—that we say we are. You know, if somebody writes the check—"Well, that's the person who did it." But, somebody that gets you to do certain things in your life by encouraging you, by persuading you, and we said tricking you sometimes to do something that you wouldn't dare try to do. It was—it was that part that really had a lot to do with me and my other siblings. Whatever we

turned out to be, it was because she was pretty much the matriarch, I mean—so I—I think that when I look back at that, it—it—'cause she lived twenty years after he lived.

SL: Mhmm.

[00:34:27] AW: And she took a role as a—as a wife and a mother in the real traditional roles. "I'm a support the family. The food's gonna be on the table. The kids gonna be in school. The kids gonna do—" And just—you know, we felt like that she was in a way subservient to what he was doing. And when he passed later on, to—to manage his business affairs to—as the business—when he passed, the business passed—how she stood there. And then she went on to promote other things we did in life as we were adults—really says that she just took that role because that's the best role that needs to be served—you could serve it. She could have with the skills she had, she could've taken another role and she would provided the opportunity and she wouldn't have been a woman and she would've been this. But the strength and the capability was there, but she played that position comfortably and, you know, a lot of times without much recognition of value to whatever the success a family would have. So it—it really—it was very clear, and we—I always look at my mother and say twenty years she—she lived and her family grew up and got a education. Next twenty years she raised a family and she grew the family. Next twenty years she—last—last twenty years, basically, for her. So it really—her independence in the first twenty years came back. In the last twenty years she took a position like you take a government position. "Well, I'll go do this for forty years."

SL: Mhmm.

[00:36:19] GA: "You know, I'm a—I'm a—I'm a step out of my role in doing this and I'm a go serve." And she served it, and she served it well.

[00:36:28] SL: Did—let's talk about your daddy for a little bit. Did the family help at the service station?

GA: Yes. The family helped at the service station because my father—and in that culture believe—he made it very clear—the food that's on the table came from somebody going around here and fixing a water pump or a fan belt, and that no matter what, you have to understand how the food got on the table.

SL: Mhmm.

GA: If you don't understand that, then you don't understand the basics. So the way to drill down for you to understand it—and I don't know if there were child labor laws back then . . .

SL: [Laughs]

GA: . . . but if they were, he broke 'em.

SL: [Laughs]

GA: And—and the first part of his introduction . . .

SL: With positive results, obviously. [Laughs]

GA: Well—well, I don't know. I mean, if this gets on the Internet, you know, they can't hurt him now.

SL: [Laughs]

[00:37:34] GA: So, the first experience at the service station, that I recall, it was before I went to school, because my mother—she was getting the bank deposits, drop-

ping the bank deposits, getting the cleaners—doing all those things that a partner would do that wasn't working, teaching, or whatever. So she was keeping activities going. And part of that was going around and doing some errands for the station. So as a kid—my other brothers and sisters was in school—she would send me around the station, 'cause there was—there was no childcare. I mean . . .

SL: Mhmm.

GA: Back then they just didn't have childcare. I mean, it was—A, if it wasn't your cousin or your grandmother or whatever, there was no, you know, childcare or play school facilities. So I remember coming to the service station and say, "You sit behind—" He had a desk. He had a—you know, you come in the service station. You got a desk, you got the couple a chairs, and they're outside as you have the—you know, where you work on the cars. And you had the gas station—the gas pumps out front. So . . .

SL: Mhmm.

[00:38:48] GA: . . . to get a kid four years old—"Go sit behind the desk."

SL: Mhmm.

GA: And my mother would make up a sandwich, and I'd sit behind there while she did other business. And if it was going to the beauty shop—whatever she did, I would have to be at the station. And it was usually—I remember mostly in the winter, because it would be cold and it was just a little stove around there. So I would sit behind the counter and see my father interact with people, and people come in. They'll pay for the gas—$2 for gas or $4 was a full tank back then.

SL: You bet.

[00:39:23] GA: And—and I would sit behind the—the cash drawer . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

GA: . . . and I didn't have no concept of money other than what was given to me to buy candy. And I didn't understand the valuations of the dollar—guy hand you a $1 bill after getting gas and he would maybe get $3 and some change back. Well, I didn't—I didn't equate the guy gave him a $10 and he'd given him change. I was saying, "You givin' money away!" [Laughter] You know, "You—he gives you one piece of paper. You give him three and some coins." And I always thought—and I asked one day. I say, "Why ya doin' this?" And he didn't really take a lot of time with me. He say, "You don't understand business. You gotta understand that the money he gave me was more than the money I gave him back." And that was my first experience in that. But I remember it, for him—he seen—even though he enjoyed in a way, he was a very closed person personally.

SL: Mhmm.

[00:40:34] GA: And his world was that service station, and that he was not a socialite or a social butterfly. He didn't go to many social activities, while my mother felt that in her spare time you had to be culturally challenged. And she wanted to leverage the relationship of the college, so she was part of the sorority. She was part of the groups there. And he basically say, "This is my island. You come in here. You get your service business. You pay for it and you leave." And the only friends he really had were loyal customers who would come around and kick the tires with him and maybe while they car was worked on, he may talk with 'em. But he was not a real talkative, social person. And, at first I took it as he didn't

really like this business—he was because of the obligations [ ] with this kids and this family, he had to do it.

SL: Mhmm.

GA: And he was sort of resentful for that. And—and he also—he also had a challenge, 'cause sometimes he would drink alcohol.

SL: Mhmm.

[00:41:52] GA: And I saw that as a—as a—as a challenge. "If you don't like it, why ya doing it?" And he'd basically say, "Basically, I'm doing it 'cause—look at all you guys. What are y'all gonna do if I don't do this?" And there was a paradox that was going on, because he was across the street from the—the college. The—the men around there were professors, doctors, lawyers, other professionals—black professionals around a college that in a way probably made him feel that "I gotta do better than them, because in the culture scenario, they at a higher reign than I am."

SL: Mhmm.

[00:42:45] GA: So, I think there was a deep level of, you know, "Most of these guys that you may think that are doing well probably had to get their car fixed here." And when you have an environment where the other guys' living was made and they would have white shirts on and tires [ties] at the end of the day, maybe the shirt is maybe pulled out of their pants a little bit. But at the end of the day for him, he was covered in oil and grease.

SL: Mhmm.

[00:43:18] GA: And for him—I—I think it made him reclusive from the standpoint

of—after work he didn't feel like socializing with them—cleaning up—because—and this is just me sort of processing this now.

SL: Mhmm.

GA: That he probably carried some of the perception issues because my mother felt it was a value to associate with the educational market. So for him, his island became his temple. So—and I guess I'm trying to say that to really know him, you had to spend time at this station. And—and I just respected what he did because it—it honed in on me, he had independence no matter what. No matter—he said one thing early on to me. You know, he said, "You know, if you think these individuals doin' so great, go pull out the credit book. See who owes you money." And that's when he would get somewhere in his lows of maybe feeling he didn't have what they had. And I think he also did it to say, "Independence is the ability—no matter what I say to somebody today, that nobody can come in here tomorrow—one person—and say, 'Get up and leave.'" And, to me, that says, you know, "Yeah, you're covered in oil. Yeah, you're tired. Yeah, you've—but at the end of the day you had control of your future." So I was torn between two worlds from that standpoint. One world of my mother saying, "You know, you really need to be educated. You really need to associate with a higher level as far as educated individuals, because I think our future is in education. A way out of whatever it is, is through education." And with him saying, "Well, that's all well and fine, but this person is the professor over here. One day somebody say, 'You gone.'" So I think those two impressions of how they saw the world sort of mold my understanding of—of my background. And I think over the years, even

through—you know, you're in high school and if you go—'cause I started working—and—and another thing about it—since I had older siblings, you know, you just want to be part of your older brothers anyway. And they got a chance to pump gas, and I said, "When am I gonna get a chance to pump gas?"

SL: Right.

[00:46:27] GA: And my father did like you do in college—when they didn't see a Coors beer in Arkansas, they said, "You can't do it. Only way you get it—you go to Oklahoma." He did the same thing. "Well, I—I won't let you pump gas. You can clean the oil cans, but you—I don't think I'm gonna *let* you pump gas." It made me more interested in wanting to pump gas. And once I started pumping gas, after one summer I said, "This is not . . ."

SL: [Laughs]

GA: " . . . all made out to be," because heat—the hoods are hot, and back then a full service station. You clean windows. You check fan belts. You check—a guy gets $3 worth of gas, you do everything.

SL: Pop the battery caps—look at the water in them. Yeah.

GA: Yeah, you—you checked the battery caps.

SL: Mhmm.

GA: Transmission.

SL: Mhmm.

GA: Oil, brake fluid—everything you can check, hoping—the subliminal message was "It might be a sale in that."

SL: Yeah.

[00:47:25] GA: But for me, working in—at the service station, it was just—"Why are we doing this for a guy who wants $2 worth of gas?"

SL: Mhmm.

GA: So, I think as I went through from elementary to junior high, the service station was a pain. It—it was a pain, but it was a obligation that even though it—my—my mother committed that obligation to us as boys, and I think—excuse me—I think this gets into the difference of—my sisters didn't work at the station because her perception was girls don't need to be at the station. I think . . .

SL: She was probably right.

[00:48:15] GA: . . . but his perception was, "But it's business. They need to know where the money comes from." So when he got to his three sons he said, "Okay, these other people had a—had a bye. These guys are gonna pay the price." And when it got down to me—he probably started me earlier, sooner or whatever, but it's like anything else. If you see that's the rule, there was no need to me to buck him, because I just felt like my other brothers went to the service station. And even though they got tired of it, I was the last one there but the first one to started and the last one out. And my mother honored his respect for us at the station, and she made sure that she would support him demanding we work there. And it got to the point where that—you know, in junior high I'm at the service station. My friends have, you know, paper routes, and they're making maybe $5 a week from a paper route. They [are] netting that. I work at the station. I ask my father for some money. He said, "That's for eating and sleeping in my house."

SL: [Laughs]

AW: "That's your contribution to the family."

SL: Yeah.

[00:49:37] GA: And one day I got sort of aggressive, and I said—and I saw somebody—neighborhood lady say, "You wanna [want to] come work at my tailor shop?" And I say, "Sure," and she gave me $3 for working that day. And that was the day I wasn't supposed to work at the station. And I was feeling pretty good 'cause I had $3 in my pocket. He say, "I hear you went over to the tailor shop and got you a job." I said, "Yeah." He say, "Well, you owe me $2.50 for eating my food and sleeping, so you really don't net but fifty cent," 'cause he reinforced—he say, "It's nothing more valuable to you to understand where your money comes for and what your contribution is to the family.

SL: Mhmm.

[00:50:20] GA: And it was—I didn't agree with it. I thought it was just totally whacked in my opinion. And—and I was surprised my mother stood by his decision. She said, "If you're working—if you live here, if that's where he wants you to work, that's where you work." So, I went through the—the years of being in high school with my friends—if they wanted to see me socially, they would have to come by the station. But location, location, location is very important, 'cause the station was right across the street from the college campus. And across the street from college campus most of the girls go past. So it turned a negative into a positive, because I was at a location that some of my friends didn't mind being at to come by and see me.

[00:51:11] SL: That's right. Well, and everybody needed to get gas.

GA: Everybody needed to get gas.

SL: And, I mean, I don't know how many gas stations were around Pine Bluff at that time, but there probably weren't many black ones I would—or I don't know. Maybe there were. I . . .

[00:51:27] GA: Well, you gotta sort of understand the dynamics of Pine Bluff. Pine Bluff—because it had the college campus there and because it had a arsenal there, it was always a predominantly black town.

SL: Mhmm.

GA: And for a small town of 50,000 back in the [19]50s and [19]60s—it's still 50,000.

SL: Yeah.

GA: What happened was that Pine Bluff had this college that was generating educated blacks.

SL: Mhmm.

GA: And it produced teachers, so it became a hub for producing teachers. So because of they producing abundant amount of teachers, they had to create schools—elementary, high school and junior high school and high schools. So in a town of 50,000 there were four black high schools.

SL: Wow.

[00:52:20] GA: We had enough schools to fight each other on any side of town.

SL: [Laughs]

GA: We had bands. We had orchestras. And not only that, the college had a laboratory school that taught teaching methods to teachers that would go out and teach Dumas—where you from? Did you say you're from . . .?

SL: Fayetteville.

GA: No, Fayetteville, but you said "Dis . . ."?

SL: Oh, my dad grew up in Des Arc.

GA: Des Arc.

SL: Yeah.

GA: And different places.

SL: Yeah.

[00:52:52] GA: And what it was doing—it was producing these black teachers that were looking for slots to go in schools that were coming up in the rural parts. Until they did, they went into this many hubs around Pine Bluff. So it created sort of educational overlap of educated blacks at the time.

[00:53:19] SL: Well, what was the—what about the white population in Pine Bluff? I mean, were—were the schools—was there—were there white schools?

GA: It was Pine Bluff High . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

GA: Watson Chapel and Dollarway. Watson Chapel was really west or south or southwest of Pine Bluff.

SL: Uh-huh.

GA: But it was one big school. But these pods of other schools literally put black schools on four corners of the city.

SL: Mhmm.

[00:53:51] GA: And what happened because of that—if you look at a master plan and, well, around each one of these educational hubs you had some kind of services—

housing and whatever. So there were other businesses, black-owned business, which gave more black-owned businesses in Pine Bluff probably than any place around, because they had these educational hubs. That means they had communities, and those communities needed service—little grocery stores, little cleaners, little this, little that. But around the college campus was probably the most vibrant level of black business. And when I say vibrant, it's still small-town, but . . .

SL: Mhmm.

GA: . . . if you looked at it from a, you know, master plan and you say, "Well, that's why they got these service stations here." And the—going back to the service station—so our station was one of several businesses up and down strip . . .

SL: Mhmm.

GA: . . . grocery store, cleaners, shoe shop, sewing facility, laundromats, different kinds of eateries, and stuff of that nature. But it was a full-service—when I got at my age it became a full-service mechanic shop. So he had fixed cars—not just sell gas—not just sell oil and gas, but actually repair, overhaul cars. So—but my father insisted that, you know, like, I was there and my friends come by and he said, "This is not a place you lotter [loiter]. Your friends cannot come around and sit on the drink cart and watch traffic go by. If they come here, they have a limited amount of time. And they—if you sweeping the front driveway, they need to help you sweep the front driveway." Well, that brought a low participation level from my friends. They just said, "Well, I didn't come to work. The guy's not paying you. You know he's not gonna pay us."

SL: Right. [Laughs]

[00:55:53] GA: So—so I went through high school with that—that burden, and even before I went to high school, in the morning we would have to get up and go open the station up. I mean, take the—the things off the cans of oil, make sure that the gas that you left it last night—same amount down in the tanks before by checking the readings.

SL: Mhmm.

GA: Pulling out the stuff that goes out—you know, they sell out front. So there were a lot of business fundamentals of inventory control. At that time we didn't call it inventory control.

SL: Right.

GA: Cost accounting. At that time we didn't call it . . .

SL: End caps where the oil racks out on the . . .

GA: Yeah.

SL: Yeah.

[00:56:33] GA: So—so as I went through junior high, high school, the one side, my mother was trying to keep into education, like, you know, "Get in this reading class. Get in this drama class. Get in this." And my father saying, "You need to be here every free minute you can between the times you goofing off." That sort of drove me to a combination of this. And I was a fair student—not a smart student. I was much smarter in elementary school, because I went to a—the college elementary school, which was a laboratory school.

SL: Mhmm.

GA: And they had new testing techniques.

SL: Mhmm.

GA: But when I got to junior high—bigger school, more girls—it just became . . .

SL: Girls always mess it up.

GA: You know, they always . . .

SL: [Laughs]

GA: No study habits. You know, goof around what I could. So I realize that a lot I liked about Pine Bluff was still there. The college was still there. It was older girls—more attractive girls. And I was a okay student. I could do all right, but I—by the time I got to be a—in high school, my grade point average had sort of plummet, and I was basically a C student.

SL: Mhmm.

[00:57:55] GA: My mother was disappointed because she said, "You could do better." My father was sort of like, "As long as he can get into college and go across the street and work part-time at the station, I'm okay with that."

SL: We outta [out of] tape? We're gonna change tape.

FE: Sorry. I didn't want to interrupt you.

[Tape Stopped]

[00:58:19] SL: Well, anyway.

GA: Okay.

SL: I—I—I just hope that you're enjoying . . .

GA: Well, yeah, it—it is. I mean, I . . .

SL: And when you—you know, I know that it's also tiring. I mean, I understand that,

too. But . . .

GA: Well, I can find more tiring things to do than this . . .

SL: [Laughs]

GA: . . . I'll tell you that.

SL: Well, I'm sure your daddy could've found more . . .

GA: [Laughs]

[00:58:40] SL: . . . tiring things for you to do than this, too. But, at the same time, you know, we're—both of those worlds—the world your mom was—was pointing you at—the world that your dad was giving you to endure, it sounds like—they're—they are both cultural. And—and I'm just wondering, you know, in the broader picture how your experiences and—and I'm just talking—let's just say you're still—we're still in your childhood—maybe up to high school. I wonder how that—what was going on with the rest of the country and the rest of the families in the country, and how they were—I mean, I'm assuming that your parents probably experienced—or for sure, their parents experienced the [Great] Depression. And I know in my—my parents did, and that affected them profoundly in the work ethic and the appreciation of having a job even and having a way to put food on the table. The great leveler that the Depression was and . . .

GA: Mhmm.

SL: . . . how it humbled everybody—how—I—I—I just see that—I see both—I see value—great value in both of these worlds that we've been talking about, with—with your mom, where your mom is telling you and what your dad was telling you. And it—it does sound like that the stuff that your dad expected from you

and the rest of the family was harder—physically harder, maybe. And also maybe didn't seem—I don't know. Maybe—I kinda get the impression that the attitude was that education was the way to get to higher ground, I guess. But at the same time, I—I can't—what's resonating with—with what your father was having—giving you an appreciation of how this comes about and how it is that you got this food on this table in front of you.

GA: Oh, he was a very . . .

SL: All—all of that is just so—there's nothing that can replace that or give you a better . . .

[01:01:04] GA: And what you said is very much on point, you know, his—I think one of the fears that he lived with every day—he feared that he didn't have a security of a job, because he says, "The only way we eat, we gotta pay all the bills, pay the guy that works here, pay everybody—some's left. Whatever that X is, is ours." So he was very, very—I would say tight—lack of a word is tight. He was very cautious of not spending what you don't have, because one day he may fix a car and he may make $100. Next day he may sit out there and nobody gets gas and nobody gets a car fixed and you don't make any money, but you still gotta pay out $30. So he lived with the fear of not the consistency or not having a safety net of a check. He didn't have a check. And I think he struggled with that. Well, the best way is never get in the position—it's not what you make, it's what you spend. So, doggoneit, part of his child labor law was "If I don't have to spend money out with a guy pumping gas and you here in the house, that $5 I woulda had to spend is still here." And I think he was driven by his fear of not having a

safety net. It was only him. And back then, credit extended from white America was different because he had to buy his gas from Esso [Eastern States Standard Oil] at the time—cash. So every time the transporter came, he had to write a check. Now, I think from that fear of if he couldn't write a check, then he couldn't get gas and he wouldn't be open, so he couldn't sell mechanic service. So getting the gas bought and still having food on the table was driven by "First of all, I gotta get the gas bought, so you guys gotta understand that's why we eating on one piece of meat right now, because we don't know if—we don't know if we gonna make $5,000 this year or we gonna make $1,000 this year or we make no money this year." And I think his challenge was allowing my mother to have the freedom to say these other things [are] important, but the cost of those things [are] important. He probably felt that those other people were getting steady checks and they could allocate their budget. He—he went this route of entrepreneurship, but the check is not guaranteed. So if you can't control it on the income-producing side, he had to control it on the cost-management side. And I think that's what drove—he lived a constant . . .

SL: Fiscal responsibility.

[01:04:20] GA: Fisical [fiscal] responsible—you don't spend what you don't have. And when I keep thinking about that, you know, and—and my—my mother still wanted to think the other things are important as well, and it probably took him a long struggle—go back to the piano. You know, it comes to me as a four-year-old—"Why in this ol' house we got a baby grand piano?" To her, music was a culture [culturally] important thing. And he'd say, "All right, get the piano, but

the house stays." So it wasn't going buying a big house. It was, "I'll give you—I'll make the compromise if—what's not the house, but the cultural benefit that you want which [is] the piano and your kids having piano—taking piano—is important to you, I'll get the piano. And if part of culture is, it is a small grand piano, but it's still in this sort of big—or this raggedy house—" not raggedy house, but house that's not—normally would accommodate a piano— "that's the trade-off we'll make." And I think as—as we talk about it—as I reflect on those two worlds, there was the steady compromise that they had for their own self sanity of how they would divide whatever they thought was important to them. And—and it continued on in high school and my—and I—you talk about at the time—one of the things unfortunately I taught my brother, and he's with us—with us in the business, but he was on his way driving to Little Rock . . .

SL: Mhmm.

[01:06:09] GA: . . . because he's doing a contract in Little Rock right now. And—but one of the things that's my older brother that he did, I believe, in something like the ninth grade—he had a minister in the neighborhood took him to somewhere in Tennessee to study at a Presbyterian camp. And the only thing I remember that it was a white camp, and I said, "You would actually go somewhere in Tennessee with a guy that goes studying in a white camp?" I mean, this is what I'm thinking, 'cause I'm—'cause he's in the ninth grade. I'm five years under him, so I was in the fourth grade. And I thought that was—you—that's almost insane. We—we were somewhat protected, being black in Pine Bluff, because it was enough blacks there to do commerce, entertainment. We had our own parks. We

had our own schools. We had our own businesses. So you can live a life and you would be in somewhat, even though there were whites there, there was enough blacks that you can have your own world.

SL: Do whatever you want.

[01:07:29] GA: It's like being in Oakland [California] [laughs] or being in, you know, South Africa. If there's enough—you [be]come a homogenous society if there's enough of you the same, regardless how big it is.

SL: Mhmm.

GA: And he was the first person I saw sort of step outside of that in the family . . .

SL: Mhmm.

GA: . . . to go do that, other than my older sisters, who went when I was very young to California on a train. And . . .

[01:08:03] SL: So you lived across the street from a black college?

GA: Right.

SL: You went to black elementary school?

GA: Right.

SL: You went to black junior high school?

GA: Uh-huh.

SL: And the high school that you went to was also all black?

GA: Yeah.

SL: So . . .

[01:08:23] GA: And those schools played only black schools in the city and outside the city.

SL: Yes.

GA: So being the college campus being there, like homecoming—it would just be more blacks in—now, there was downtown, and there was downtown and there was the bank down there—Simmons Bank and you had downtown out—my mother would go downtown and she would go to the bank. And I remember going in the bank. That's the first time I saw a—what you call a—not a high-rise building, but it was, like, eight stories, and it had an elevator—first time—and I remember at that time they had people running the elevator.

SL: Mhmm.

[01:09:07] GA: And that's really—I mean, we saw there in Pine Bluff colored water fountains, colored—you couldn't eat at the—the—the colored stands. I mean, you couldn't eat at the lunch counters. But when I was growing up as a kid, first of all, we wouldn't be eating at the counter no way, because my father say, "You eat at home." So it wasn't omission of something and I was gonna eat anyway. And, second of all, as a kid we didn't just eat out. I mean, we—we had hamburger stands in our own neighborhood that we could go buy stuff, and we really—when we were downtown we never thought about it from that perspective. So there was somewhat, even though it was integrated, it was isolated.

SL: Yeah.

[01:09:58] GA: And it was separate. I don't think it was equal, but it was separate. And—but it wasn't a omission, because it was so much—you know, we had a theater that was black-owned, but if you want to go to the other theater, which was the white-owned theater, you had to go to the balcony. But when we were

doing that, I was so young and my other sisters and brothers have accepted it. It took it as that's the way it was. So it was a—a separation, but it wasn't—not a omission of something. Might've not been as nice, not as—not as pretty, but it was adequate, and that's the way it was. So when he went to Nash[ville]—or somewhere in Tennessee and he came back, that was just beginning to start the civil rights struggle. And as I remember, we—we used to hear about it, but we never really was engaged in it as much. But one of the first things that happened when—if you move a little further, being that college campus there—it took—you know, those students would leave and go do sit-ins. So we saw firsthand, because usually that—that Civil Rights Movement moved through college campus and educated individuals, so we would hear students going sitting in and the cops would do this and do that. My father took it—he was probably hardcore Republican deep down—I mean, not—not a Republican. He was just saying, "Well, you just need to take care of business. I don't have—" he was old school. He didn't really see the struggle. He faced racism, but he faced it within his own limits, and he was not of the [tenue?] to, as I was coming up, to say, "Well, yeah, we need to do this. We need to do that." He said, "What you need to do is learn how to work and have a good work ethics." And so through high school we ended up—even though I was in school, I have friends of mine that actually—that I was at this elementary school—their parents were educated and they started sending their kids to let's say Pine Bluff High [School]. So I have friends of mine back in elementary school—got in high school—had started going to the white school that first put me encountered with—'cause I could play a saxophone somewhat decent, but

not—not a Eric Benet or nothing like that, but—so he would play in little groups there in the high school. He'd probably be the only black, but he would play in little groups. And he would say, "We need a extra sax. Would you come over here and play?" And I'd really never engage with—with the white market, other than I would one or two times met with him and they played at a little teen club. And that was the first time I really engaged with that, and it was sort of like "Eww! This is not what I wanna do." So for . . .

[01:13:31] SL: 'Cause it was too foreign to ya to . . .

GA: Too foreign, you know . . .

SL: Not so much because there was anything ugly going on, but it just didn't—you just . . .

[01:13:39] GA: It—it just—I—I was totally out of my element—didn't understand it. They didn't understand me. My mother say, "Well, if you get exposure, go do it," 'cause she was always say, "Well, if there's exposure of opportunity, pursue it." So as I went through high school and I guess if the highlights of high school was I become somewhat popular from the standpoint of just hanging around and—but grades were not a big priority. I was still living off what I been pre-educated in earlier, and I was working at station, staying somewhat out of trouble. So far as my father, I was keeping it between the—the lines. My mother was—my brother at that point in time had—he was smart, he was studious, he was good in math, and he was over at Arkansas AM&N—the college across—and she said, "Somebody put an idea—he really needs to go into engineering." The only engineering school was University of Arkansas. And he was not as—what you say—push the

envelope, so he say, "Yeah, I guess I would like engineering." But he would have to go to University of Arkansas. But he was studious and he'd already done his [chem?] somewhere that he went—and so if he went up there and studied and he was studious, he'll be all right. And he went up there and he came back—it's sort of like he went to another country. Way we saw it, he going up there. My father really didn't promote it because he said, "What is it you expect to get over there you can't get over here?" And I think he just wanted cheap labor when he said that, because my brother, if he was in town he would work at the station. And I think from my father's standpoint, didn't understand the value of engineering because engineering was not something that we talked about in our neighborhood much.

SL: Mhmm.

[01:15:51] GA: And the other problem—it was sort of like, they couldn't explain what it did, you know?

SL: What an engineer was.

GA: What an engineer was. He said he was gonna major in electrical engineering, and I remember my father asking—say, "What do you do with that?" He said, "Well, I'll be able to help design and figure out electrical components." He said, "Well, can you fix this TV," 'cause you know, we had typical—a TV that's broken and you . . .

SL: You bet.

GA: . . . go get new TV and you put another T—he said, "No." He said, "Well, what's the good of engineering? You can't fix a TV. The guy down the street can fix the

TV and he's not a engineer."

SL: Mhmm.

[01:16:30] GA: So my father's understanding of it was limited—didn't see the value of it. My mother said, "He needs to go to engineering. He's studied. He's prepared. It's gonna take a little bit more money. We can get the loan money. We can get some grant money. And if he takes these exams he can get part his education paid." And I remember my mother lobbying for that, and my father said, "I still don't see the value of it, but—" his compromise and, you know—I see a saying a lot of time—"Peace has value." She didn't let go of it. He went up there and he performed as far as engineering. He—he struggled because first he was in civil engineering and it had to use surveying. He had to work with teams, and he couldn't get any students to work with him, so he couldn't do the surveying work. So he didn't make good grades and he switched into electrical engineering, and he started doing all right. So as he was up there, had another brother that was two years—two years ahead of me. Didn't study. Was—you know, Troy was the studious. My other brother was on the other side. He was more of a revel-raiser.

SL: Mhmm.

[01:17:56] GA: And he was—last thing he wanted to do was study.

SL: Hmm.

GA: And so I was sort of in between the two. If I had to perform I would. But if I—if you didn't watch me I wouldn't perform. So he—my other brother decided to go to the Air Force.

SL: Mhmm.

GA: Which was a—which was a good compromise, because he was probably the most rebellious of all of us.

SL: So he got disciplined and . . .

GA: And—and one of the rebellious things—and my—my mother said he was more like my father, and because they were like each other, it was like water and oil.

SL: Hmm.

[01:18:39] GA: And because he was becoming of age, it was no compromise between those two. And I think he didn't—I always wanted to please both my parents, in a way.

SL: Sure.

[01:18:53] GA: So my—my goal was I—I learned early on that they really didn't figure out my father. He was a good guy. You just had to deal with him on his turf. You had to spend the time at the station and then he would eventually communicate with you because you on his turf. So as we were going through high school, my brother had graduated from—my other brother had graduated from high school and he was cross the street at the campus, and he had gotten to the age that him and my father were just were not—two men in the house just don't work. And my other brother, Troy, was up to the University of Arkansas, and he was the starlet educated one from the standpoint of being able to stay up there was the first thing, and he was facing a lot of challenges, 'cause when he went there it was the first year they allowed blacks to stay in a dorm. So he was going through quite a big experience. That was in . . .

SL: [19]65.

GA: . . . [19]65.

SL: Mhmm.

[01:20:06] GA: But he—he was so focused on engineering, and my mother made it, like, "This is what I was talking about. We—we really move the family to—" my—my sisters had graduated from the local campus there. Both of them were gonna be schoolteachers, and that was—that was fine. But Troy was the first son, and now he's gonna be a engineer. So it met her esteem needs, and my father was satisfied his money wasn't wasted, and Troy did do—come back and work at the station between the times he came. It was very respectful for that, and—and not close from a communication with my father, but mutual respect. My other brother was pretty much totally revel-raiser from that standpoint, and he elected to go to the service. And I—I never forget my father would—I don't know if he was teasing. It was just sort of how profound he was at the time. When my brother and him were having their disputes and he would still have to come to the station, he would tell—Father'd tell some of the guys at the station, say, "Here's my son. Got tired of taking orders from me, so he joined the service." And it used to—and even my brother say, "When you put it in that perspective, it didn't seem like I made much sense."

SL: [Laughs]

[01:21:33] GA: So I come around in the—the last year or so in high school because of the—the non-studious commitment I made in ninth, tenth and eleventh, my GPA [grade point average] was basically C. I coulda [could have] gone over to the campus. And my mother came in one day and say, "You know, your brother's

graduating next year. You need to go up to the University of Arkansas." And I thought she had lost her mind.

SL: [Laughs]

[01:22:07] GA: I said, "What would I be doing up there?"

SL: [Laughs]

GA: She said, "You need to go 'cause you haven't been challenged, and you need to be challenged, and you could—" I said, "First of all, I couldn't get—I couldn't get in." She said, "How do you know you can't get in?" I said, "Because I got a basic average." She said, "How do you know? Until you try, you don't know." And she said, "That's where need to go, 'cause I don't want you to go to school over here on this campus." And so she had two battles to fight—my battle and my father's battle.

SL: Yep.

[01:22:46] GA: Because he didn't see—he said, "Now, [laughs] you—you—you made me send this other guy go up in here, and—and that was a decent call, because he had prepared. He's a different kinda person. We understand it's—requires a lot of studying. We've seen this guy in action. If it doesn't wear a dress on, he ain't gonna put much time on it."

SL: [Laughs]

[01:23:10] GA: So—so she—she kept pushing, you know? And I think she used my brother as well, to say, "You don't know." And he presented a—you know, "They got bigger dorms. They got this, they got that. It's—you know, people got cars up there, you know?" And I was saying, "Oh, yeah?" "Yeah, that's—" you

know, he took every little positive thing he could, and she kept saying, "You can't go to school. You might need to go to the service. You might need to do something else, then go on this campus next door, 'cause you not being challenged." And she finally got to the point—I made application. And, you know, I think she added a few things on my little applications that probably were stretched . . .

SL: Mhmm.

GA: . . . as far as involvement of different things . . .

SL: Mhmm.

[01:24:07] GA: . . . and I got accepted, if I went to summer school the first. And it—it dawned on me that—my father said, "I will not—don't—" his key was "Don't waste my money." I mean, he—he drove that home like, "That's the most sinful thing you can do is waste money that the family raised, on you not puttin' the effort."

SL: Yep.

[01:24:35] GA: So after he—she convinced me—oh, no, got me in. I wasn't still bought into it, it was the acceptance letter, and then convinced him to spend the money on summer school. Prior to that summer, the—the business thing stuck with me, 'cause he said—you know, he wouldn't hardly take vacation. His habit was that if you took a vacation, he had to have someone there to run the station. He said, "You can't close a service station two weeks. People start going other places and we can't let 'em do it." And he didn't have a mechanic there to do it. So, I said, "I can run it." And it was sort of like—I don't know if you seen *The Godfather,* Michael Corleon . . .

SL: Sure.

GA: . . . say, "Well, why don't—let—let me run the family." He looked at me like, "Come on. Come on, Mike, you can't—"

SL: "I have better things—"

GA: Yeah.

SL: Well, to Michael, he'd say, "I have better things for you," but . . .

[01:25:38] GA: But—but he never envisioned that. And he said, "Well—" I said, "We got two guys here gonna do the mechanic work, but the business of it—I been around ya every day. I know how to open it. I know how to close it. I know how to count the books. Let me take a shot at it." And, my mother wanted him to go on vacation to see his brothers and stuff.

SL: Mhmm.

GA: And he said, "Well . . ."

[01:26:05] SL: Now, you're, like, eighteen years old at this . . .?

GA: No. Here's the ironic thing about it. I started school when I was four.

SL: Oh, so you were sixteen.

GA: Yeah, I—sixteen.

SL: Wow.

[01:26:18] GA: So, I went to the University of Arkansas at sixteen.

SL: Man!

GA: So at sixteen . . .

SL: [Laughs]

GA: . . . I said, "Let me run it, because . . ." We had one of two options. Here's—it

wasn't all just good and wanted to be on—I knew if I stayed with the station they would leave me at home at the house by myself.

SL: [Laughs]

GA: So there I am.

SL: Vacation.

[01:26:45.] GA: You know, "Y'all go on vacation." I had a house for two weeks for myself. So for me, it wasn't me really wantin' to run the station, it was me—them going and leaving me there at sixteen at the house.

SL: Oh, boy.

[01:26:57] GA: So I said, "If it means all day I gotta work and all night I can party, works for me."

SL: [Laughs]

GA: So, he said, "Look, he's what you do. Here's what you don't do. Here's . . ." And he said, "Okay, can he do something that wrong?" And he had a couple of guys that were older guys that could do the mechanic work, and he was pretty convinced that I could open and close and the business stuff, so he left. And I was true to my word. I was there at—he said, "That opens at 7:00 [a.m.]. It closes at 8:00 [p.m.]." He said, "I'm a call the station at 7:05. You better answer at the station."

SL: [Laughs]

[01:27:44] GA: You know, 'cause prior to that, you know, they had to call me three or four times to get me there.

SL: Right.

GA: But I said, "Deal."

SL: Mhmm.

GA: So I would get up, stay at home, open the station, and station—it was the summertime, so the station wasn't what it was. And didn't take too much to heart because it was sort of like on automatic cruise, 'cause other guys told—knew what to do.

SL: Mhmm.

[01:28:12] GA: But we had a situation the third day I was there.

SL: Uh-oh.

GA: And the situation was that the tanks for which the gas was stored underground cracked.

SL: Oh.

GA: So underground water came in the tanks, and every gallon of gas we were pumping, we were pumping water in people's cars. So all of a sudden the phones started ringing. "My car is broke down and say it got water—you need to come get my car." And I'm on the phone trying to explain what happened. They say, "Yeah, you don't—we—we need to do something and you need to go pick up cars." So, all of a sudden the third day I'm in this what's supposed to be automatic cruise. I'm just laying out my agenda for the night.

SL: [Laughs]

GA: That now I'm here in a panic situation, that we got about thirty customers that we'd pumped gas—we had to go tow the car, get the gas pumped—drain the tanks and do this. We don't have wreckers. We don't have none of this. So, I'm saying, "My father just got to Chicago. If I called and tell him this, he's gonna

turn around and come back, and then the whole deal falls apart."

SL: Right.

[01:29:27] GA: So the guys said, "We need to call your father." I said, "No. No, you don't. We'll handle this." And we ended up getting the guy next door that had a service station—he had a tow truck, to start towing. We—we emptied the—the gas tanks. First time I called Esso and said, "Look, these tanks have cracked. We're pumping gas." And the guy said, "We'll send somebody down and find out which ones are . . ." We stopped that, and after about 10:00 that night, we had gotten all of the cars that had broken down—cars drained, tanks up. The party I was supposed to have had got postponed. I didn't say got cancelled, got post-poned, and we fixed that, and it was really a defining moment, because I actually cared [about] what I was supposed to do. And—and the guys that worked there and said, "I still think you need to call your father." I said, "No, we not gonna call him. If we called him and he turns around from Chicago, he would never leave again." And, so, we got that resolved. Got the people from Memphis to come down. They told us which tank had cracked. They put the gas in the other tank, and we just sold one brand of gas instead of the premium and the plus. So the—all that week we were resolving those kinds of issues, and he comes back in two weeks. He called me at night and said, "Well, how's—?" [I said,] "Fine. No problem."

SL: [Laughs]

[01:31:17] GA: And then when we get there, he gets back two weeks and—and, sure enough, we had a—we had parties at the house at night, and one of the neighbors

had found out that I was having parties at the house, and he was convinced to tell my father that, "You know, your son Friday night has had parties at your house," and he came back—when my father got back to the station—first thing he did—he came to the station. He—he went over the books and he—he was never super comfort[able]—he said, "Okay, the place didn't burn down." I guess that did—I mean, that was the highest compliment.

SL: Yeah.

[01:31:59] GA: And I was feeling decent about that. So here comes the neighbor, and he comes over and said, "I wanna tell you, Mr. Alley, your son had parties at night." And then my father said, "Look, how he behaved from 7:00 to 8:00 was my deal. If you wanna know how he behaved at 8:00, you need to talk to his mother." And that was a pact that we made at that point. He knew it was a party, but he was saying "He was hired to do this." So it was sort of clear separation that . . .

SL: Yeah.

GA: . . . we honored amongst each other on that. And then the mechanics said, "You know, we had all these problems." And he said, "Why didn't you tell me about the gas?" I said, "If you woulda known what was going on, you couldna [could not have] enjoyed your time off."

SL: That's right. It's a good call.

[01:32:54] GA: And he said, "I still think you shoulda called me." But in his heart—everybody say, "Yeah, he had this and he handled that." We never really talked about it, but I think at that point it became in his mind that what he was preaching

in the business stuck. I think he felt that, "You finally got it. You didn't get it up to then, but you got it then." And so, that summer—late that summer he said, "All right, if your mother wants you to go up there, I think you should go up there." And I said, "Well, I'm not sure." He said, "Don't waste my money." And that's what moved him to pay for me to go there to Fayetteville that summer.

[01:33:45] SL: He's gotta be—he had to have been proud. You know, I mean, I don't know if he would ever have told you that, but . . .

GA: Well, he—he was a man that didn't give much accolades for anything.

SL: Mhmm.

GA: But if he was not critical, we considered that a accolade.

SL: A victory. [Laughter]

GA: You know, it was the Marine sergeant . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

GA: . . . that you don't get pulled out and get dogged out, and other than that it's acceptable. You won't get any more than, "It's acceptable." So, second semester—sixteen—I go to Fayetteville. Different world.

[01:34:22] SL: Yeah, I—you know . . .

GA: Different world.

SL: You—and your—is your brother still on campus? He's gone?

[01:34:31] GA: Well, what happened is—he graduates—he graduates the day that I come on. My father never been up to Fayetteville, only to—to go to his graduation, and to drop me off. He said, "If you up there I don't need to be up there."

SL: [Laughs]

[01:34:54] GA: Right? And a little story about my father and his principles: my brother—was his senior year in engineering, and he got offered a intern job at Central Transforming.

SL: Okay.

GA: And it was a electrical supply cable transformer maker in Pine Bluff—probably one of the biggest employers in Pine Bluff, and they hired him as a engineering student—intern.

SL: Mhmm.

GA: And at that time he was getting paid—they were paying him $8.50 an hour.

SL: That was big money.

GA: It was very big money. And my father—first question my father's—probably—he said, "You gonna come in here?" He said, "You're not gonna work [at the station]?" [My brother said,] "No, I got a job at Central Transforming." He said, "No, you need to work at the station." He said, "By the way, how much they paying you?" He told him. My father said, "What?"

SL: [Laughs]

[01:35:44] GA: Because he was paying him more—at that time mechanics were getting $50 a week, and here's my brother, who had no formal training, that was making more than that. And my—my father—first time ever said, "Well, tell me more about that engineering. Is it gonna pay you that?" And he said—so my brother said, "Yeah, they gonna pay me engineering." My father did the typical thing, "Well, if you're not working here, you gotta pay on your rent. You gotta pay for your expenses. You need to use the car—you gotta pay the gas." So my

brother does all this, and he—he—he works all summer, and his—back his mind, he say, "Well, I'm gonna get me a car." So he says, "Okay." And I'm sayin', "Well, Troy, you wanna get a car?" "Yeah, yeah." So we go up to Little Rock on the weekend and we look at cars, and we looked at everything from Corvettes to Camaros and everything, but we settled on a Volkswagen.

SL: [Laughs]

GA: And so he sees this . . .

SL: [Laughs] That's a big difference between that and the 'Vette. [Laughs]

GA: But he—he—he goes up to Volkswagen 'cause he—he knew if was gonna get this car it had to be all cash, because my father wasn't gonna pay for the car. So he had to pay it off his residual that he had from not paying the toll of the house and taxes and [? and fuel?].

SL: Hmm.

[01:37:12] GA: So I think he had about—I'm trying to think, $1,100.

SL: Mhmm.

GA: Something like that. Maybe not that much. Maybe $900. Found this Volkswagen—got it—talked the guy into—to—to letting him drive it to Pine Bluff to show my father, 'cause there was a—a respect. You don't make a purchase without—especially a car, because even people in the neighborhood, before they bought cars they would—especially used car—they'd bring it by the station and let my father check it out.

SL: Sure.

[01:37:42] GA: Father looked at the car and said, "Volkswagen." Said, "What are you

gonna do?" He said, "I'm thinking about buying this Volkswagen." He said, "How much is it?" Whatever it was, $1,100. He looked at it. He said, "Huh." My brother was there was saying, "Well, do you think it's a good deal?" He said, "I don't know." He said, "What strikes me—it's $1,100, right?" He said, "Yeah." He said, "You know what? That's about as much it takes for your last year to get your degree." Brother looked at it—I was listening in. I said, "This thing has turned ugly all of a sudden." He said, "Well, I think you need to decide whether or not you need to buy that car or get a education." My brother said, "Wait a minute. Well, you—you got the $1,100." He said, "So do you. Who needs it? Who's gonna benefit from the money?" He said, "I'll let you think about that." So my brother took a bus his last year back up to Fayetteville—took his $1,100 and spent it on his last year of education.

SL: Yep.

[01:38:52] GA: And so I said, "Whoa! That is hard."

SL: [Laughs] Mhmm..

GA: I said, "He set him up. He let him go practice and do this other stuff," and I said, "Whew!" And that hurt. That—that hurt. I—I just said, "Now, if there's a lesson in that, I don't get it at my age." But, I knew then, that's what I'm dealing with.

SL: Yep.

[01:39:15] GA: You know, he said, "It's your money—my money. You benefit. It's for you. You gotta be willing to spend it if you want it." So, he took the bus back up to Fayetteville—finished his last year. So when he graduates, he drops Troy off.

SL: Yeah.

[01:39:33] GA: No, he—he goes to graduation. He drops me off and, you know, it's sort of like a—no—the dorms weren't open, yet. They were gonna open up in a—over the weekend—over the Monday. And Troy found a place for me to stay at a guy's house and my father said, "Don't waste my money." That was his last statement to me. And my mother's constant—you know, "You know what you're up here for. It's not a party. It's not a vacation. You know, you need to get a education." And at that point in time I understood and I got left there. And I—I remember the first night, 'cause I was staying in a house that a guy was staying in, and the first time I was really out of my element. I wasn't around in my neighborhood.

SL: Right.

[01:40:29] GA: I didn't know anybody. My brother was here—he was gone. And I sat up there in the middle of the night in this vacant house—say, "What am I gonna do? How did I get suckered up into this?"

SL: [Laughs]

[01:40:42] GA: So the next day I go to the dorm, and I remember going to the dorm and, sure enough, it was a world of difference—just the structure. Yocum Hall was just massive. I mean, the dorms at Pine Bluff were two-story. This dorm, albatross was twelve. It was taller than the bank in Pine Bluff. I couldn't imagine . . .

SL: [Laughs]

GA: . . . people living—I mean, it just became—that's a whole brave new world. And

so . . .

[01:41:13] SL: So did you have a roommate?

GA: Had a roommate.

SL: Black? White?

GA: White. Upperclassman.

SL: Man. So . . .

GA: But he was a—he—he was a good guy. He was from Tulsa. He was a biochemical engineer, and so he was sort of nerdy.

SL: [Laughs]

GA: And he—he suffered from—first of all, being studious and quiet and—but I still had party in me and I had ability and I had a couple of friends that were there the year before, they came over, so we really sort of controlled the room environment.

SL: Yeah.

[01:41:52] GA: And he was—it was a new world for him to have a roommate like me and a roommate like me, so—but he stayed one—and then he moved out, and then after that I—that summer I spent—and it—it surprised me, 'cause I was—English and speech . . .

SL: Mhmm.

GA: . . . were my only two classes.

SL: Mhmm.

[01:42:16] GA: And it was really sort of like a softball pitch. I didn't really get the—the full thrust of the university of the demand of the class. So I remember calling Troy back. I said, "Troy, this—I mean, I'm making C's up here. That's—I got a

C and B. I mean, I—and I didn't study that hard." And he was, like, "Is that right?" 'Cause he had—he'd burned midnight oil, right?

SL: He'd [ ]

GA: And I'm [ ] to speech. I didn't. "You were at the university. I'm at the university. You studied, I didn't. I did all right."

SL: Right.

[01:42:54] GA: So I called back and tell my mother. Mother say, "You know, he—" then Troy said, "I guess he smarter than we thought." Well, that fall rolled around and, sure enough, I got overconfident.

SL: Mhmm.

GA: I'd made a few friends. I didn't want to be in the dorm because I couldn't move as freely in the dorm. I couldn't invite as many people over in the dorm.

SL: You bet.

GA: And it was restrictive on my social life, so I went back to my old habits. So ran into two guys and we decided to get a house . . .

SL: Mhmm.

GA: . . . off campus.

SL: Mhmm.

GA: And . . .

[01:43:31] SL: Is this the one on Duncan?

GA: On Duncan.

SL: Yeah.

GA: And one of—guy was a fifth-year freshman so, you know, your element is wrong,

right?

SL: [Laughs]

[01:43:42] GA: Other guy was engineering, but his—he was married, but his wife wasn't there. And I was a freshman, sixteen, total independence, house off campus, private bedroom with a deck off of it. And I said, "Ain't nothin' but a party, people." And I look up—half semester—I realize, "I'm in a chronic problem here." My grades had tumbled in a short span. The midterm grades that went home and I said, "Oh, my God." I was on loan, grant, defense fund—everything. I was leveraged up, right?

SL: Right.

[01:44:25] GA: And they said—before I knew it I was gonna be in probation—out the door. And I could just hear my father say, "If—if you mess up you might as well go to Missouri. You're not coming back here."

SL: Yeah.

[01:44:36] GA: So it was no point of return, so, I ended up saying—after the first semester—saying—what had happened was my roommate did something that was totally un-appropriate—the fifth-year freshman. He had lifted some eight-track tapes out of a person's car.

SL: Yes.

GA: And I didn't know where the tapes came from, but he brought these tapes in and he said some guy had a recorder. And they re-recorded over the tapes, and he gave me some tapes. And, sure enough, somebody'd seen him steal these tapes, right?

SL: Uh-huh.

[01:45:20] GA: So it gets worse. And they—they take the tapes and they re-record the tapes, so we're—one—right before Thanksgiving we're in the house partying . . ..

SL: Mhmm.

GA: . . . whatever—knock on the door—it's the Fayetteville Police. And we thinking he parked his car in the wrong lot, so they asked for my roommate, 'cause they say, "Who's driving this car?" And it was a Chevy.

SL: Yeah.

GA: And we said it's what's his name's car. And they take him out and he's gone for ten minutes. And we go to the door and the cops come back in the door and say, "We taking him down to the police station 'cause we got a—somebody saw him steal these tapes."

SL: Mhmm.

[01:46:01] GA: And when he said tapes, we thought about it and you could hear the music coming out of this machine from these tapes that had been re-recorded. So I was sitting there with my other roommate. I said, "Dunn is gonna say—he's gonna say that others helped him with these tapes, 'cause he's going down to the police station." And I said, "First of all, we can't have the evidence in here. He stole the tapes. We didn't know he stole these tapes." So, sure enough, they—they come back and they say, "We need to take you guys down for questioning." And I went down to the Fayetteville Police Station . . .

SL: Mhmm.

[01:46:39] GA: . . . and I—they said, "You erred because you shoulda asked where the

tapes came from." And I said, "He came in with tapes. I don't know where they came from. He had a bunch of money all the time." They said, "Yeah, when we arrested him he had enough money to buy the tapes. He didn't tell us—" To make a long story short, the roommate—we went home. They let me go. They questioned me and let me go, and they took him and kept him for a while. But what happened—we didn't have enough to stay in the house. So that was the last year they had—you go home for the holidays. It was Christmas.

SL: Yeah.

[01:47:18] GA: You go home for the holidays. You'd come back and you'd take your finals after that. So I had a real—I—my grades were sinking. I had a bad experience. I'm saying whatever the deal is, and I had to come back the last two weeks and do my finals. And it was sort of do or die on the finals. And my other said, "You might need to go back up there early, because this is gonna be a defining moment for you." And, sure enough, I went back up and I stayed all-nighters. I—I—they wouldn't let me in the dorm because there was only two weeks, so I had to stay down in the married people's apartments on a sofa. And for two weeks, through the snow, I would stay at Yocum down in the study room and studied all day, all night. End up—that semester—pulled enough to stay off probation.

SL: Good.

[01:48:12] GA: And learned a valuable lesson about who you hung with, why you did what you did—every consequences. And—and by then, you know, I still got the [newness?] on me. And I said, "The key is if I can stay up here this first year, I

can stay up." So to make—you know, and a lot was going on then. That's when Arkansas played Texas in the—for the [NCAA football] championship. [This famous game is commonly referred to as "The Big Shootout" among sports enthusiasts]

SL: That's sixty . . .

GA: [19]69.

SL: . . . nine? Yeah

GA: [19]69.

[01:48:44] SL: Is that when the kid got shot?

GA: Yeah, Darrell [Brown] got shot.

SL: So you knew Darrell?

GA: I knew Darrell.

SL: Okay. Let's talk about that.

GA: Okay?

SL: I interviewed Professor Morgan.

GA: Gordon Morgan.

SL: Gordon Morgan. And he wasn't really sure exactly what happened with that. I mean, he—he—I read in his book that he was at the hospital—that he went to see the kid and all that, but do you know what happened on that?

[01:49:14] GA: I—I don't know—I hate to say it. I was at a party . . . [laughs]

SL: Uh-huh.

GA: . . . when—when somebody came in and said—see, the whole week that we were gonna take over the football field—when [President Richard M.] Nixon came . . .

SL: Yep.

[01:49:33] GA: When Nixon came, we were having protests about the [Vietnam] War and the struggle at the University of Arkansas—you know, blacks not being recognized.

SL: "Dixie" was . . .

GA: "Dixie" being played.

SL: . . . playing in the [*Traveler*?].

GA: And we were saying "Dixie" shouldn't be played and . . .

SL: Right.

GA: . . . and that—that . . .

SL: Ya'll requested police escorts to the game, I think—something like that.

GA: Right.

SL: Or some kind of protection.

[01:50:01] GA: And—and at that point we went over to the—to the—what's that? [Chi Omega] Greek Theater?

SL: Mhmm.

GA: And they were playing "Dixie." And R. D. Rucker—I don't know if you heard of him . . .

SL: Mhmm.

GA: . . . but R. D. Rucker was there—put a sheet over him and he was portraying "Here's the Klan." [Reference to the Ku Klux Klan] And when they were playing "Dixie," that—I don't know who, but somebody went in there and pulled the power—stole the mic box, and there was just a lot of friction going on that whole

week about "We are gonna have 'Dixie.'" We had several meetings with—at that time it was BAD—Black Americans for Democracy—about should we have a protest and come out on the field to stop the game, and everybody said that's dangerous. Matter of fact, there were some meetings at "the house I was staying at" prior to that, which was they talked about what—what could we do to disrupt what's happening there to get our message out . . .

SL: Mhmm.

GA: . . . about that.

SL: Yep.

[01:51:19] GA: And, at one time there was—now, what—how Darrell got shot—I remember it was—it was—I was at a party there off campus, and somebody walks in and said "Darrell Brown got shot." And I don't know—I don't know the incident from the standpoint—I wasn't there. We—I thought he was walking and somebody'd shot out of a car.

SL: I—I don't know.

GA: That's what I heard.

SL: That sounds kinda familiar.

[01:51:46] GA: He was walking up Dickson . . .

SL: It's—you know, it's interesting, you know, that I was in high school then.

GA: Uh-huh.

SL: You know, I was a junior in high school and—and actually I was living over on Oliver Avenue. We had a house over on Oliver at that time just above the stadium.

GA: Uh-huh.

SL: And for the life of me, I don't think I can remember someone getting shot—anybody getting shot.

GA: Well . . .

SL: I mean, was it suppressed in the paper or was it just kind of a little—I mean, did it get a lot of play in the press?

[01:52:18] GA: It didn't get a lot of play. It got a lot of play amongst—I think on campus, and I know through the black student population it got a whole lot of play because I think that's what warded off them coming out on the field, because it was, like, "Darrell got shot. If they shoot Darrell, you know, you can get—" I mean, we—we all for the protest, but we don't plan on getting killed about it. So I think it—I don't know what happened. Darrell Brown at the time—Darrell had tried to play football for the Razorbacks and he didn't make it, so he was—he was trying to get along into the system. And we—we took it—Darrell at that point was a upperclassman, and for us as freshmens, which increased the population—black population up there—it sent out a message of "This is really getting serious."

SL: Mhmm.

[01:53:22] GA: And there was—you know, you could have a silent protest, but going across the field and you got the president there, I think it upped the stakes where that, I don't think anybody was willing to pay for those stakes . . .

SL: Mhmm.

GA: . . . from—from black student population. But it was probably that the—at one

while, everybody said, "Yeah, we're gonna go over there and take over the field." For me at that time, I was more into—I'll sell my tickets and make some money all the time, versus what that issue was, 'cause I didn't—I didn't affiliate with the—the sports part of the university at that freshman year at all. I was more interested what I was doing socially off campus in my interest escapades. So it would—for me it wasn't something that I cared that much about. I wasn't gonna go to the game anyway. If I went to the game it was only to protest and not go to the game to enjoy the game and then protest it.

SL: Right.

[01:54:26] GA: So, to give you the exact detail of what happened, it was sort of like word of mouth. They shot Darrell. They—you know, this is—you know, at that time the feared fraternity at that time was Kappa Sig[ma Alpha], and that, you know, I never really had any experience from—maybe—maybe somebody hollering out of a car, but didn't have any direct confrontations with anybody direct as a student.

SL: Mhmm.

[01:54:55] GA: And I'd heard that, with Darrell, and—and I believe it was true. I don't think they just made it up.

SL: Right.

GA: So, a lot of that is blurred from the standpoint of what happened that night 'cause I wasn't there.

SL: Right.

FE: Excuse me. We are at fifty-seven minutes, before we get . . .

SL: Okay.

FE: . . . just three more minutes or we change tapes

SL: Let's change tape.

FE: Okay. And I'm gonna need just a . . .

[Tape Stopped]

[01:55:24] SL: Okay. All right. Well, let's go ahead and pick up about the—the great Shootout and all those activities. I mean, we—I kinda stepped on ya a little bit.

GA: Do you want to go back to . . ..

SL: Yeah, let's go back.

GA: . . . to Arkansas—I mean, to go back to Pine Bluff to the transition of what I felt when I walked into . . .?

SL: Let's—okay, yeah, let's do that.

GA: You know, I did touch on . . .

[01:55:52] SL: Well, first of all, how did you get from Pine Bluff to Fayetteville. I mean, by car I guess—I'm assuming.

GA: Yeah, my—my—my parents—Troy graduated.

SL: Uh-huh.

GA: We went to his graduation.

SL: Uh-huh.

GA: and then they dropped me off after graduation to start that session.

SL: Okay, so you rode up to the school with. . .

GA: By car.

SL: . . . with your parents.

GA: Right.

SL: Just you and your parents.

GA: And my brother.

SL: Troy.

GA: Yeah, ‘cause he had come . . .

SL: He was just going back up . . .

GA: Yeah.

SL: . . . to go through the ceremony.

GA: Yeah, right.

SL: Okay. All right.

GA: Right.

SL: Okay.

GA: And I guess from that, we talked about the difference in—in school size, and it wasn’t only the infrastructure. I noticed after we passed Little Rock that the—the citizenry had started getting lighter. You know, and as we got toward Alma—is it Alma?

SL: Alma.

GA: Alma . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

GA: . . . it became really light. And as we made that turn and went up to Fayetteville, when we went up into that town I was asking questions—“Well, where do the blacks live?” And he said, “Back behind down—“ And I said, “Where else?” He said, “That’s it.” And then I start appreciation—appreciating the population of

Fayetteville as far as ethniticity [ethnicity] breakdown. The campus, I think, had 100 or so—8 or 96 black student population, and the town had about 150. So I couldn't imagine that, for the first level, 'cause I said, "Well, how do they exist? They—where—where are the schools? Where—where are the shops?" And they say, "Well, if you go down behind downtown, you go a dip," and they—they had named it "The Can," and I—first striking thing when I went there after being dropped off, like, a week, I'd sort of worked through the people I'd met on campus, and I went over there to the black side of Fayetteville, and—now, I'm coming from Pine Bluff where you had all class cultures, very clear, evident that they are there: on the bus, the railroad, downtown, walking the streets, on campus; to, they're nowhere but over here, and there's no—it's—they're not—if you go north—Springdale it even gets lighter. You gotta go all the way to Fort Smith, and it's still not much. So I'm saying, "I'm hundreds of miles—" sort of like a foreign country to me. And when—I noticed there was a class perception even amongst the blacks. You know, the students—the students [that] went to Fayetteville at that time—the black students, were typically the smart students from the state, if they wanted to take it to another level. I first came—was probably the first class where that it wasn't the val or the sal [valedictorian or salutatorian] or the honor student. I was just a guy in class. And so, my perception of "The Can" versus what people presented to me—that's—that's where the real rough people are. It's the . . .

[01:59:31] SL: Now, you're calling the black community down there behind the [Washington County] Courthouse "The Can." That—is that right?

GA: Yeah.

SL: Okay, I grew up knowing it as "Tin Cup." Now, I don't know . . .

GA: The blacks called it "The Can."

SL: Is that right?

GA: So you—we learned something. I didn't know it was "Tin Cup." I had always heard it called "The Can." So I guess those sidebars . . .

SL: Mhmm.

GA: . . . you all define it as the "Tin Cup." We cut it—we netted it out, "The Can."

SL: Mhmm.

GA: So it's the same identification.

SL: Yeah.

[02:00:00] GA: And, when I went there I said, "You know, this can't be any tougher than the neighborhoods around Pine Bluff." So it was no—because I was a student that sort of hung around with pretty much everybody, what they perceived the tough guys from "The Can" didn't appear to me as being tough. They was just—it was only a few of 'em, where that some of the smart kinds around the state—black kids saw this as the tough neighborhood. And I think it—it created a social class. You know, it—my—my wife went to Princeton, and around Princeton University there's a black neighborhood called [Townies?], and it—it's—where these—around these institutions of higher learning they needed a—a—they needed people to serve the university. And usually with a social lower class to—to do whatever those social function for that community to operate, and they create their own community. And usually the students that were coming up to the

universities perceived this group of people as—defined as lesser opportunity, thus less neighborhood, thus maybe rougher or may build up this perception—"These guys think they're better. These guys think that—unnecessarily pick on us." So it—it was a separation, I think, between the blacks that came on the university and the blacks that—that lived in the city. So my situation was when I saw it, I didn't think it was anything. Matter of fact, you know, my social interests went outside the student population. I said, "Okay, I—I would like to meet people, and if—if there is a bigger market outside of young eligible people I can meet, I'll open that door." So I ended up dating girls that were from the city, which was sort of a difference . . .

SL: Mhmm.

GA: . . .you know? And I said, "Well, you know . . ." if you go to Pine Bluff, even though there are the kids that hang around the college and there are kids that don't hang around the college, and it's just so happen there's more people that don't hang around the college here. I didn't see it as a cultural divide.

SL: Mhmm.

[02:02:36] GA: But I saw that there was a clear cultural divide, because usually the students that came to the university were students that focused on—that was the best of the class that—out of that little community, versus the whole community of a community that had it socially limiting the opportunities because they were operating as the social servant part of the university. I don't know if I'm saying that clearly.

SL: No, you got it.

[02:03:09] GA: So, that—that first struck me that they had identified the area as a area of you don't want to wander. Second of all, it struck me as that the—the—the individuals that live there saw that the individual students were different. But I—I probably felt that they probably didn't have the luxury of—up in Fayetteville it wasn't like they were close to Little Rock or they were close to Tulsa. They had a long ways to migrate to even have a social interaction, so there was a clear separation of students in the campus and the younger youth that are out in the city.

SL: Mhmm.

[02:04:03] GA: And, I—I—I felt that that probably, we were missing the opportunity as both the limited populations of the students on campus and the limited opportunities—those who live in the city of Fayetteville. And because the parents of those kids that lived in Fayetteville, they didn't have the exposure that says—okay, going back to AM&N, you know, I'm used to seeing a guy with a shirt and tie on that was black. I mean, you know—you know, college professors and accountants. And one thing about Pine Bluff, it had the highest number of black attorneys, highest number of black doctors. I mean, it was a—a different cultural setting. And there were a lot of thugs in Pine Bluff, but it was a cross-section of community. So I—I saw that as strikingly different, and so one of the things that I didn't mind doing is socializing there, and at that time there were a few students that had graduated from Fayetteville High that were black that decided to go, because I think those parents thought, "Yeah, you need to do more than just work as a janitor over at the [Student] Union building. . . .

SL: Mhmm.

GA: . . . You probably need to go over on campus and go to school." So there was a blending somewhat, and by me being off campus, there wasn't that barrier of they in a dorm—they wouldn't be in the dorm because they live at home. But I was off campus, so there was more accessibility to that than maybe if I would [have] been in the dorm.

SL: You were certainly more available.

[02:06:00] GA: I was more available, and by socializing with somebody that was—lived in the city, I was more available because they knew—"Oh, that's Gerald, you know? He goes school there and he's dating a young lady that—that's from there." So . . .

[02:06:15] SL: Well, and also you weren't as academically driven . . .

GA: No.

SL: . . . at that point in your life.

GA: Right, right, right.

SL: So you were there to meet and socialize. That—that's what . . .

GA: Yeah, yeah.

SL: I mean—I mean, you were at school, too, not to . . .

GA: Well, yeah, you're right.

SL: . . . waste your father's money, but you were also—you had—you were just—you were free.

GA: I was free.

SL: You know?

GA: And to me . . .

SL: Just like any other kid going to college, in a way.

[02:06:38] GA: And—and for me, that freedom says "You open it up. You don't—" You know, and—and even I had friends of mine who had gone to the university a year or so ahead of me—they had—and I said, "Y'all are talking about these guys—these guys—you know—" And they said, "Some of these guys carry knives." And I said, "Guys in our neighborhood carry guns, so what—what's—what is the issue here?" Because my perception—if these guys—you call these—you grew up around guys that were tougher than that, so we gravitate—we—we figure out how to manage around that situation."

SL: Mhmm.

[02:07:18] GA: Because even though I was a block away from campus—I grew up—a block away there was joints, liquor stores. It was New York with everything in it as far as the same environments. You choose what environment you wanna be in, but all environments are there.

SL: Right.

[02:07:40] GA: And so Fayetteville struck me as "Here's the campus and you got the school on the hill with the greatest the state has to offer, and right in its back door you have a limited opportunity of people, not with the exposure that they could even get to the level of Pine Bluff because they're not exposed to it.

SL: Mhmm.

[02:08:02] GA: And so—but it all came at a time where freedom of information was being pushed through the civil rights struggle and the Vietnam War. I think that blended a lot of the open-mind thinking, not only of the blacks and the blacks, but

the blacks and the white students to say, "You know, we need to all think a little different about this. Lives are being lost." And, you know, so I think that was a overall perfect time to blend some of the line of thinking and even the music at that time was sort of combining the—the races and the culture divides. I mean, when you start talking about [the bands] Santana and you start talking about Earth, Wind and Fire—I mean, the different—the music changed from Elvis Presley to the Temptations to, you know, a different kind of music that blended.

SL: Yeah. Well, yeah, and Sly and the Family Stone.

GA: Yeah. And I loved Chicago, so . . .

SL: Yeah.

GA: . . . that was a—that was a move on both sides to sort of look at the world a little bit different in that . . .

SL: Jimi Hendrix.

GA: Hendrix.

SL: Big, big, big influence.

[02:09:18] GA: And I didn't know about Jimi Hendrix 'til I got to Fayetteville. I mean, a friend of mine said, "Hey—" and I said, "Man, I don't wanna hear this rock stuff." He said, "That's a black guy." I said, "You kidding."

SL: [Laughs] Playing left-handed—upside-down, too.

GA: Playing left-handed.

SL: Yeah.

GA: And he pees on his guitar. I—I just . . .

SL: [Laughs]

[02:09:33] GA: It—it was amazing. So my—my [ventury?] into Fayetteville was a different kind of venture, 'cause it was not only seeing this great dominated cultural society strength of when I look back and say, "This is in the—" I saw college as big as Arkansas AM&N, Philander Smith [College]. I didn't never see "Here's where the real money is being spent." And for me it became really mind opening from that standpoint. Now, back to class—when I got there two things helped me. First of all, there was a freedom of information and there was issues that happened worldwide as far as, you know, Kent State [University]. There were a lot of demonstrations from the standpoints of whites and blacks joining together. There was the hippy movement. There was—there was everything that was out there to help you think freely about what you had an opinion on, and that was a natural—question the authority.

SL: Oh, yeah. Sexual revolution was in force.

GA: Oh, yeah.

SL: Everyone was marching.

GA: The [birth control] pill was introduced.

SL: Let's talk—let's talk about—yeah.

GA: [Laughs]

[02:10:57] SL: Let's talk about the Union—the Student Union. Do—do you remember much about the old Student Union, 'cause at that time . . .

GA: Student Union building?

SL: Yeah.

SL: Do you remember—I mean, it's the—the old one there . . .

GA: Yep.

SL: . . . on Maple Street?

[02:11:09] GA: Yep, I remember that for a couple reasons. First of all, my freshman year, that's how I learned how to play bid whiz.

SL: Play what, now?

GA: Bid whiz. It's a card game.

SL: Oh, okay.

GA: And the black students would be downstairs, socially interacting, playing cards. And the Union building was really a blend of student life, and they had a bookstore at the basement. That was one of the first buildings I went to. And the second floor they had a TV room. And they had—the first time they had social symposiums of different things, and I—I was—I spent a little too much time there than I should have, between classes. Because I lived off campus between classes, my holding period was the Student Union building. And I think you probably had more interacting of black and white students there that any one place, because not only you had the black and white students, you have off-campus students that were—when they were on campus, between classes you would go to Student Union building. And because I didn't want to walk down and back up that hill to Duncan, so I'd leave in the morning, and if I had a afternoon class, I may have two or three hours to kick around in the Student Union building. So you—you got a chance to meet people and talk to people and—and see different activities going on. And I thought it was a good deal to the point I—that building I end up working as a night manager there. And . . .

SL: You probably were—I had a band that played concerts there at night.

[02:13:02] GA: Well, I was the guy that opened the building up and booked the—the rooms and—you know, when they used to—and we showed—as a Union manager, we showed the films, you know, like *Rosemary's Baby*, *Barbarella* and all that. I was one of the night managers. They had two night managers and, really, the best job I coulda [could have] had, because the first job I had on campus—and it's sort of your nature. My first job was I worked [Federal] work-study [Program] and I worked in the library in the stacks, getting the books and putting 'em back in the stacks. And I learned a lot about my nature of what kinda work I can do. I have to have a job I think I can complete.

SL: [Laughs]

[02:13:51] GA: But if you worked in the library in the stacks, you just work at it, because you get the trays down in the basement, you take 'em up and you put 'em on the shelf. After you do that, you come back—it's more books. You never finish it. You—it's a never completion job. I worked there in the summer and I just—it was—air-condition was up high. It made me—it was right after lunch, so I was always sleepy. I didn't feel a sense of completion. That fall I ended up working in a bacteriology lab, where—that I had to clean Petri dishes after the bacteria classes grew cultures . . .

SL: [Laughs]

[02:14:35] GA: . . . and I had to put 'em in autoclave and turn 'em up to about 300 degrees [Fahrenheit], and that smell would hit you. And I would clean these Petri dishes. And I had this black apron on and black gloves, and sometimes that stuff

splatter in your eyes and your nose, and you got this little hairy stuff on you and you're itching all day. And I end up getting informed about a job to take ID [identification] pictures for students. And that job—so I would take pictures, and I said, "That's a easy job, 'cause you take ID student pictures." First of all, you the first contact with new students, so any young lady that wanted a picture—if she didn't like the way it turned out, I would be her first personal photographer. And you get all the information—the name, address, and everything else. So it played right into my agenda.

SL: [Laughs]

[02:15:30] GA: So I did that, and the next job—when that job—they said they had a job looking for business students to work as night managers in the Union. And it was a gentleman who's now the manager of the Union—Nianzer Anderson.

SL: Hmm.

GA: He was one year ahead of me, and he said, "There is a job. They're looking for business students," and we went over there together and they hired us both. And I was one night manager on certain days. He was another night manager, and Naz stayed with the job. I didn't, but that's a whole different story. But we started out as managers—night managers of the Union.

[02:16:18] SL: I—I interface with him nearly every event I do in the Union these days.

GA: Good guy.

SL: He's a great guy.

GA: Good guy. So the Student Union building was a excellent place. We showed the

little films—the tea, coffee house-type deals.

SL: Yeah. Absolutely. Mhmm.

[02:16:39] GA: And one of the movies I showed on a—a VHS—I guess was reel tape.

SL: Yeah.

GA: Was *Reefer Madness*.

SL: [Laughs]

GA: And I used to always laugh, because when you show that film everybody in the—the room [laughter] would be—you walk in the room—you say, "Woo! Is a con-tact [high] in here!"

SL: Mhmm.

[02:17:00] GA: 'Cause they watching this movie about reefer madness, and meanwhile it's just floatin' in the room. [Reference to smoke from marijuana cigarettes] So—so the Union building was a interesting scenario. The other interesting part of the university—I remember really being impressed with the university. The first thing impressed me about the university besides the—the buildings was—the sidewalks with the names on it. I just thought that was the coolest thing in the world, because to me, it gave me a target. My name's gotta get on the [Senior] Walk. So it—it blended in with a mission. "You gotta complete this, 'cause the only way you gonna complete it, you gotta get your name on the Walk." So I thought that was a cool scenario. The—the business school was okay. It was not—it was not a social school for me. I—you know, with a lot of fraternity guys there and I wasn't in a fraternity. There were a lot of people that knew each other. I would usually be the only black in the class, that's besides Nianzer and a couple

of other guys, there were no other blacks in the School of Business. And I accepted the perception a lot of times that the professors had, that I wasn't gonna lead the class. My job was—you know, it's sort of like people talking about the gazelles. You don't have to be the fastest. You just don't have to be the slowest and you'll be all right.

SL: Uh-huh.

[02:18:35] GA: So as long as I made the bar in my objective to get out, in the first couple years [it] was staying in and understanding my strengths and weakness, so I managed by transcript—like, if it got to be a real tough class and I didn't think I could make it, I understood drop dead dates. I understood not taking a load that would not make sense for me, especially after my freshman year. After I went through my freshman fiasco, it became—"understand what you're good at and understand what you're not good at, but clearly understand what you're not good at and do whatever you need to do to accommodate, if that means working your—your classes you take, who the professor is." I would take a habit of looking at classes the semester before and look—because at that time they would post the grades, and I would get a trend. I'd say, "Well, this guy gave predominantly B's and C's. I didn't see any bad grades." And then I'd see the same class—another guy, he has a different—"I'm gonna work to get in the class just based on the trend of this professor." So it became understanding what my issues were. Where my strengths were, I took more time in looking at—I would buy a number of used textbooks. I would try to find out who had the textbooks before and try to find their name and see what they made, and if I can say Anderson and the same

Anderson had a "A" and I look at his textbook, and he had a "A" and he highlighted stuff, it increased my probability that he read the right stuff. So I would use whatever I had as a survivorship mode, regardless of what the criterias were, to find the path of the resistance I can deal with.

[02:20:37] SL: Wow! That is so brilliant. [Laughs]

GA: Well, it wasn't—it wasn't—it wasn't brilliant.

SL: I mean, I know, but it is.

GA: It was—it was—it was just survivorship.

SL: But I've never heard anybody get—approach it that way, and that's so—it's also so pragmatic and makes so much sense.

GA: Well, you know, the . . .

SL: It's like you get—you—you're looking for your tutor that's already proven themselves, and you're not gonna ever both him, you know? I mean, you've got someone that knew how to do it. And you're just getting the—his notes from him. It—that's . . .

[02:21:08] GA: Well, at least improved—and especially in some of the classes, I had some tough classes where I have very little exposure in, was like Western Civilization was a tough class because big lecture, right? They would talk about things I would—you know, coming from a small black high school, we didn't even talk about what happened in the 1600 century, and they would talk about that to the level in a lecture form that—you know, you get the study cards, and besides, I had to program in my social time so, you know, I had to balance what my priorities were. So I had to try to figure out—on the mission, I had to finish. I had to have

a certain grade point, 'cause my loans and stuff would expire. And I couldn't fail, because my father said, "You can't. You not gonna do this." So—so as I went through school through my—by my sophomore year I began to understand not so much—first, it's staying up there so I wouldn't flunk out. Second of all, sophomore year is saying "My plan to graduate: how do—" I thought I can master—I knew enough ropes that I figured that I could stay up there. I knew I couldn't spend all day in the Union, and from time to time because my financial situation, I took the route of independence, so I didn't—I went back in the dorm one other time, and that was in Gregson Hall. Things got a little lean and I needed to get the grade point average up, and I got over there and—and did okay. I had a roommate that—from my hometown, and we—we hit it off real well. But pound for pound, I—I—I kept struggling to be independent while I was there, 'cause then I moved into a one—rooming house at the corner of Maple and Arkansas. It's torn down. It's a parking lot right across from . . .

SL: Mhmm.

[02:23:10] GA: . . . the hotel there. [Reference to the Inn at Carnall Hall]

SL: Mhmm.

GA: And, that was probably the toughest living I had, because it was three bedrooms upstairs, and we had a kitchen. We had a stove out in the hallway and we washed dishes in the bathroom, and it was pretty basic, $35 a month, all utilities paid, and that was the first time I heard the term "brown recluse spider." The guy was—a roommate—he was a botany major and he was a—maybe not botany. Whatever the study—what's the study of insects? I don't know that, but . . .

FE: Entomology.

[02:23:49] GA: Entomology. He—he was saying he had caught so many brown recluse spiders in this house. And I said, "What's that?" He said, "It's a recluse spider. It's not aggressive, but if you touch it," and he—through out this—this rooming house, "it'll bite in a hole. If you don't do anything, it—it's almost uncurable." And, I said—that was the first month. And I said—the next month he moved out, so I was always paranoid about that house. And—and I ran into a gentleman at that time—a guy that was in law school that you probably heard of—Jimmy Wilson.

SL: Yeah.

[02:24:30] GA: Bootleg.

SL: Mhmm.

GA: They called him Bootleg. He had heard about me on campus and I was much younger than he was. He was in law school and he—and he offered me a opportunity to be his roommate.

SL: Okay.

[02:24:46] GA: And—and I was a little question—because he—he was—he was down in Pine Bluff and Little Rock. He was very politically active. He was a upperclassman. He was in law school, and he looked—very militant look.

SL: Mhmm.

GA: And—and he came to me, to my rooming house, and said, "I hear you're a pretty sharp guy. I'm gonna give you—why you live in squalor? Why don't you come live with me." And I'm saying, "Why would I do that?" And—and he said, "I

will teach you the ropes." And I—I took that strangely. I said—he said, "'Cause I think you got a lot of promise." He said, "You might be pretty smart and I hear you got a decent little hustle, and I'll teach you the ropes of hanging on this campus. And you don't have to live like this." And I remember talking to a dear friend of mine. He said, "I don't know." And then I thought about it. I said, "Wait a minute. I'm barely making it in a rooming house. I'm eating in the hallway, washing dishes where I use the bathroom. How can he take advantage of me? Whatever I'm going to has gotta be better than this." And we moved to [Francisco?] Apartments, which was right across the street from the campus—right down from Kappa Sig—two-bedroom studio house. He said, "You go there. The keys'll be under the doormat." And I said, "Well, I don't have that kinda money." He said, "You pay the same amount you pay now." And I said, "Something's gotta be up with this." And, sure enough, I said, "I'll do that." And I moved my little stuff and went over there, and I didn't see him in two weeks. He was out doing whatever his thing was, and—and I came and I said, "Boy, he got a two-bedroom studio," and—and I didn't realize what he was saying. And then you remember Adolph Reed [Sr.]?

SL: I remember that name.

[02:26:56] GA: He was a professor in political science.

SL: Okay.

GA: Jimmy . . .

SL: Oh, I know—Reed?

GA: Reid. R-E-I-D. [Adolph REED, Sr.]

SL: Yeah, I think I . . .

GA: He just died about three years—four years ago. They had a special for him down at Old Main, and he was very, very influential. But he was brought there by—because there was no professor other than Gordon Morgan in Sociology. There was no professor. Jimmy Wilson was pushing the—[University of Arkansas President David W.] Mullins at that time and them to have more black professors. And he had a mentor called Adolph Reed when he was down in Pine Bluff. And Adolph Reed was a professor of political science and history. He was down at Arkansas. He was at Jackson State. He—he was a very profound, cutting-edge guy—could make a lot of people mad, because he was sort of like a Bill Maher. He would be on the edge on most issues.

SL: Uh-huh.

[02:28:03] GA: And Jimmy Wilson, being a law student and a civil rights person, left Arkansas—Pine Bluff—went up there to go to law school, and at—that was the height of the civil rights struggle, and he challenged the university, and when I got there to the apartment and I saw him two weeks later, he said, "Adolph Reed is coming here." And Adolph Reed was a friend of my father. He used to do business with my father and the service station—he would service—and I only drew from that—that—that Reed was a mentor—Jimmy Wilson was the older guy, and said, "My friend, Troy Alley, has a son up there. You need to know him and you need to make sure you do right by him." So it was a mentor to a mentor, and we became roommates. We were roommates. And we actually started another black organization called BUS—Black Student—Black Union Students or something.

And . . .

SL: United, maybe?

[02:29:13] GA: Yeah, something. But it was a organization—ad-hoc organization that—that Jimmy had, and it was a little more outspoken and radical. And he said, "Well, you know, you seem pretty sharp, but you haven't been tested." So I became the—sort of the voice of that organization and he was more the strategic planner. It—it worked in conjunction with—with BAD, but it would probably say things a little more to the edge than BAD was, 'cause BAD was part of the university system. And my experience with being a roommate that was in the law school, and I was undergrad, was impressive. I mean, I was impressed by—he was a radical by day, but he was still studying in law school by night, and a civil rights outspoken guy in the week—on the weekend. So it—it fit me from the standpoint—being able to identify not only with the plan system, but the system that exists that may not be the system. And he and I were roommates for the whole year, and we helped generate some programs that was trying to generate students, minority students, to get jobs, that he wrote grants for and he got grants to do that. And so it was—it was interesting from that standpoint, and it was interesting also—he was five years older than I was to—you know, 'cause he was much older, to see him move in that circle and he—you know, he could call the higher-ups of the organization from a radical standpoint and he would go over—I'm trying to think of the—the vice-president of academic affairs was very close with him. And he was the edge that—he would say things that they didn't really wanna address in public, but he—he was articulate enough and had sort of earned

his stripes from a civil rights issue that he got respect, and it wasn't promoted publicly of his respect, but it was respect . . .

[02:31:47] SL: He was working the system.

GA: He was working the system.

SL: From inside.

GA: From inside.

SL: And . . .

FE: Adjust your mic. I'm sorry.

SL: Okay.

[Tape Stopped]

[02:31:53] GA: I got a real good feel of politics, business, in a pragmatic sense.

SL: You're still only eighteen years old.

GA: Yeah.

SL: In junior year.

GA: Right. So it—it was interesting, and he was saying—you know, 'cause I was always amazed to say, "Well, Jimmy, I don't see you going to law class like these other students." He said, "It's the final exam. Doesn't matter if you hold your hand up. That—" and he just sort of cut—he said, "The criterias are pass an exam. So what I do—as long as—" and he would go—and I wouldn't know why he would be gone for two—he would go somewhere else and study. But when he come back to the apartment he would party. And he didn't hang around in the social groups of study groups. He studied on his own for the final exam. He wouldn't even go to class. They didn't—he said "Was no value in the class," be-

cause you didn't get points in law school for class. You either pass the exam or you don't, and that's what your class—he said, "So . . .?

[02:33:03] SL: I gotta tell my son this. He goes to every class. He takes copious notes. And—and he's a smart, smart kid. I mean, he graduated.

GA: But this—you know, this was thirty years ago.

SL: Yeah. But, no, it's still the same. It's still the final exam.

GA: He said . . .

SL: [Laughs]

[02:33:18] GA: And he—he beamed in on what was the finish line, and I used to tell him when I got [out?]—he said, "Why you didn't—?" And he was one of those very pressing personalities. "Why are you wasting your time going over to that class?" I'd say, "I need any benefit I can get. Maybe I'll run into somebody who may be talking in the hallway about the right answer." And his view of it was—in law school was—it's the final exam. And if you can manage to the goal line, don't—don't worry about all this other stuff. So he was one of those people that just go for the homerun—don't care—the bunts. He was just a homerun hitter. And so we stayed a year and we had two different personalities, and after a year I said, "Okay, I need to go back," and I end up getting a house by myself. But this time, I was—it was a small, little place. It was by myself, and I did it as me now in the third, fourth year of going into my last year, and I'm saying, "I really need to think about—what after this." And I—I'm gonna go back to my father, 'cause this is point—situation, if you go back to the discussion with Troy. So, after I moved in that little rooming house, my mother—I—she'd asked me what I was

doing, I said, "I'm in the rooming house," and she—she said—she's sayin', "Well—" my father told me after my sophomore year—said, "You know, I consider you more of a person that understands what—how to make things happen. So, you know, I cut your brother off as a senior." The first freshman year, even though I didn't go down, he said, "I don't think that was a good use of my money, so you need to figure how to stay up there on your own." So I had to do the loans, grants, and whatever hustles I need to do. So by the sophomore/junior year, I'd been up there a year or so, and he wasn't funding the—the fund, right? So my mother was saying, "You know, it's not right. That boy's up there starving," you know? And so my father just said, "Yeah, but I looked at them first grades. He didn't do nothing but play. He didn't do nothing but have a good time, and I don't need to fund that." So by the time it was the junior year, I went through that sophomore and the junior year pretty much on my own, and I guess—and when I would come back to Pine Bluff I—I would come back and work at the station and he would maybe give me a little money to do that, but he wasn't paying for the education, 'cause he figured that "If—if you learned anything in college, you'll learn how to stay up there." So I said, "You raised the bar. I thought I wasn't gonna get a car, and now you just take the education away from me, right?" So by the junior/senior year, I guess guilt started getting to him. He—he said—"Well—" he saw [ ] he said, "Well, gimme [give me] them papers. I may sign to say you can get some money to go to school there." And said, "No, that's okay. I—I can handle it." So he said, "That's strange. He didn't take the money." So, just keep that in the back of your mind. So meanwhile, I'm in—I'm in

the—I'm in the senior year and I'm back in my own place. I sort of understood the business school enough that I figured that—I found out the longer you go in it the easier it gets, 'cause the class is now—or sort of beaming down on some of the practical things that I understood. The old inventory issue that I did with checking gas—when they said, I understood it, I just didn't call it inventory. The old cost versus revenue I understood because—from a practical sense. So, I could get through those classes and I sort of adjusted my social life to the way I could really handle it. And I starting wondering, "Well, I really need to get this grade point up, because I got a lot of trash in this freshman/sophomore year." So my grade point started rising, but I had so much . . .

SL: Lot of baggage.

GA: Baggage. You—even though your last looks better, there's so much there that it's not gonna go but a few basis points. So my senior year I ended up looking for opportunities at the university—[Student] Union manager. And then they had—if you become a senior you can be a orientation counselor. You can make more money. So, I became a orientation counselor for incoming students. And through that I got a chance to really understand being—preparing for orientation counselor—start understanding what the university was really trying to sell to students coming on. And you see so many students routing through to coming in for orientation, so I did that. And so I'm ready—almost ready to graduate my senior year now, and I was in a class, I—was a finance major, but I was in a class called retail advertising.

SL: Mhmm.

[02:38:47] GA: And it was the first semester of my senior year, and they were bring on different—different—en—different business people to talk about retail advertising or business and . . .

SL: Mhmm.

[02:39:02] GA: . . . this [is] sort of how I got from the university—out of the university. They brought a gentleman by the name of Jack Miller. He was the president of Foley's or at that time, Singer Harris, which is a large department store here in Dallas.

SL: Mhmm.

[02:39:19] GA: And we had a class called retail advertising, which I was taking as an elective. I had then a three-point-so in my senior year and I was sort of coasting from the standpoint. But the—the Vietnam War was still going on. I was still sort of anti-establishment—understood that you had to work in the establishment to—to get what you needed. And this guy comes in the class and he's a businessman. He's talking about getting seniors come in and get in the management training program and work for their store. They would bring different corporate leaders, and this guy was in there and he was basically saying that they had a program—a buying program, where they would bring in junior buyers to buy merchandise to sell in the stores, like a management training program in retail. I was in one of those moods of saying, "Well, you know, I'm going to this class, but I'm hearing this guy talking about the opportunity to be a buyer." And I don't know, it was still at the height of a lot of civil rights struggle. I just took one of those attitudes today and said, "Well, let me challenge this guy." And the guy was sort of

in the middle of his presentation and I said, "I got a question." He said, "Yes, sir, could I help you?" And I was wearing my brother's—who was in the Air Force—fatigue jacket—on it—had Alley on it. He said, "Yes, Alley?" He said—I said, "Yeah." And I had a Afro out to here and he said . . .

SL: [Laughs]

[02:40:57] GA: I said, "How many of these—this position you got called a buyer? How many of these buyers are black?" Class goes dead silent. And he said, "Well, we don't really have any blacks that are buyers at our store." I said, "Well, let me get this straight. You got 300 buyers, right?" He say, "Yeah." "And you say you don't have none that are black?" He said, "Well, no, not at the time." I said, "Well, what percentage of your market that you sell this merchandise—y'all got how many stores in Dallas alone?" "We got twelve." I said, "What percentage of your market is black?" He said, "I—I don't know that off hand." I said, "Aren't you the CEO [chief executive officer]?" Said, "Yeah." I said, "Well, Dr. [Harry] Ainsworth said the first thing you need to know is to know your market." And Ainsworth looks at me like, "How—why you drag me in this, right?"

SL: [Laughs]

[02:42:01] GA: And he said—he said, "Well, I don' have those figures." I said, "Would you say it's thirty percent?" He said, "No, about twenty percent." I said, "Okay, twenty percent." I said, "So twenty percent of the market you sell to is a market you don't have representing purchasing the very merchandise you selling to. I don't quite get it." And it was stunned, and everybody in class said, "God, this guy normally cuts this class. Now he's in here raising hell to a guy who can

give us a job," right? So, I continue on this guy and I said, "Well, I—I don't get it. It's just mathematical. You should have at least eighty, sixty, representatives of the marketplace that you buy." And I'm using the marketing tools. The underlying question was another question, but I'm using the marketing tools to attack this. And he said, "Well, let me be real—let me—let me clarify this." He said, "You know, we don't have any blacks that are buyers now, but we have blacks in the management training program." I said, "Okay. You said earlier it takes from a management training program about three years from the average management training program to become a buyer, so I can only assume this idea only hit you less than three years ago or blacks that are in the management training program are not progressing at the rate that the average are." And he just sort of looked at me and he said, "Well, we [are] trying to get people that are qualified." And I said, "Qualified?"

SL: Ooh.

GA: I said, "Let me get this straight."

SL: [Laughs]

GA: "Qualified means you can't find anybody—" I said, "You're located in Dallas? In Dallas? In Texas? United States? On Earth? To buy the very merchandise you sell to twenty percent of your market, and you say your margin is less than ten percent. It doesn't seem like you're risking your whole margin on a market you don't understand." He said, "Well, let me retract that back." I said, "Well, I don't understand it, and this is totally contradictory to the concepts of marketing retail." And everybody said, "Oh, God, this guy here is just—threw a bomb in the room."

SL: [Laughs]

[02:44:31] GA: So Ainsworth said, "I don't think, Mr. Alley, this is the time nor place to debate that." I said, "Well, Dr. Ainsworth, I—I just don't understand." He said, "Well, we can talk about that later." So the—the class sort of breaks up and I'm feeling pretty good. I done chewed out a—a corporate giant and didn't—no sweat off my back. I probably wouldn't never see him again.

SL: Right.

[02:44:53] GA: So as I was leaving the classroom the guy said, "Alley, can I see you a minute." I said, "Yeah." And I still had a sort of chip—arrogance about me at that point.

SL: Mhmm.

[02:45:04] GA: He said, "What I was trying to explain was, we have people in the program, but they haven't progressed. And—and because we—we have a tough time finding candidates." I said, "Oh, yeah?" He said, "Have you ever interviewed for our company?" I said, "No." He said, "That's my point." He said, "Why haven't you interviewed?" I said, "Well, when y'all come I'm—I'm working." He said, "Where do you work?" I said, "I work forty hours a week." He said, "What do you do?" I said, "I'm a manager of the Union building." He said, "You're the *manager* of the Union building—in school?" I said, "Yeah." He said, "If given the opportunity, would you interview with our company?" Now, regardless what chip I had on my shoulder, reality slapped me—"I ain't got no job."

SL: Yeah. Right.

[02:45:44] GA: Right? So I said, "Probably. Okay, I'll—I would consider that."

Well, next two days in the mail—[GA snaps his fingers] personal invitation from Foley's. "We'd like you to come down—expense paid—interview our company," signed, the Executive Vice-President of Personnel. So I'm saying, "Whoa!"

SL: [Laughs]

[02:46:06] GA: You know, "Maybe I ruffled a little feathers, but maybe I made a point." So I—I go through interview with other people in the university while I'm there, and time to—to graduate, and as I come through graduation—one thing I forgot, while I was there with Jimmy Wilson—they called Bootleg—Adolph Reed, who was the professor, really spent a lot of time with us at our apartment—he—we would come in and we would talk about social issues, political issues. He would talk about the university. He would speak to—he had a lot of class. I nev-er—everybody said, "You never took a class under Reed, but he would have class at your apartment every evening almost." And—and I always recalled that time in my junior year where I had Jimmy Wilson, who was a senior law student, and he talked about a young law student—a young law professor he thought that was pretty decent that changed the trend over to the law school, 'cause they were flunking out a lot of law students. And I said, "What's this guy's name?" He said, "A guy named Bill Clinton." That's the first time I heard Bill Clinton's name. He took classes—constitutional law, under Bill Clinton. And then, second of all, I remember Adolph Reed, who would come in and would have sort of like a rap session with—with us, and he always used to say, "Your father worked at that station and you cannot fail, 'cause he's down there busting his rear for you guys." And that was my father's friend, and—and my father used to say out of all

the professors over there, he liked this guy, and this guy actually understood the importance of the business, not so much as a social level of the university. So that's just sort of sidebar. So I—I—I came away in my senior year with a feeling of accomplishment because I felt I was gonna graduate. I had a few good professors that encouraged and promoted me. And back on my freshman semester, when I was about ready to punch out, and after I did all that hell-raising, I actually got a favor from the professor in art. I was taking a art class.

SL: From . . .

[02:48:41] GA: You remember—you know in freshman year when I had my roommate that . . .

SL: Mhmm, mhmm.

GA: . . . got—and I had to go do this.

SL: Mhmm.

[02:48:48] GA: And I said—I went to my art professor—I looked up and I said, "The way I'm coming in the end of the semester, I—I got D's and F's, and there's no way. I gotta pull it up. So some classes—I'm gonna have to drop some classes. I'm gonna have to bring my grade up." And I went to the art professor and said, "I need a A." And he said, "Gerald, you can't draw." I said, "I didn't say what I deserve, I tell you what I need." And he said, "Well, why do you need?" I said, "If I don't get a A, I'm on probation—I'm outta here. And I guarantee you, if I can get a A by doing extra work, staying late and drawing the best I can and turn in all the assignments and help cleaning up the art place, if you look in your heart and give me a A, that would get me off—that won't allow me [to] hit probation."

He said, "I can't make you that promise," he said, "because at certain levels you gotta have a skill level." I said, "But I'm telling you, this will define me and my career." And he lived up toward Duncan. I would walk back from art class after cleaning up the art building, you know, 'cause all students laid the—the sculpture and . . . all this stuff.

SL: Mhmm.

[02:50:02] GA: . . . all this stuff. And he said, "Well, I gotta justify that in my mind to give you a A." I said, "Justify this. If you give me a A, not only I will finish this freshman year, I will graduate and I will do great things." And he said, "I can't make that promise." When the grades came in, had a A, B, C and a D. He gave me the A. One hour, but it put me over ten basis points from not hitting probation. So that was a blessing that was given to me by somebody who didn't have to give it to me, that I don't know if it'd changed my life, but I think it did give me the opportunity to stay there to give it another shot, at sixteen, to go on to the rest, and after that I—I continued to plow through it. But upon graduating I was looking at the university, 'cause I really grew as a individual at the university. I came in as a sixteen-year-old kid. I did what sixteen-year-olds do. Understood. Dug down. Did a lot of praying. Did a lot of calling home sometimes when things got bad. But, I kept hearing my mother say, "It's never over until you give up. Until you give up, it's never over." So I would say, "I don't see how I'm a [gonna] pull it off." She said, "Get a good night's sleep and go in there and do your best." So as I was graduating, I—I—I did several things. I—I worked inside the system by absorbing the jobs. I even—only time I went over to the foot-

ball field, 'cause I had a disdain for the Razorbacks, just based upon their—their racial make-up and lack of acceptability of black students playing. But in my senior year I said, "Okay." There was a opportunity where they had urshers [ushers]. You could ursher the game, and they said, "You can make $20 to ursher the game." And I said, "What you have to do?" They said, "You put on this little vest and you go there and make $20." And I said, "Okay, I—I'm really doing anything for a Saturday. I'm not really interested in the game, but $20." And the guy said, "We're not—we're gonna assign ya over to the—the Alumni side." And when I got over to the Alumni side, I said, "How can I get more than $20?" And I found out people love service. So if—most the urshers would tell people, "Your seat is J fifty-five." They stand at the end and they point to the guy that's where to go.

SL: Mhmm.

[02:52:53] GA: When I was standing there, the guy say, "I got a seat at—" whatever—"J twenty-five—" whatever it was. I said, "Let me show you where it is." And I walked him down, held his wife's hand 'cause the steps was pretty steep and took 'em to the row and showed it to him. And the guy turns around and handed me a $10 tip. I say, "I made fifty percent as much as my base rate." So I said, "Wait a minute. There's a opportunity here." So, from that point on, I would always escort the people to their seats. And I could make off of $20, I would make $100 off tips. And really wasn't into the game, but said, "I'm here at the game, working the game," and I wipe out the little seat where they would sit. If they had a little—carrying a little seat I would open it up for the lady and there would be a

tip. I would—just service. And I said, "You know, there's—there's a opportunity." And people say, "Well, man, you're going over to Arkansas game. I—you know, you shouldn't be going over to the game. I mean, aren't you mad?" And I said, "Yeah, but it doesn't mean I can't improve myself." And so from that senior year I became at peace with, regardless of it changing, it—of the university not changing fast enough for me of what I think the line of thinking was. But it was a lot of open-minded people when I was there, professors, students, whatever, that wanted to see a change. And I think the administration slowly changed. We had—one time we took over Mullins' office [November 26, 1969] . . .

SL: Okay, just a second. You gotta change tapes?

FE: Changes tapes.

SL: Gotta change tapes.

[Tape Stopped]

[02:54:38] SL: . . . university or the evening or—or what—where you think—what—maybe some advice for the university or what you see happening—happening across the country and how the university relates to that or—you know, the—this whole diversity drive is very high on the chancellor's priorities now.

GA: Mhmm.

SL: I mean—and, of course, it's not just Afro-Americans, it's all—a—diverse cultures from all over.

GA: Cultures—all—all over.

SL: But you guys are the first thing out of the chute for us and our first concentration, and so you might be thinking more in terms of globally or diversity as a whole . . .

GA: Mhmm.

SL: . . . you know? But—so are we ready?

FE: Yes sir.

[02:55:25] SL: So why—why don't we go ahead and finish up this things on Mullins. Now, I knew the Mullins family. They—they lived up the hill from us when I was in grade school and I used to hang out with Gary Mullins, his son, and all this stuff. But tell me about the Mullins.

[02:55:40] GA: The—the Mullins scenario was that—and I believe it was the spring of my junior year—spring of my sophomore year—I'm not quite sure what year it was, but there was a—a push to move the university to bring on more black professors, to have professors the head of department, to offer more programs that would assist minority students. And—and I'm trying to think, it's not remedial courses, but because of the background in which these students were coming from, they felt they needed a bridge. And—and the university from either—either from their limitations—did not understand the problem or not working as hard for the resources, were not taking the steps needed, that the African-Americans felt on campus needed to happen. So this was somewhere around the Kent State scenario in that there was a group of us felt like, "Okay, the only way we're gonna really get attention on this matter is, we need to go take this to Mullins direct. And the only way we gonna really do is take over his office." We were gonna sort of impromptu, just go past his secretary and say, "Here's fifteen black students, gonna take our grievances to you." And it was the grievance of the black organization, BAD, and the grievance of the Black Student Union, which is—our

group had joined together and said, "We need to address these issues." And, I don't know if the time we came that, that time is around mid—late-morning—whatever. Mullins was not in his office, so we're in the lobby and say—and the secretary say, "He's not in," and we say, "Well, no, we think he's there and he's not willing to see us." So it was even—I remember it was myself, Nianzer, Jimmy Wilson—several other people said, "Well, we just need to go in there and see him." Typical, we get, "No, he's not in," and ironically he wasn't in, and we actually barded [barged] through the door and he wasn't in the office. And I think wherever he was, maybe he was on campus somewhere, they told him. And we were up there, we said, "We need to call the other students up here. And we're gonna just sit in his office until he comes back," and it created a sit-in . . .

SL: Mhmm.

[02:58:09] GA: . . . for us in his office. And while we were in his office, that's one of the pictures you will see is—we were sitting at his desk and, you know, I'd never been in a president's office, and—and, you know, discussing that there's been no relevance put to our issues. And I think he was informed that we were in his office, and to avoid any confrontation, he basically said, "Well, I'm not going back to the office. I'm a [gonna] just sort of wait 'em out." And—and I think we were there—there were a lot of people said, "Well, we're gonna stay to the end of this thing," and it—it got past closing time, and—and they said that—there was some message that he might be outta town and I think I after so much of that, we decided he wasn't gonna be there. But we met with a—the dean of students. He came over. I'm trying to think of his—it was the dean of academic affairs. I think it

was [William] Denman. I'm not sure. He was the vice-president of academic affairs. They bought in the student government representative. And one of the things that came out of that—the issue also was financial aid. There was not enough financial aid, because there was a—a statistical thing that was happening there that I felt the footsteps of it as well. You could technically still be in school, but your loan requirements—you would be on school—you're on probation, you could still be in school, but it would [GA snap fingers] automatically stop the loan money. So we said that, it's sort of like a self-fulfilling prophecy that you can still be in school and you wouldn't have flunked out, but since your money's cut out, you gotta leave anyway. So, we did talk with the person in financial aid. We did talk with the student government. We did talk to Denman, who was the vice-president, and there were some promises made about, "Okay, we're gonna really get serious about trying to get some professors up here. We're gonna look into their financial aid." And we actually got in a new financial aid vice-president—a gentleman that came in—I think it was Dave Cooksey—that came in later to do that. There was supposed to have been a program. I'm not sure exactly what happened with the program, to bridge the lack of background, because if you go in, you went straight into these courses, like Western Civilization, that if you came from smaller schools, you wouldn't have no preparatory time to get adjusted, and it gave a little more flexibility, you can choose some of the lighter subjects before you were thrown into your college. So I remember that being a challenge, because they kept saying while we were there—they were saying they would call the—the police, and we were sort of like nervous because Kent State

had had happened. And what—when they finally got the policeman up there and it was the campus police. And at that time the campus police didn't have no guns, so it was sort of like "They brought the Boy Scouts up here. These guys can't put anybody out." I mean—and so I think it was the feeling that we had sort of bonded together as—as students making a statement, challenging the system. It wasn't as prolific as, you know, things that were happening out in California, but it was clearly a demonstration that, never in the history that, I think up to then, they would expected fifteen black students hanging around the president's desk and waiting for him to come to have this shoot-out—not this shoot-out literally, but to have this venting of issues and force of discussion. And I left there later that evening thinking there was a sense of accomplishment. And the reality was we really didn't want to have a confrontation, we wanted these issues to be addressed. And by the mere presence, that we came to the president's office, sat in his office all day, was a statement itself that I think the—the administration said, "We need to address this some kinda way." Now, you know, I don't know—you know, we didn't track exactly the monitoring of that—how it went. But that was a defining moment that, at that time, we might of had 140 black students that time, challenge the highest representative of the strongest organization up in a area that a few years ago, you—you needed to watch what you said. And going to Silas Hunt, that he had to go to the register [registrar] to get admitted. We were there, calling to question the president, in his office, I thought was pretty profound for me, and it was a experience I would always remember of somewhat of a [exubernation?] that—you know, we actually came up here. We actually started over

in the Union building saying, "We're gonna go over here and do this." And we had a little falling out, but most of the students who said they were gonna come came, and once we got there and the word was out we were there, we had more students to come into the Union building. And I think the university administration handled it pretty well, 'cause they—they felt there was a need to diffuse a true confrontation, and I think Mullins was at least smart enough to nay—say, "Okay, I'm not gonna let this become something that something goes wrong." And this was after the—the—Darrell's shot. I don't know if it was a year later. But it was also after Kent State, so I think he was smart enough to say, "How do we diffuse this? It's by not engaging in it." What I think few years earlier they woulda quickly said, "Call Fayetteville Police. Drag these people out of here. Beat 'em down." So I think it was smart on the sense of the university. It was smart on his part, to regardless if he disagreed with the views, not to let it agitate to something where that he couldn't control it and it would got to be something bad. And I think that the model that the university had was the old cliché, "What happens in Vegas stays in Vegas." That—sort of, "What happens on campus stays on campus." And there was a sense at that point, a need to address this as a campus issue versus let's call-out the outsiders, be it Fayetteville Police, state troopers, or anything like that. This is a student activization. It's part of university culture now. And I think he accepted that as part of, that's what's happening all over the country. We've seen it happen positively. We've seen it happen totally when it went awry. And that, when I really think about—I haven't thought it about it in a long time—that that was probably one of the smartest things that he

coulda [could have] done, 'cause a lot of people didn't even know about the sit-in and didn't know about the confrontation. And that, I know in the public market-place, it was dealt with on campus, but it was on campus that they dealt with. They even wrote things about it in the—the campus newspaper. [Reference to the *Arkansas Traveler*] . . .

SL: Hmm.

GA: . . . but it was still within the—the family of the campus. So, in hindsight, I still see that he dealt with it like a family issue, even though I was really no big fan of his administration, during that time or after his time. But in retrospect, as I think about it, if—if he had come back and we woulda engaged, I don't think anything positive woulda come out behind it. I think we needed to go there to make that statement. I think he needed to stand down and let that statement be made. I think he needed to implore at certain things after it, so at least he would be smart enough to be noted as coming. And I think it was just ironic that we came in there and he wasn't there. I mean, there might've been a—a divine intervention that he was out at that time, 'cause there was no—it was a discussion we had and said—somebody said, "We had enough. We just need to go over there." And he could very well have been there, and we would have very well been in the room with him, and it could have turned out differently. So that was a—a real experience in retrospect that—how things happened that got addressed and . . .

[03:07:40] SL: Yeah, you know, by his staying away it didn't become about him. You know, if he'd been there it would've been him against you guys.

GA: Yeah.

SL: But by him staying away. you got all the attention from all the guys that have to make these things happen anyway.

GA: Right.

SL: I mean, he can say "This has gotta go this way," but these were the guy—where the rubber met the road as far as the changes and . . .

GA: And—and, you know, and I think it gave them some out to say "Let us listen. We'll take it back up."

SL: Mhmm.

GA: "Take your grievances up."

SL: Mhmm.

[03:08:10] GA: And we didn't have—"Well, you could make it happen." Well, we knew that the people that did come, could clearly define the message, but in a way that message couldna [could not have] been acted on from a true commitment, other than empathy for the issue and a real understand of how big a issue this was. And maybe to them, and sort of just like negotiating and trying to diffuse issues, they probably said—well, I—I remember them being—they did bring in quite a few people to demonstrate "You got our attention . . .

SL: Yeah.

[03:08:54] GA: . . . now." And a lot of times in most protests, usually it drills down—people just wanna be heard from what their view of the world is. And I think they accomplish that by bringing in people that were in the system that said—you know, they probably woulda blown it off if we weren't in the president's office. I think you—probably from his view of the world that he couldn't be seen there

compromising—woulda probably forced him to a action that woulda elevated the situation that woulda taken that something that nobody coulda controlled. So it was one of those wars that never occurred from a war, but I think pound for pound, it clearly sent the message, "Let's start addressing this issue." Because after that, certain things started happening. And even if it was just they met and talked with people more about it, and I know—I think they even—I can't remember if Gordon Morgan was there or not. I'm—I don't know if he was on campus at that time or he was the byproduct of—when did he come to campus? Do you know?

[03:10:14] SL: I don't remember, but he was—let me think. Yeah, he had to—yes, he was on campus at that time, because he was there when Darrell got shot.

GA: Okay, so it was a gentleman by the name of Harry Budd. Do you remember Harry Budd?

SL: I do remember Harry Budd.

[03:10:30] GA: Harry Budd came to run this special program . . .

SL: Uh-huh.

GA: . . . for students to get 'em acclimated into the university. So . . .

SL: Mhmm.

GA: . . . there were certain things made after it—obviously not enough—not quick enough.

SL: Right.

GA: Not enough. But . . .

SL: There was a history of that . . .

GA: There was a history of that.

SL: . . . of—of promises being made or programs started but never developed.

GA: And . . .

SL: Or—and for whatever excuses they made.

[03:10:57] GA: And—and—and what—what happens that I—if I think about it, in the dynamics of a university the people that are bringing attention to there—if they're students, they're moving on a track, eventually that—you know, if they're a sophomore to the junior, they have more concentration. First of all, freshman have gotta know the ropes. Junior—sophomore they sort of understand and being able to really define a position, and junior they can act on it. But after that, if they're progressing there's really no monitorization of whatever the commitment is made, because they go to the next level of their lives.

SL: Mhmm.

[03:11:36] GA: Or they hang back and they're really not the driving force of the university. So it—it is a challenge, you know, and I think any system, like a university—say, "Well, these guys here raising hell, they gotta graduate, so, they'll be outta here in two years." So, you know, we can start a program, but if we don't monitor them and they don't check on it every day and they have to go on with their lives toward graduation . . .

SL: Mhmm.

GA: . . . then the program falters.

SL: You bet. Atrophy.

[03:12:11] GA: Yeah, it—it becomes—you know, "Is it—is the priority right now as a

senior to get them to make good on the commitments and follow up? Or is it my priority to get out and get a job or move on with my life?" Now, as students we should convey to those sophomores before we leave. "You gotta follow it up to keep it engaged," and whether that's done effectively or not is really gonna be representative of how much attention that stays on it. And that almost has to be breeded [bred] in the culture, and maybe the challenge with Fayetteville, unlike Berkeley [California]—and I use Berkeley because the edges of Berkeley is Oakland, where you have more people around that is aware of the commitments made two years ago, that are still involved, because you have the city of diversity around it, that they can perpetuate and hold harm—hold to the commitments where those people are. And I think a lot of people in the Berkeley/Oakland area, even when they graduate they still stay around the area, unlike Fayetteville. At that time they would graduate and, like me, the first thing I wanna do is get the heck outta here.

SL: Mhmm.

[03:13:34] GA: So it—it did—and—and—and I would think upon graduation I didn't come back to the university 'til years later.

SL: Mhmm.

GA: I mean, it just—my life went on. You know, it just moved on. So it wasn't a urban hub that I was in and engaged with, and because my population of students—maybe let's say it's grown from 100 to 200 black students, and the population grew from 200, 300—that's only 500 people.

SL: Mhmm.

[03:14:09] GA: And I come to Dallas, so now I'm in here with hundreds of thousands of people.

SL: Right.

GA: So my issues in college sort of moved on. That's just my perspective.

SL: Yeah. Well, that's pretty accurate.

GA: So . . .

SL: That's what happens.

GA: . . . that's—that's what happens.

[03:14:28] SL: Yeah. I mean, of course, now there's a great move not only to get industries in Arkansas that keep . . .

GA: Very much so.

SL: . . . kids—kids in Arkansas, but there's also that move to keep the kids that are in Arkansas looking to go to college . . .

GA: You know . . .

SL: . . . to go to the University of Arkansas, because our brightest kids were leaving for so many years, and now we're trying to—they're trying to reverse that. So I think—I think we're headed toward a better marketability of the skill sets that are in the state.

[03:15:04] GA: And, you know, I think what's happening to the good or to the detriment of the university—these branches come up and they are competing for those students, and if they get a degree from the University of Arkansas at Monticello—I'm just choosing—I don't know if they have a—or Fort Smith.

SL: Mhmm.

GA: What is the real reason to go from Monticello to Fayetteville and get the same degree?

SL: Right.

GA: And then because the legislators, I understand, in the Monticello area say, "Well, we want the Monticello branch to do well. We want some of that money that would go to Fayetteville to stay in Monticello area to support our education institutions," so you're graffling [grappling] after the same state funds . . .

SL: Which are . . .

GA: Limited.

SL: . . . pitiful. [Laughs]

[03:15:57] GA: And the—the interesting thing about that, and we talk about that at the business school level, and I—I'm a big promoter that the university, especially Sam Walton School of Business, should be drafting to as big as fertilized ground there is, and that's Texas. I mean, they're—I understand they're not homegrown, but, Texas has nine, ten, twelve universities, that if you went and got a fraction at each one of 'em—the student population—that the cost, the travel, the cost to the university—you can draft out of Texas, where you got a lot of low-lying fruit. University of Texas's gotten so large, they're disseminating their students to their other systems.

SL: Mhmm.

[03:15:51] GA: So, that's one of the things we discuss a lot in the Walton School, "How do you go get the good students out of Plano, out of Arlington, outside of Houston." You know, and you can go—if you waive out-of-state fees—if they

have a high enough grade point average . . .

SL: Right.

GA: . . . it's easier for them to go to Arkansas and to have a better college experience than going to A&M, Texas Tech, or east Texas or Lubbock . . .

SL: Yeah, that—that's in place, though, isn't it? I mean, we do that.

GA: Yeah, you do that, but I think it . . .

SL: I mean, they get in-state rates or in-state tuition.

[03:17:32] GA: Yeah, and that—that makes sense. I—and I think what—what I think that the university is doing better than [delegate forward?] is marketing outside the state. I mean, you—and when people get in state, I know for a lot of people I've talked to—if you can get 'em up to Fayetteville, and Fayetteville dynamically is changing, you can retain them. And whether or not they were born and raised in Arkansas, they go to University of Arkansas, [they] like northwest Arkansas, like Little Rock—they can set their family up here, because I don't know if the state is growing enough individuals to share through all the colleges and keep the university at the level to compete with the other universities, it's gotta bring in some of the—the population from other areas to—for the ones that are in-grown and the ones that you migrate here.

SL: Mhmm.

[03:18:30] GA: I mean, if you look at California, you look at Stanford or something like that, everybody in the country is trying to get to Stanford.

SL: That's correct.

[03:18:41] GA: And so a lot of people in California say, "Well, what's my odds of go-

ing to Stanford?" You know, your odds may be better going to University of Arizona, and if Arizona creates—and—and one of the things that I've been impressed with the Walton School is to raise itself in the rankings.

SL: Yeah.

[03:19:05] GA: To really compete. To start marketing. "We are a competitive university." Now, we might be a little state, very little base, but we got a brand and we got high academic standards, and we can market worldwide. And I think—I think that helps the university.

SL: Absolutely.

GA: And I think you're right. I think the new chancellor is—is pushing this diversity issue, not just ethniticity [ethnicity] in the United States, but globally.

SL: Yep.

GA: Because . . .

SL: Flat earth.

GA: Huh?

SL: Flat earth.

[03:19:38] GA: It's flat earth. And—but that's—you know, I—I'm on SMU's business . . .

SL: Mhmm.

GA: . . . school board also, but that's being chanted everywhere.

SL: I know.

GA: Every—every university now is saying, "This world has gotten mighty flat and very small."

SL: Mhmm.

GA: So I think the University of Arkansas, which it—in my story with it, has come back is that, I left there, I went to Foley's, worked a year, resigned because of the same issues I feared when I talked to the president . . .

SL: Right.

[03:20:10] GA: . . . came to fruition. I didn't—I didn't get promoted. I went in and resigned to Jack Miller, who I interviewed with, and he said, "Well, I can't believe you didn't progress." I said, "Well, what you're saying at top management, that message just don't get down to middle management." I resigned there, went back to SMU—was able to talk them into allowing me to come to the school of SMU. And SMU was a little bit different because the cost per hour was dramatically different.

SL: Yeah.

[03:20:43] GA: But my model of, you know—you know, until you try you don't know. And SMU at the time was pushing entrepreneurship, and I challenged SMU. I—I met the—the—the head of their M.B.A. [masters of business administration] program.

SL: Mhmm.

[03:21:05] GA: And turned in my—my transcript, and he said, "Mr. Alley, I appreciate your coming in here, but while you did good your senior year, your—your grade point average is not what we normally look for." And he said, "Well, let me ask you a question. Why should—" he said, "We take only 110 students a year for the full-time M.B.A. program. It's a fast-track program. You can't drop out.

You gotta take fifteen hours a semester. Why would *we* let you in here?" And I'd done some research on SMU. SMU was a big entrepreneur school.

SL: Mhmm.

[03:21:48] GA: Trammell Crow [Company], the Hunt family—all—[Ross] Perot and all those guys were big supporters of SMU—big entrepreneur school. And I turned to the M.B.A.—the director and said, "You know, SMU has been known to grow large entrepreneur corporations from their graduates, and you've done it. Your alumni represent the stronghold of the South."

SL: Mhmm.

[03:22:21] GA: "But you guys have failed as a university to grow your entire community. You don't have black business that you can point to that you grew. So you as a university are deficient." He looked at me and said, "What?" I said, "So what I'm saying—we have the same challenge. I need to be a entrepreneur. You need to grow your full community, and I'll provide that opportunity." He said, "Well, I'll tell you what. Why don't you go write me a business plan?" And I came back and wrote my business plan. He said, "I took this to our dean, and we will consider this—you have to take the ATGSB—advanced test for students in business. You gotta take these courses. There's no drop, no add. And if you drop one course and we're not convinced that, you know, based upon your transcript—" I said, "But you looking at the transcript in a composite rate. Check my trend." And he said, "Well, what is it that you do?" And I told him I—I worked forty hours a week and I told him all this other good stuff. He said, "Hmm." He said, "I tell you what. Let us think about it." Well, two months later—get in the

mail, acceptance letters from SMU. I was work—now, it was a month later. I was working at Foley's. I was totally . . .

SL: Discouraged. Yeah.

[03:23:59] GA: . . . depressed. Just totally—they had made me feel like I didn't know what I was doing. They had made me feel I couldn't add and subtract. There was pure isolation of the other people in the organization as far as in my group. And I get this letter from SMU saying, "You have been invited to participate in the full-time program." And my logic was—I was talking to a friend of mine. He said, "Gerald, you applying to these graduate schools. Why would you apply to SMU? It costs so much money. Why?" I said, "First of all, it costs so much money. That means they got more money to give."

SL: Yes.

[03:24:34] GA: And, sure enough, they gave me scholarships and grants that I lived better while I was in SMU. Had enough—my business plan required me to have a new car. It financed that. And so I went to the guy at—Jack Miller, president of Singer Harris—said, "Mr. Miller, I just came up here to tell you I was resigning, and I was right. There is no opportunity here for me in this." And he was just taken back. We hadn't talked since my day on campus. He said—he said, "I—I can't imagine that." Then I said, "Well, your middle management doesn't get your message." And he said, "What's the job position you wanted?" I said, "It's too late for that. It's not—that's not the opportunity, and I'm not that good in re-tail. There are other people, blacks, that are better than I am that are not being promoted that are still here." He took me off from—I was assistant buyer. He

took me off my duties there to work with him the last month to help come up with a strategy.

SL: Wow.

[03:25:45] GA: And all those people in my department said, "This guy is now working with the president on a special project?" And he said, "Well, Gerald, what—what do you—what company are you going?" I said, "No, it—it's not a company. I just had a change of career life." Got into SMU, freshman—I mean, first semester, side-by-side legacy of kids that their parents were billionaires. And the guy first said when he came to the M.B.A. program. He said, "First of all, we assume you guys are gonna be the leaders. We're gonna assume that you got the fundamentals of accounting, finance down. We're trying to tell you how to be thinkers. So mechanics is something we assume you got. We're gonna push you to think—to build organizations." I said, "Okay, so that means I don't have to do all this cranking of accounting." He said, "We're gonna do some of that, but we're gonna do more case studies, case management, group settings, and thinking." First semester, [foil?]. I go back to the guy. He said, "Gerald, we are really amazed." Next semester, all A's except one B. In the summer session—before we started the summer session, I said—Dr. Edwards said, "You know, we really—we took a bet and we think it'll work and we're really proud." I said, "Look, Dr. Edwards, I need to [talk to you any way I got?]. You know, when I told you I need this business plan, the part of that plan is—" oh, they asked me before I started, they said, "Well, how have you prepared? How much money you got saved?" I said, "I have no money saved." So then he just sort of nodded his head and then he sent

that letter with all this other stuff. I said, "To make my business plan work, I need my brother to get a M.B.A." At that time Troy had finished electrical engineering. He had worked for Westinghouse and started doing real estate appraisals on the side. He was frustrated up at the big company and he said, "Where is he?" I said, "He's up around Washington, DC." He says—I said, "But he's smart. You can look at his transcript." [Laughter] Then he said—oh, he said—he said, "Does he have any money?" I said, "He doesn't have a dime either." I said, "Don't look at it as expense. Look at it as investment." He said, "So what are you saying?" I said, "I need him to come get his M.B.A." I said, "Troy, apply." He applied. I graduated that summer. He started that fall. So we flipped the roles.

SL: Wow. [Laughs]

[03:28:37] GA: So—and I said, "This—Troy is the smart one of the family. He prepared. He did his homework. I BS'd [bull-shitted] my—my way through it."

SL: [Laughs]

GA: He said, "Well, somehow I think that's gonna work for you in the future."

SL: [Laughs]

GA: And—and—so we went through. I finished SMU. We went through that, and I started working as a consultant in a consulting firm. And Troy went through his M.B.A. program as well, and I was doing financial analysis. We eventually—after I did that about three years, I said, "There's a opportunity to start a business. We [are] coming in[to] a business. We wanna be real estate developers, but we don't have no land, capital, money. We don't have no rich daddy." I said, "So we gonna have to learn the skills that we can sell to be developers." So he con-

centrated on real estate. I concentrated in finance, and I got involved in construction. And so I said, "Well, I'm gonna go out and start this business called Construction Services, and we're gonna do technical service to help contractors handle financial monies. After about a year we're gonna see—want to integrate that to your real estate appraising service." And that was born Con-Real. And, what happened was, as we went through that process, I would go back, and I—I was going—when I graduated from high school—it'll come back to my father's story—type of person he was—I graduated from college and I said—he said, "Tell me—" he said—the last year, he said, "I—I was gonna sign for your last loan and financial aid, and you—how did you do that?" I said, "Dad, if you'd a signed you'd got us both in trouble, 'cause you'd been signing it for two years. You just didn't know it." [Laughter] I said, "You'll fool around and sign and get us both in trouble." And I said, "You told me to work it out. You tell a seventeen-year-old to work it out—I worked it out."

SL: [Laughs]

[03:30:57] GA: And so he always laughed about that. He said, "I guess I did tell ya to work it out." I said, "Well, think about it. I worked it out." So, fast-forward to the beginning of this organization . . .

SL: Yeah.

GA: . . . so we started doing construction real estate services, and we—we were fortunate enough to focus on two things. And it comes back to—there's a perception of blacks in the construction real estate business that, first of all, they are not as high a professional. So we gonna try to draft as highly—as my mother'd say,

"educated people" with as many credentials—going back to the education model. And my other brother—he'd started—he'd got out Air Force. He started working for the government and we were setting up, as the company started, and he said, "Gerald, you got a construction real estate—" he said, "Gerald, you can't nail a nail. How you . . ."

SL: [Laughs]

GA: ". . . gonna become a contractor?" I said, "Still can't nail a nail. It has nothing to do with nailing nails. It's management of people and resources. The perception people have, that a contractor is a pickup truck and you're nailing nails—" I said, "That's the wrong perception . . ."

SL: Uh-huh.

GA: ". . . if you are actually driving a business to level you wanna drive it at." So the spirit of my mother saying, "Push your education" made us gravitate to a highly professional-type business. The entrepreneurship spirit of my father said, "Well, you gotta get out there and do it on your own and you gotta be with it every day at some level." But in 1981 he passed.

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:32:47] GA: And when he passed, I came back home the—last days that he was sick. He had leukemia. And for the first time, we would sit in the hospital and talk about things, and I—I knew it was pretty much the end for him, 'cause the first time—he was always just focused on his business—he talked about every-thing except the business, and it struck me strange that at the end of the day, it wasn't as important when really life issues came about. And the other thing we—

I walked outta there with the legacy of is that he operated that business for forty-seven years, and a few days after he passed, the real key was, "How we gonna liquidate?" And I said, "The real business model is building a business that outlasts you, because you're only [written?] time with it." So the nature and the mission of this organization is not that I'll always been in charge—that it lasts past my—first of all, desire to be here. Second of all, past—and it doesn't have to be family-owned, but the business in itself does good for the community in which it operates, because one of the natures of business—when I read books about—the real strength of it, other than the—the Dell—Michael Dells and the Microsoft—they're usually over generations, that it learns—just like any other stage of life—embryo state, youth state, and it's a growth state and then it's matured state. And for me is that my job is to get it out of embryo to growth state—be willing to let it go, to give it a opportunity, because somebody probably be better to drive it than me. And, second of all, what can I do in my last part of life that really brings value to my life? So I already have a mission I'm a do after a few more years of this, and that's to go back and teach entrepreneurship at a college level. So for me, this business serves a purpose. For me, it's brought quite a bit of joy, some pain, whole lot of wisdom, and it's very humbling, because you—lot of—you run into a lot of issues you never prepared for. But I don't—what I walked away from my father, he—people say, "Well, was it your undergrad or did you learn your business at SMU M.B.A. program? What—did you—or went to Northwestern—went to a special [program]?" I said, "No, it really came from a service station." I said, "But one of the challenges that I think that the legacy of it is that it has to

outlast you, not so much—" it's like a—I look at boxers. They always stay in the ring too long. They become great and then they wanna hold onto greatness versus being great in something else.

SL: Mhmm.

[03:36:09] GA: And for me it's that the measure of success or the benefits of the business is being able to have a podium in which I can influence other people to do things beyond what they feel they can do, and to say, "You don't have to have a deck of aces. You can have threes, fives and fours. Just play that hand best you can, and realize that's the hand you're dealt with. And regardless what cards you pull, that's really the best hand you got." And if—for me in the business comes that I'm very proud to say it's a family-owned business. I'm very proud to say it's a diverse business. I'm very proud to say that it's a continuation, regardless if we fixing cars or we building buildings, it's still the legacy of getting up in the morning, having a mission, and solving a problem by the end of the day—or at least working on the problem. So I think that the university was part of that process. It wasn't the end of it. It wasn't the beginning of it. But it was the first time that I was faced with independence to test myself—what choices I was gonna make, whether it had been easy or hard to test those choices. And, you know, people say, "Well, I thought you—going to Arkansas—that was a Southern university. Didn't you have—?" I said, "That was the best experience I had at—because without those challenges—without being in the room with all students that I felt at least knew each other or didn't see me ostracized gives me confidence when I walk in rooms right now and in board rooms. Same guys. I mean,

it's the—maybe not the same guys, but the conditions don't really change."

SL: Mhmm.

[03:38:19] GA: And I'm comfortable with that, because I understand from the [university]—these same guys that I saw in college at certain levels. They've just gotten a little older—a little grayer. Their financial statements got a little bit bigger. But, really, they're the same guys. And that doesn't intimidate me. It doesn't make me hostile. It doesn't make me at awe. It just says, "This is the cards you're dealt with." And I think it's my job right now is to pass whatever knowledge I gave 'em—good, bad, indifferent—to other people that are coming into an environment they are not familiar with, and don't look at the—the obstacles. Look at the—where you think you can go. And to make a long story short, we ended up starting doing a project for Kaiser Permanente. We're building medical facilities in—in Dallas.

SL: Mhmm.

[03:39:20] GA: And then they chose a firm to go to California to build facilities for them. And we start to—to leave Texas and go to California. We opened up another company called the Alley Group out there. And somebody called me and say, "There's a gentleman on our board wanted to know are you the same guy." I said, "Who is that?" "His name is Jack Miller. He is a retired guy, but he used to be president of Foley's. And he just wanted to know, were you the kid that embarrassed him back at University of Arkansas." I said, "I didn't think he was embarrassed." He said, "Well, it stuck with him that he remembered. He saw your name, about who you were and said, 'That's the guy that called me to question

back at University of Arkansas.'" And I just thought that was—you know, your history—your life-issue history and that take it as part of life—part of the ride or whatever. And I try to tell my kids—you know, "It's part of your life, and I wouldn't change any of it." So, as far as talking to what I would like to leave people with is, it's no other life but yours. You decide how you wanna deal with it. And you understand that other people influence where you are today. Accept that as a blessing. Now, your job in life is whatever your blessing you got is not to help the people that help you, but to help other people so we can go further in life together. And the University of Arkansas—Pine Bluff, Arkansas—Dallas—Foley's—all the big issues of my life—my family, my friends—people that I didn't know that even respected what I was trying to do—and some of the—the people that—that probably felt that I didn't have the ability to do it was probably right at the time. But I believe that being right all the time doesn't affect your heart and wanting to do it. And, you know, it's sort of like—heard Muhammad Ali, says, "You don't become a good fighter until you take a hit." He said—you know—he said that about George Foreman before he fought him, when all the statistics were in, he said, "Until you take a hit, you [don't] become a fighter." And when I look in business and in life, if you don't have a background of challenges—if you don't have failures in your background, it's not over 'til you say it's over. And just keep that in mind. Only until you decide to not get off the canvas is when the fight is over. But if you get up, it ain't over. So that's my thoughts.

[03:42:40] SL: That's really great. How much time we got?

FE: Ten minutes.

SL: Ten minutes. Couple of questions real quick.

GA: Sure.

[03:42:50] SL: First of all, what's your favorite music?

GA: Jazz.

SL: Okay. And was it that way in college?

GA: The—the favorite music I got is—is jazz with a blend of rock in it. Yes.

SL: Okay.

GA: Yes, yes.

SL: Okay.

GA: I still have Earth, Wind and Fire, Marvin Gaye albums.

SL: Yeah.

GA: Same kinda deal.

[03:43:10] SL: Okay. One thing that we didn't mention, other than going to funerals, was church. Is that a part of your life?

GA: Church is a very—you know, I—I tell people that being in business gets you closer to God than anything, 'cause you see your limitations, and, that I grew up United Methodist Church—my mother required us to go to church even though we hated the place. And we went to church in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, and right now—we had to be ushers, we had to be acolytes, we had to do the whole deal. And she said, "Every Sunday morning we getting up and go to church, even though you don't get it—even though you don't agree with it." Today I teach Sunday school. Now, when I was in college you couldn't catch me near a church.

SL: Right.

[03:44:10] GA: After I graduated from college, I visited church. After I got in business, I became more involved with it . . .

SL: Mhmm.

GA: . . . because I believe there is very much limitations to a person—has personally, that if—if you think you can do it all yourself you're mistaken.

SL: Right.

GA: There has to be your God reaching out and having a plan for you. And that's the only way it really gets me through major issues. Well, it's—you know, we just—we look at opportunities and—and if I work for a opportunity, I work day and night and I pray about it—don't get it. The pastor told me, who's also from Pine Bluff, Arkansas—you have to say, "Well, maybe it wasn't meant for you and you gotta find peace with your decisions. Even if your perils happen, you have to find—you have to have a religious experience." And I tell ya, in business I've hit some walls where that—there was no way out. And I believe today God intervened and made a way out of nothing. I think another thing that's very near and dear to me, and I probably should be ashamed, is my family.

[03:45:25] SL: We haven't touched that yet.

GA: And I—I was fortunate enough after all my perils in life to find somebody I think that's—you know, when you feel that you maxed out on your own capability, to find somebody that wherever my weaknesses are, they have strengths, so it's a great blend . . .

SL: Mhmm.

GA: . . . that we have. And, ironically, even though I grew up as—as a music appreciation, my mother forced me to play the piano. I didn't play it well.

SL: Mhmm.

[03:46:00] GA: My wife came from almost a similar background in a predominantly black city in—outside of Philadelphia called Camden, New Jersey.

SL: Okay.

GA: She is—she went from Camden, New Jersey, but she—she could've gone to Philadelphia, but she went to Princeton . . .

SL: Mhmm.

GA: . . . four or five years after I was up at Fayetteville, so she was at the end of maybe the civil rights struggle, but she experienced a lot of the background. But she—I met her at a social event that I was totally ill prepared to meet anybody. I was—was at my lowest appearance look . . .

SL: Mhmm.

[03:46:46] GA: . . . lowest mental attitude, and she was visiting, here. And she was working for IBM [International Business Machines], and we immediately start talking about—you know, music in a way, and I—I was sort of—sort of—I'd say sort of boosting that I really knew music, and she was quietly saying, "Oh, yeah?" I say, "Yeah."

SL: [Laughs]

[03:47:18] GA: I say, "Yeah, I have music. I know some music." I say, "Well, have you done . . .?" She said, "Yeah." I said—she said, "Well, I've been playing piano since I was four." I said, "Oh, yeah? Well, what did you do after that?" She

said, "Well, I played classical stuff, jazz, and—and I got a degree from Princeton in [Temple?] and music, and I'm working towards a doctor's in music in theory and composition." And I'm saying, "Well, I really don't know that much about music."

SL: [Laughs]

[03:47:45] GA: I just started back-pedaling. But she—she worked for IBM . . .

SL: Mhmm.

GA: . . . and they hired her because music and math.

SL: Now, we're talking here in Dallas?

GA: Here in Dallas.

SL: Okay.

GA: They—they hired her in New Jersey. She was only here for a—a—a training session. And we met at a—I say a club, she says a social entertainment restaurant. And it just so happened there was no other seats available, and a girl from Arkansas, a friend of the family, said, "Oh, that's Gerald Alley over there. Can we—he's got a table by his self. He's just sitting up here." And I was at this restaurant 'cause I was there early, and later that evening it turned to a sort of night club, and I wasn't dressed—prepared—so I just stayed in the seat, so we sat this girl from my hometown down, and then they sat my wife down. And we—we just started talking, and after that she stayed about six weeks. We hit it off, and I would ask her—one time I said, "So what do you—what do you wanna do out there?" She said, "I really don't want to be out there. I—I really want to teach music." And it—you know, it goes back—all the way back to the history. And I said, "Oh,

yeah?"

SL: [Laughs]

[03:49:04] GA: So, I said, "Why don't you?" And she said, "Well, you know, I don't know. I gotta do this and do this." So we eventually got closer and closer. We got married. And I said, "Well, I believe you should pursue your dreams," 'cause she really was family oriented. And so she went back to North Texas and got a doctor's in music—music composition and theory.

SL: Great school.

GA: Great music school.

SL: Yeah.

GA: I didn't know it was that great. I used to hear about the jazz band, but she said other than Juilliard [School] and Eastman [School of Music], North Texas—number three in the nation.

SL: That's what I've always heard.

[03:49:35] GA: And she—she teaches now at TCU [Texas Christian University], adjunct professor in music theory and composition. So all our kids are musically inclined, right?

SL: [Laughs] Mhmm.

GA: We happen to have . . .

[03:49:51] SL: You making any of 'em work at the station?

GA: Huh?

SL: Are you making any of 'em work at the station?

GA: Well, I tell ya . . .

SL: [Laughs]

GA: . . . from seventh grade on . . .

SL: [Laughs]

[03:50:00] GA: After they graduate sixth grade, from seventh grade on they gotta spend three weeks here in the office. And I said—they said, "Why?" I said, "'Cause you need to know how you get to do what you do every day." And—and the first summer session they have to write what it meant to them to work. And every summer they have to spend three weeks here. And me and my wife struggle about juggling their time and music and ballet and—'cause she provides the cultural arts of things.

SL: Uh-huh.

GA: And so I think we've come full circle. She—she says, "You—you gotta do arts and music, and you gotta—" you know, "have drives to do cultural things—Boys and Girls Club—do these fund-raisers," very cultural artsy-type things. And I said, "Yeah, but they need to know some about business."

SL: [Laughs]

[03:50:54] GA: They need to know. So, our compromise is every summer—I have two daughters, one is now a senior in college [Gina]—senior in high school—and she is a—and I'd mentioned earlier, she was looking at colleges and I said, "Well, look at every college. You wanna look at Arkansas. If you want to, it's up to you."

SL: Mhmm.

GA: And they thought I was a big promoter of it. I was. And she came to Fayetteville

and she likes it. And just naturally, she started taking accounting classes in high school, and she's real good in accounting.

SL: Mhmm.

GA: She actually just received a number-one person in Arlington High Schools in accounting scores.

SL: Wow.

GA: She's competed regional and state levels also, so—but she said, "I don't really like accounting. I like international business."

SL: Uh-huh.

[03:51:48] GA: But her mother has convinced her to do foreign language . . .

SL: Mhmm.

GA: . . . so she is [Spanic?]. She speaks Spanish very well.

SL: Good.

GA: So she probably can do what she wants to do. My other daughter [Stephanie] is—she's almost a virtuoso cellist.

SL: Wow.

[03:52:09] GA: And—but, in the summer—she's in the ninth grade—she's worked her two summer's. Gina's worked here four summers. Gina spends about eight hours a week at the office, and it's for the purpose of them to know . . .

SL: We're outta tape in two minutes.

GA: For them, the purpose—and I got one son [Byron], who is nine years old, who is—I—looking at him, I see a lot of me. He has a balanced of attitude. He learns from their mistakes, and I just hope that he has a fulfilled, good life. He has a

positive attitude—very jovial. And my wife is—is that supportive person and a quiet strength—somebody else I think about—very quiet strength.

[03:52:58] SL: What's your wife's name?

GA: Candace.

SL: Candace. That's right.

GA: And—and that's my family. And my brother—he—we've been together now twenty-seven years with the business. When we first started I said, "Well, if we have a argument we could always go tell Mother on each one of us," so that sort of grounded us. He has the same experience. We've sort of flipped roles here and there. So it's been a family thing. It's been a legacy thing. It's been almost a—a repeat of my life in a way, and I think the values that were instilled, good, bad or indifferent, and the idiosyncrasies are pretty running track to background. So that's where we are.

SL: This is a great job. Now, first of all, do—do you want to spend any more time? It's after 6:00.

GA: It's—I'm—if you think you got enough . . .

[End of Interview]

[Transcribed by Cheri Pearce Riggs]