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Acknowledgements and Introduction:

JB: *I would like to thank Dr. Morgan Kiper Riechel for this interview conducted with Dr. Robinson. I also want to thank Dr. Robinson for her willingness to visit us during the Alabama Counseling Association Conference in Birmingham, AL on November 21, 2013.*

Dr. Robinson's interview offered an important look at the history of our field by a dedicated counselor. Dr. Robinson has served the counseling field for years in various leadership capacities. This interview offers a glimpse of her many contributions. In January 2014, in a follow-up dialogue, I asked 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. Robinson, prior to publication.

Interview Excerpts:

MKR: *Well Dr. Robinson, I really appreciate you taking some time to let us talk to you this afternoon. I have a series of questions. Can you tell me about when you began your career as a school counselor?*

TR: *It was in the Fall of 1970 when I entered the counseling field. I had four years of teaching experience in the Florence City Schools as a substitute teacher (completed the year for a teacher who went on maternity leave) and as an evening teacher of typing (my undergraduate degree was in English and Commerce/Business Education) After I taught two years of keyboarding, I went to work for the Tennessee Valley Authority (TVA) in Muscle Shoals where I was Personnel Clerk/Examining Officer. Because I was not satisfied (going to work early, not having time with my family, and limited advancement opportunities), I decided to go back to school and pursue counseling at the Master's level. The traveling aspect of the TVA job was interesting and enjoyable because I got a chance to visit colleges and universities offering engineering and science programs. I talked with young folks rather than sitting in an office all day. We recruited "co-op" students – those who worked one semester in companies throughout the Southeast and even in Texas, and studied the next semester. I administered the TVA Clerical Exam to Business Education majors for summer employment with TVA.*

I can remember the positive experiences I had in high school because I had a wonderful counselor, Mrs. Browder, at Druid High School, Tuscaloosa. When I moved to Florence in the middle 1960s, I met wonderful people in the school system. Because my husband was a science and math teacher, I became friends with them, and worked with them on programs and projects, hoping to land a job in English or Business. The system was known to be one of the best in the state – (outstanding programs, teacher preparedness/advanced degrees, extra-curricular offerings, and pay that was beyond state allocated funding). I participated in Career Days, was classroom and club speaker on many occasions, and decided that was where I wanted to be was in the schools interacting with young folks.

I returned to graduate school and I received my masters in Counseling and Guidance from The University of Alabama in 1970. Immediately upon completion of my degree, I was hired as a high school counselor in one of the two white high schools. During this time, the systems were beginning to integrate faculties and I believe I was hired because of my experiences at TVA, working in an integrated environment, my degree, and my community involvement.

MKR: *Can you tell me a little bit more of what it was like to be a school counselor?*

TR: At first it was overwhelming. It was very different from what I had experienced – being in an office all day. There was nothing like being in a school every day, seeing different children all day – everybody with a different concern. No day in the school setting was routine or the same, you learned something new each day, and that was true until I retired. My TVA experiences were helpful because they prepared me to advise students for life beyond high school, (what was expected of them when they applied for jobs in TVA or other businesses). I had knowledge about the requirements for different jobs (Secretary versus a Clerk/Personnel Clerk or an Engineer versus Engineering Aide). As a counselor, I helped prepare students to enter college or into careers that require other levels of educational preparation (two-year schools, specialty schools, technical schools, etc.).

I never stopped going to school and/or workshops, they helped me stay current and prepared me for future challenges. For example, I was a General Electric Fellow at the University of South Carolina for one summer, studying under Dr. Thomas Sweeney, Director of the General Electric Institute. We worked in the mill getting the trade/technical school “hands on” experiences to share with students that were not going into four-year colleges. I also spent a week in an intensive technical workshop sponsored by the U. S. Navy at their entrance facility in Florida. I was fortunate to go on visits to all of the Service Academies to get first hand information on requirements and processes needed to get into the Service Academies.

My first few years at the high school varied greatly from the training I received. I took a gentleman's place; he had retired after a long career as an elementary school administrator and high school counselor. With my training from the University of Alabama, I hit the ground running. “Go do” was what I did that first year. With the theory and practice that I had, and my experiences in recruiting and testing, I settled down to the day-to-day duties. I was also fortunate enough, to have a Director of Guidance and Pupil Personnel, Mr. J. Roger Moore for the system, and a supportive administrator/principal, Mr. Ralph Smith, to set the stage for me. They allowed me to do what my counselor training stated I should be doing. My school system, like I said earlier, was one of the best in the state. I knew what the principal and director expected counseling to be. We

worked well together in providing the services that were needed for the children in the schools. Mr. Moore did not wait until the state mandated “essential services” needed in all of the schools and all over the South, he was a step above that.

MKR: *Can you tell me a little bit more about the beginning years?*

TR: I started with the 9th grade and followed those students through graduation. That kept me on my toes because I had to remember to provide them everything for the next level – 10th grade. You would have to know everything there is to know about the next grade (their needs and their development), as well as the present grade level. This approach kept you learning, studying, and participating in activities appropriate for the level of students you were working with at the time.

After I received my degree, I never did stopped learning or serving the association. I attended The University of North Alabama and received my certification as a Psychometrist–conducting all of my testing requirements in the Regional Catholic School, St. Joseph -- a feeder school to Florence City for 9th – 12th grades. I also became active in the American Counseling Association/Alabama Counseling Association, serving as President of ALCA, Secretary, Chapter/Division Coordinator, and several Committees as chair and presently as ACA Liaison; American School Counselor Association/Alabama School Counselor Association, serving as the Professional Awards Chair for ASCA and as president of ALSCA two times. I attended a workshop on Group Counseling, conducted by Dr. Gerald Corey to improve my group counseling skills in the classroom. I had the honor of presenting at the American Counselor Association (ASCA) conference in Orlando, Florida with two other counselors in Alabama and presenting at our ALCA Fall Conference with Dr. Fannie Cooley. I have always been an active member of the local, state and national education associations (Florence, Alabama, and National). I also evaluated programs in Counseling, Student Services and Support Services with the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). Later in my career, I trained for the Council for the Accreditation of Counseling and Related Educational Programs (CACREP) as a site team member. In 2013, I was asked to read content programs for the ACA Convention in Hawaii, an experience that was rewarding because I had a wide range of proposals to read and rate. For this, I will be listed in the 2014 ACA Convention and Exposition program in Honolulu, Hawaii.

MKR: *Can you tell me about some things that you were most proud of as a professional?*

TR: It would be the wonderful and rewarding experiences I have had, and the well-known people I have been privileged to meet and work with all over the U.S. A dream came true when I helped my school develop a counseling program, aligning the system with the *Comprehensive Counseling and Guidance Model for Alabama Public Schools* (State Plan; 2003) from the Alabama Department of Education (ALSDE) and with the *American School Counselor Association’s National Model* (2003). This came about because of my involvement in school counseling at the state and national levels. I was with the first group of counselors in Alabama that developed the statewide counseling and guidance program plan, currently the *Comprehensive Counseling and Guidance Model for Alabama Public Schools* (State Plan). At that time, we had an official guidance representative in the state department with a line item budget. Dr. Asa Sparks was the School Counseling Specialist and with a supportive State Superintendent of Education, we made strides. Unfortunately, following Dr. Sparks’ departure, the ALSDE put counseling as “an essential service” on the back burner, thus giving our representative more duties in other areas of education.

Another important experience was working with the Testing and Assessment Division of the ALSDE and consulting with them about the number of testing days. It was affirming to get the ALSDE to consider "...maybe we do need to focus more on student needs and more important things than just testing. Will testing make students better? Will it enhance their future? Will it be more helpful to the overall educational programs?"

In my school system, we believed that music, arts, languages, science, and math were important and helpful at all levels for all students, not just for children who made high test scores. That philosophy caused us to develop an advanced placement program and career/technical programs. We worked with and served on the Southern Region College Board, the ACT Council in Alabama, local businesses and industry, and with the international students at University of North Alabama to utilize all their resources to enhance our programs.

MKR: *Your legacy continues today.*

TR: Yes, especially with the international students program. We had students, exchange students, at one time in our system from about 14 countries. We had to find families to host these students for a year. At the end, many of the students would say, "I don't want to go back home. I want to stay. I want to go to an American university. I want to graduate in the U. S." That was great. Now, UNA has a large population of foreign students.

MKR: *You had far-reaching effects.*

TR: Yes, I would hope so because we had good and willing families to receive and host these students. The beginning of the international program was in the high school. At the time we had two high schools, and I worked in the oldest one with the more established exchange program.

MKR: *Well, what are some things you can tell us about the history of counseling in our state?*

TR: Well, when I came into the field, school counseling was in a better position of being included in the ALSDE's total educational programs than it is today. There was commitment to what was needed to develop the "whole student." Student services, such as counseling, were embraced as needed for all students at all levels. To add, we had leaders, superintendents, state-superintendents that embraced the same idea. They believed that counseling was important... they believed that counseling was an essential service, and all students needed it. Somewhere down the line we veered from that view and started taking away the essential services in counseling. Now, even on our ALCA council, we have a representative from the ALSDE, but that person has other priorities, counseling is not the primary responsibility. I think school counseling has to be the primary responsibility of one person at ALSDE or we will get lost in the shuffle. I think it has to be a top priority.

MKR: *If you could bring back anything in the profession from the past three decades what would it be?*

TR: I guess the ultimate would be that everybody, all stakeholders would embrace counselors as important people, that is somebody that you cannot do without, somebody that you need in

everyday life, wherever you go, you need a counselor. This is a service that every student deserves. Knowing a counselor has had an impact on your life, someone everybody could embrace - the adults, parents, the professionals, and the non-professionals. I guess you can see I am passionate about counseling and I enjoyed every minute I served.

To add to this, the ALSDE should reinstate the counselor education department, with a line item budget with school counseling as a priority. We really need that; I do not like being mixed with other educational programs.

MKR: *If you could advise new counselor educators who are preparing students to essential fill the professional school of school counseling what would that advice be? What advice would you give counselor educators?*

TR: Be inclusive...Inclusive in your writings, your research, and your travels. Act as passionate about the profession as you would want the students to act. Mentor the students, help them get another mind set..."You are a student now, but one day you are going to be a mentor or a director or a coordinator of some program. You need to get students prepared for their opportunities that are down the road.

MKR: *Well thank you for sharing your thoughts.*

Several months after the initial interview, I asked Dr. Robinson to elaborate about her early years and her personal life. She offered the following information.

JB: *I want to ask you a few questions about your life prior to your becoming a counselor. Where were you born and what was in like during your early life?*

TR: I was born, reared, and educated in Tuscaloosa, Alabama and attended schools in the Tuscaloosa City System (Central Elementary and Druid High School). My family lived on 37th Avenue. One of my sister's and her husband lived on 36th Avenue; we were between the entrance gates at Stillman College. I had a cousin that was a housemother at one of the dorms at Stillman, so my younger sister and I visited the campus often. During my growing up, Stillman had Vesper Service every Sunday afternoon. I went to that service almost every week. I learned to swim at Stillman. I promised my parents that I would do work-study on campus IF they would let me go away. I thought Stillman College would not be a good school for me to attend because I knew everybody and everything - we lived just across the highway.

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

TR: Being around people who were educated, hard working, and leaders in the community through my family, church, and school had influence on me. Going to college was also an early influence. The military was not an option in our house and we all accepted this. My parents exposed us to many things. My dad "walked" my younger sister and me to music lessons every week and would wait for us - sitting in the swing or on the screened in patio where our teacher kept her flowers. We travelled as a family once during the summer - mostly the girls. I still like riding the train.

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

TR: The opportunity to always be involved, staying busy (e.g., working at the YMCA, serving at my church as bulletin editor without pay [beginning in the 11th grade - a service I rendered to my local church here in Florence until 2013]; teen writer for the local newspaper once a week a column called – TEEN TALK; serving as a camp counselor at retreats).

There have been very important people I have met and remained friends -- former teachers as Dr. Jean Cecil (deceased) who was known for her professional look/dress all the time, Dr. Bob Comas, and Dr. Thelma Daley, past president of ACA and a member of my sorority (she still greets me as namesake) and we still make time to visit during the ACA Conferences. Dr. Harold Bishop (deceased) was another great influence. He was my dissertation chair (I was adamant about writing my dissertation on a counseling topic). I believe we brought together the Educational Administration and Counseling and Guidance departments -- the best of both worlds.

JB: *As you reflect back on your family, tell me more.*

TR: We have been a very close family, but we had our own space to be who we are -- originally there were eight children. A brother died at birth, leaving three brothers who were high school graduates, honorable discharges from the Navy and Army and/or technical school, junior college grads; four girls, all college graduates with advanced degrees (two with doctorates). My parents were no nonsense about education – both of them completed the 8th grade in a private church school before returning home to Gainesville, Alabama. It was their goal to make sure their children received much more education than they had received. They moved from Gainesville to Tuscaloosa after the first five children were born.

I am next to the youngest. There are only three surviving children. Two sisters in Tuscaloosa, the youngest who lived in New York for 35 years. I reside in Florence, Alabama. I graduated in May from Alabama State University and got married in June – one month later and moved to Florence, which was my husband, Howard’s home. He was an educator – teacher/administrator and is now retired.

We have one son, Rod who studied at UAB, The University of Tennessee Memphis School of Medicine, and Johns Hopkins University as a Fellow for his specialty. He is a board certified Neo-Natal Pediatrician and is married to Tina who is a board certified Internist. They reside in McDonough, Georgia with our three “grand” children – Katie, Allie, and Matthew; their two dogs – Henry and Lilly, and their turtle, rescued from their backyard, named Under.

I still enjoy travelling. We take our annual vacation trip to the Cape Cod Islands in August, our house is in Falmouth. Howard and I go to New York yearly (for about two weeks before Christmas to deliver our goodies to our friends there, go to the theater, and eat very well at the many restaurants). Since retirement, we have decided to travel yearly, rotating abroad travel with a cruise or within the continental U. S. We managed to do that until last year when we both lost close family members. Hopefully, we can pick up and start again in 2014 – Australia is top of the list.

JB: *Would there be any other thoughts you would like to add to this interview?*

TR: Thank you! My career in counseling is just where I wanted to be and I think I did a good job while serving – at least I gave it my best. Retirement though, is even better.

References

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