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Acknowledgements and Introduction:

JB: *I would like to thank Dr. Morgan Kiper Riechel for conducting this interview with Dr. Elliott. I also want to thank Dr. Elliott for her willingness to visit us during the Alabama Counseling Association Conference in Birmingham, AL on November 20, 2013.*

With the gracious and engaging Dr. Elliott, we heard about her past experiences and noted her dedication to the field of counseling. In January 2014, in a follow-up interview, I asked additional questions to add a personal perspective to the initial interview. The following information reflects excerpts from both interviews. This version was reviewed and approved by Dr. Elliott, prior to publication.

Interview Excerpts:

JB: *The first thing we would like to know is when did you begin your career at University of Alabama at Birmingham (UAB) and how long did your career span?*

GE: I joined the UAB faculty in the fall of 1973. I will always be grateful to the late Dr. Clay Sheffield and the late Dr. Fain Guthrie for giving me the opportunity to teach at UAB and be part of developing the Counseling Program. I supervised my last practicum in 2000.

JB: *Where were you born, when, and what was in like during your early life?*

GE: I was born in 1940 in Mayfield, GA, a small rural community in Hancock County. We lived with my maternal grandparents. My mother taught high school English in the small nearby town of Sparta. Toward the end of her career, she became a high school guidance counselor! My father, an agronomist, was the county agent for Hancock County. On my first birthday, my father, also an Army reserve officer, was called into active duty to serve during WW II. After the war ended, we continued to live with my grandparents for several years with my mother teaching school and my father working as a salesman for a mineral and chemical company. When I was sixteen, my family moved to Thomson, GA.

Because my only sibling, Edlyn, was born when I was nearly 12, I grew up for the most part as an only, sometimes lonely, child. My maternal grandmother was my constant source of love and care. I learned early to “entertain” myself by reading, listening to music, and playing outside, occasionally with a few neighborhood children, but most of the time alone. Somewhat of a tomboy, I loved to climb trees and even had a tree house! While I enjoyed playing flute and piccolo in the school band, I also enjoyed playing girl’s basketball in high school and playing intramural sports in college. Of course, I loved going to school not only because I enjoyed learning but also

because being in school meant I would again be with my friends, and the loneliness would subside.

JB: *What were some early influences in your life?*

GE: From my maternal grandmother, I learned the significance and importance of unconditional love and acceptance. From my mother, I developed my love for learning and teaching along with the love of music and the fine arts. From my father, I learned to appreciate nature, to understand the importance of a spiritual life, and how to play basketball with “true grit.” In both parents, I saw the importance of giving of one’s time and resources in the service of others.

JB: *What were some influences in early adulthood in your life?*

GE: As an undergraduate at the University of Georgia, through my participation in student religious organizations, I was introduced to the concept of religiously-based social justice which literally came to life during the integration of the University in 1961. The summer of 1961, while attending a student leadership conference at the Pacific School of Religion in California, I heard Martin Luther King, Jr. speak and was able to shake his hand. This was a very significant experience for me. At Georgia, I was also introduced to existential theology, particularly that of Paul Tillich and Martin Buber. Paul Tillich’s (1952) *The Courage to Be* remains one of the most influential books in my life.

Carl Rogers’ (1961) *On Becoming a Person* and Viktor Frankl’s (1959) *Man’s Search for Meaning*, which I encountered while pursuing my master’s degree at Georgia, were and remain very important influences. Being at Kent State pursuing my doctorate at the time of the shooting of the students in 1970 crystallized my commitment to nonviolence and peaceful conflict resolution. Also, at Kent State, my major professor, Dr. Virginia Harvey, was a very important influence. From her I learned the value of collaboration and consensus in decision-making. In several ways, I modeled my approach to teaching after her. Her influence on my life remains inestimable.

JB: *As you reflect on your family, can you tell me more?*

GE: I am very grateful for the opportunity earlier in the interview to acknowledge publicly some of the important influences of my family and the gifts I received from them. I hope I have shared with others – students, clients, colleagues, and friends – in ways that honor their memory.

MKR: *What has it been like to be a counselor educator during your career?*

GE: Well, I would say it has been exciting. It has certainly been meaningful, very rewarding, and it has been challenging. Much of the challenge has been an opportunity to be creative and be in on the ground floor in the development of the counseling program at UAB, as well as to be involved in the growth of our professional association, the Alabama Counseling Association (ALCA). Having a direct impact on our local community, consulting with schools and agencies and helping them develop their client services has also been meaningful and rewarding. I have met many wonderful people as a counselor educator and developed colleague relationships that have been lasting.

MKR: *Can you tell me about the beginning years of Counselor Education?*

Well, for me at UAB, as indicated earlier, it was developing the counselor education program. In the 1970s, UAB had just become a separate entity of the University of Alabama system. I was hired primarily to develop two of the courses in our curriculum: the group course and the human development course. The primary mission of the school of education at that time was to have a positive effect on education in the Birmingham and surrounding area. As for the counseling program, this meant our focus was on the education and training, both pre-service and in-service, of school and agency counselors. Our consulting and in-service training with schools and agencies provided an opportunity to put theory into practice which was very appealing to me and very much part of what I wanted to do in terms of my work as a counselor educator.

I was also involved in seeing and participating in the growth and development of ALCA. One of the significant happenings in terms of the history of the counseling profession in Alabama occurred shortly after I joined the faculty. In 1979, the state legislature enacted the licensure process for counselors. At that time the current president of the ALCA, Don Schmitz, was active in the political process leading to the passage of the licensure bill. I was fortunate enough to be nominated by ALCA to be one of the first board members on the Alabama Board of Examiners in Counseling (ABEC), representing counselor education. One of our first responsibilities was to develop the supervision requirements for licensure and the plan of supervision that counselors seeking licensure had to follow. It was meaningful to be engaged in that process of laying the groundwork for licensure and the supervision process. These were my loves, so to speak, in terms of my role as a counselor educator on the Board. It was significant, I believe, that Alabama was the third state to enact licensure, and ALCA played quite a significant role. I was very glad I could be a part of that process.

Later the requirements for supervised experience were increased, such that supervisors had to be certified. One of the ways LPC's could be certified as supervisors was to complete 24 hours of ABEC, and later NBCC, approved training in supervision. One of my colleagues, Dr. Judith Harrington, and I developed the first workshop in the state that provided this training. I very much appreciated this opportunity to be innovative and to work with another colleague in presenting something that was needed in our profession at that time. The model we developed was later modified and adapted by ALACES. Of course, other certified supervisors now offer workshops that provide this training.

MKR: *Can you tell me some things that you have done that you are just really proud of as a professional in the counseling field? We talked a little bit about the licensure board...*

GE: In addition to being involved in developing the UAB counseling program, serving on the licensure board would certainly be one. At the time, it was exciting in that we were doing something new and different here in Alabama! I had lived in Ohio for five years while pursuing my doctoral work and working at a Kent State branch campus. By living in another state one sometimes gets an idea of how one's native state is perceived. Being originally from Georgia, I had to endure some of the "not so favorable attitudes" projected on the South. So, being in Alabama and being involved with people who were working very actively to enhance our profession and improve the quality of the lives of our clients was a very meaningful experience!

MKR: *Can you talk about some other career highlights at UAB?*

GE: As part of the development of the counseling program, being a charter member of the Chi Sigma Iota Zeta chapter was certainly a highlight. After Dr. Sam Gladding left UAB in the late 1980's to take a position at another university, I became the advisor for the Zeta chapter. I am glad I was a part of the chapter at UAB. I still am!

I took an early retirement in the fall of 1994, because of my need to participate in the care of my aging parents in Georgia, but I continued to do adjunct teaching at UAB. In 2004, Michael Lebeau was the president of the Alabama Counseling Association. Michael and I were on the advisory board that was responsible for creating the UAB Safe Zone Program in 2001. He and I were both also involved in the training of volunteers. Shortly after he was elected president of the ALCA he turned to me one day at a planning meeting and said, "Glenda, you know I have the prerogative of appointing committee chairs and charging the standing committees, and I would like to appoint you as chair of the committee on Special Issues with a particular focus of raising awareness around gay and lesbian issues in our association. Are you willing to take that on?" I said, "Yes." That was one of the more challenging endeavors of my professional life, but absolutely one of the most rewarding. We worked long and hard with the ALCA Executive Council to convince the Council that we needed to raise awareness and have a focus on gay and lesbian issues in the ALCA.

As a result of our efforts to increase awareness, we were able to form a special interest section, which was part of the process to become a division within ALCA. I remember well the 2004 Fall Conference in Huntsville. We had a table where members could sign a petition in favor of our forming the interest section, a requirement in the process of becoming a division. I do not recall the number of signatures we needed for the petition, but we had more than enough. Just the fact that many members came by our table saying, "I want to sign up to support what you are doing..." was meaningful. So, the interest section was formed. Another colleague, Frank Hrabe, and I served as co-chairs, and we began the work of becoming a division.

In 2005, we gained the approval of the Executive Council to form the division of the Association for Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender Issues in Counseling of Alabama, ALGBTICAL. At that time, there were only seven similar divisions in the American Counseling Association (ACA). So, the formation of ALGBTICAL was definitely a highlight. I will always be grateful for being part of this group and proud of our accomplishments. We could not have done it without the support of some of the other people you are interviewing for this project. They stood by us and spoke up for us, taking a stand to support us on the Executive Council to approve the division. I believe the division has made an important contribution to ALCA and to the counseling profession in Alabama. We have been able to bring together many people who are willing to work to achieve the purposes of the organization.

The last thing I would add to that, even though I am retired from UAB and my clinical practice, I have remained active professionally. It was in 2007 that I ended my tenure on the Board of Equality Alabama which is a state-wide organization seeking civil rights and protection for LGBT people in Alabama. That same year, the Board of Equality Alabama decided its major project would focus on creating safe schools for LGBT youth. Of course, I pushed for that because I knew the time was right. As my tenure on the Board ended that year, I volunteered to pull together a

committee to form the Alabama Safe Schools Coalition which has continued its mission to encourage K-12 schools in Alabama to develop policies and procedures insuring schools are safe places of learning for all students, including LGBT and questioning students.

MKR: *What year was this?*

GE: This was in 2007, but let me back up just a little bit. As indicated earlier, in 2001-2002, we developed a Safe Zone Program at UAB, the aim of which was to raise awareness of LGBT issues on campus and train volunteer faculty and staff to be “safe persons” to whom students could address concerns related to sexual orientation and gender identity. Gloria Anderson, a colleague and member of ALCA, was at that time the Director of Student Services in one of the local school systems. She had heard about the Safe Zone program. There had been an incident involving a member of the girl’s basketball team who had come out as a lesbian. Subsequently, she had received strong, negative reactions from some of her teammates. Gloria contacted me and asked what we were doing at UAB to address this kind of issue.

As a result of having subsequently attended one of the Safe Zone training sessions in 2002, Gloria was able to convince the superintendent of schools to provide training for all the school administrators including principals, counselors, school psychologists, and other staff. It was a workshop on creating safe schools for gay and lesbian students and was, as far as we know, the first training for school personnel in Alabama on this particular topic. Following that workshop, at the 2003 ALCA Fall Conference, Gloria and two of my colleagues at UAB, Dr. Angela Stowe and Dr. Angie Coker, and I presented the first session at an ALCA fall conference on Creating Safe Schools for Sexual Minority Youth. So, to make a long story short, I was already doing safe schools work while on was on the Board of Equality Alabama. So, it was a natural next step for me to become involved with the Alabama Safe Schools Coalition.

In forming the coordinating committee of the Alabama Safe Schools Coalition in 2007, I was able to bring together a small group of people, including Gloria Anderson, the executive director of Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG,) the current president of the Equality Alabama Board who was also a retired school principal, and a retired elementary teacher who worked at that time with the Teaching Tolerance program. We spent the first year, 2007-2008, building the coalition which now is comprised of 16 organizations, including, of course, ALGBTICAL, the Alabama Psychological Association , the Crisis Center, the Teaching Tolerance Program of the Southern Poverty Law Center, the Alabama ACLU, the YWCA of Central Alabama, and Greater Birmingham Ministries, to name a few. It was another challenging but exciting and rewarding endeavor to pull together that coalition. So, my involvement in the development of the Alabama Safe Schools Coalition is another opportunity for which I am very grateful.

Again, in thinking back on my career, it has been the coming together of people to bring something into being - the process of joining with other people in teamwork – that has been very meaningful. For example, when I joined the faculty at UAB we really had to work together as a team to build our program. We were building a counseling program primarily from scratch. It was modeled somewhat after the master’s program at UA, because the Dean of the School of Education had been a counselor educator at UA and some of the faculty had their doctorates from the UA program. So working together, for me personally as well as professionally, bringing together a team of people who can collaborate, support each other, share resources, and create

something that hopefully will be lasting, has been very meaningful. If we talk about “pride” in one’s work, yes, there is some pride, but it goes much beyond that word.

MKR: *It’s building a legacy.*

GE: And, especially at this stage of my life, it very meaningful to know that what is built is continuing. For example, to sit at something like our ALCA Award’s Breakfast this morning and see members of our association and our division, especially the younger people, moving into positions of leadership and doing the work is gratifying. For example, the young woman sitting next to me this morning at the Award’s Breakfast, Dr. Angela Stowe, is the president-elect of ALGBTICAL. She was born the year I came to Birmingham! So, what can you say after that? I am very proud of her and proud and gratified that she and others will continue our work.

MKR: *Passing it on to the next generation....*

GE: Right. I have not used the word “mentor.” But, I do value that aspect of being a counselor educator and having been a supervisor, and now an advocacy counselor which has become my professional identity now. The mentorship piece has been very important to me in all aspects of my advocacy efforts, and I am very grateful for the experience.

MKR: *Can you tell me a little bit about the history of counseling in our state?*

GE: OK, I have alluded to some of that. Seeing the growth of ALCA and ALCA's involvement in bringing about licensure for counselors would be important elements in our history, I believe. Also, the growth of counselor education programs at universities throughout the state has been impressive. I think just about all the university programs are CACREP approved now. It has been wonderful to see that happen in our state along with the development of the various divisions and particularly the division that I have been very involved in, the ALGBTICAL division. At the same time ALGBTICAL was formed in 2005, the Alabama Association of Adult Development and Aging division was also formed and approved. In my opinion, the creation of these two divisions has been a significant piece of the history connected with ALCA.

Several ALCA members who were counselor educators have achieved national recognition. ALCA members have been presidents of ACA divisions. At least two former counselor educators have served as president of the ACA, Dr. Sam Gladding and Dr. Marcheta Evans. When I think about contributions to the counseling profession, I do not see contributions just within Alabama; I also see significant contributions having been made regionally as well as nationally.

MKR: *Well if there's anything you could bring back from three decades past what would it be?*

GE: Well, I appreciate that question. What I would like to bring back? What I would like to bring back would be a deeper understanding and a deeper respect for the basic core conditions of the counseling process. I was strongly influenced by Carl Rogers and Person-Centered counseling. It was my honor to meet him briefly and to shake his hand at the 1986 ACA Convention in Los Angeles. He died not long after that time in 1987, a real loss to our profession. But the basic core conditions of the therapeutic process - unconditional positive regard, empathy, and congruence - have been and remain the cornerstones of all of my work. Certainly, I would like to see these basic

core conditions of the counseling process regain more recognition, more prominence, not so much as techniques but as qualities, as characteristics of the person who is a counselor. That is what I would bring back from three or four decades ago.

MKR: *If you could give any advice to new counselor educators such as myself what would that advice be?*

GE: Well, that reminds me again of Carl Rogers. In my studying and reading of the work of Rogers, I ran across an article that reported an incident when a doctoral student came to him and said "What should be the focus of my research?" Rogers said something to this effect: "Find what you love to do and do that." I would say to beginning counselor educators, "Find what you love to do and do as much of that as you can in your teaching, your research, and your service and find a way to balance those three pillars of being a counselor educator.

MKR: *That is good advice. Is there anything else you would like to add?*

GE: I would add my thanks to you and Dr. Burnham for carrying out this project and asking the questions you are asking of us to get a perspective on what the profession of counseling has been in Alabama. I appreciate being included along with the other counselors and ALCA members in this project. You are making a very meaningful contribution to our association and to the history of counseling in our state.

MKR: *Thank you. We really appreciate you and you sharing our story with us.*

JB: *It has been a few months since we interviewed you. Would there be any other thoughts?*

GE: It has been very meaningful to reconstruct and share elements of my personal and professional life with my colleagues in ALCA, my primary professional association. I offer my heartfelt appreciation to all those who have shared with me the journey of becoming and being a professional counselor. Many, many thanks for including me in this project.

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