

**Dr. Wilbur A. Tincher, Jr.**

**Professor Emeritus of Educational Leadership at Auburn University**

**Acknowledgements and Introduction:**

I would like to thank Dr. Shirley Barnes for the interview she conducted with Dr. Tincher while I videotaped the session. I also want to thank Ms. Joanne Schrantz, who initiated the first inquiry with Dr. Tincher to see if he would be willing to be interviewed.

In February 2013, Dr. Shirley Barnes and I went to the home of Dr. Wilbur Tincher in Auburn, Alabama. Dr. Tincher was gracious, kind-spirited, accommodating, and filled with a warm sense of humor. He insisted that Shirley and I call him, "Wilbur," offered us coffee and dessert, and asked for a hug, as we left his home - landmark traits of "Dr. Wilbur," as I now so fondly call him. In May 2013, 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. Note this version was reviewed and approved by Dr. Tincher, prior to publication.

**Interview Excerpts:**

**SB:** *We are visiting with Dr. Wilbur Tincher. He is a former president of Alabama Personnel and Guidance Association (APGA), which is now known as the Alabama Counseling Association (ALCA). We have questions that we want to ask Dr. Tincher about his involvement ALCA, as well as his involvement with the counseling program at Auburn University. Dr. Tincher thank you so much for allowing us to come to your home and ask you some questions today.*

**WT:** Thank you. I appreciate your coming to my home today.

**SB:** *The first thing we would like to know is when did you begin your career at Auburn University and how long did your career span?*

**WT:** My family and I came to Auburn in 1958. I had recently received my doctoral degree from the University of Kentucky. We came to Alabama when I was a young Assistant Professor in Education. I moved up the ranks to full professor. I also served as Dean of Student Services and Director of Institutional Research at Auburn University. I retired from Auburn University in 1987.

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

**WT:** I was born in Franklin County, Kentucky, in Peak's Mill, on September 15, 1927. My grandfather had a country store with a potbelly stove, and I recall some serious rook games being played in the store. My parents lived next door to the store. We had a strong sense of family and community collectiveness. There was no such thing as a Maytag washing machine during my youth. Instead, we used a washtub filled with rainwater, collected from the roof in wooden barrels (old Whiskey barrels from the Kentucky distilleries). We lighted a fire under a wash tub, used a scrub board, and lye soap to clean our clothes. Irons were heated by the fireplace.

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

I was the oldest of three children. I had close family, church, and school connections. My piano teacher was another great influence. I played the piano early in my youth at church. A real confidence builder was her asking me to be the organ substitute at church.

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

After high school, I went to Transylvania College for 1.5 years. I had a friend that was paralyzed and I took care of him so he could go to college. This paid my way at Transylvania. By being responsible for my friend, I realized what some people can do and will do to help other people.

I later went into the military, they were still drafting in 1944-1946, so I enlisted for 18 months. At basic training our squad was asked, "Is there anyone who can type?" I raised my hand and volunteered. I quickly gained the respect of the chief clerk for my skills.

During basic training, soldiers often did not know what to do -- I noticed that they gravitated toward me in the orderly room. I began to realize I just needed to listen - this was a "kernel of helping people taking root... the plant came out of the ground, I just had to fertilize it."

Another influence was the military chaplain allowing me to play the organ on the base. This was yet another way that I got involved with helping people.

After the military, I went back to college on the GI Bill. I finished my undergraduate degree and a master's in education. Then, I received a doctoral degree in educational leadership with a strong minor in psychology and sociology.

**SB:** *What was it like being a counselor educator during your career and what vision did you have for counselor education during that career?*

**WT:** Well I'm going to have to play a caveat because I was not an integral part of the establishment of the counselor education program at Auburn. As stated earlier, my field was educational leadership. However, I came to Auburn in 1958. The National Defense Education Act (NDEA, 1958) was the beginning of school counseling. Auburn applied to become a NDEA Institute in Guidance, and I was new to the university and had experience in psychology. I was

asked to direct that institute, the first one at Auburn, and I think we had about 30 people in the institute.

Dr. Truman Pierce, the Dean of College of Education, at the time was interested in guidance programs in the schools and he asked two or three of us to write a proposal. We established a NDEA Institute. There were three professors and two doctoral students. We worked on some television programs that went out to Auburn educational television facilities here and we offered additional classwork or coursework to those people in the institute and anyone others who wanted to watch it on TV for about two years. This seemed to lay the ground for a lot of the development of Counselor Education at Auburn. However, were you specifically interested in our goal? Our goal was to prepare people to qualify for the Counselor Education Certification that the Alabama State Board of Education had established. We did that well. That's pretty much the way we got started.

The NDEA funds prepared high school teachers to become counselors. After Sputnik (Abramson, 2007), the country knew it had to do a better job of teaching science and math and with the guidance of students in academic programs.

**SB:** *Well, you mentioned Truman Pierce's name, and I do remember him. He made a great impact on the counseling program (at Auburn) along with the College of Education in general. I can remember for many years how students would apply for certain kinds of scholarships and assistantships through the Truman Pierce Institute. Truman Pierce Institute continues to be an integral part of the educational program at Auburn.*

*Although you mention that you feel that a lot of that credit is owed to individuals other than yourself, I do find that you made a great impact on the program at Auburn and the state of Alabama. You became the first executive secretary of the ALPGA and you had a great impact on the counseling program as it relates to the association. Can you give us a little information about your many years as the Executive Secretary of ALPGA?*

**WT:** Yes. I'd like to talk about the organization of ALCA, (which was ALPGA back then) to begin. I came to Auburn in 1958, I believe it was the next year and I was still involved with the development of the counseling program. I was asked to speak to a group in Birmingham (this was a group of academics from Auburn, Alabama, Montevallo, etc. interested in counseling). This was the first opportunity I had to meet with those people and I became Auburn's unofficial representative to that group. Clay Sheffield was one of the persons that I recall. I was elected the first president of this organization. Although I don't know how long I served, I recall that there were a lot of good people involved. We worked together on a lot of things that were very meaningful to me.

At some point we decided that we were getting large enough that we needed to have someone and some place that would help us do some housekeeping so to speak, and work with the organization and the people, the officers and all. By that time I had retired in 1987 from Auburn,

and they decided they wanted to appoint a person who would work throughout the organization and organize things and try to remember some things, which I did. Dean Pierce gave the association some space in the Dean's Office complex, so we worked with that. I was named; well, I was interviewed by a committee. It was almost as bad I think as somebody adopting a new child, you know? They had a lot of questions.

**SB:** *It gives me a great pleasure when you were talking about the history of the association, to be sitting here talking with the first president of the ALPGA and also the first ALPGA Executive Secretary. I mean here's history over 50 years of history.*

**WT:** I didn't realize that until I saw some of these things you wanted to cover. Some things came to mind that I had almost forgotten.

**SB:** *Speaking of the association and the great services that you rendered, ALCA decided to name an award after you. The Wilbur Tincher Humanitarian and Caring Person Award.*

**WT:** Yes. Wasn't that great?

**SB:** *That was fabulous. I was so happy when that happened. When we were going around your house looking at your awards and certificates (earlier today), when you were giving us a short tour, we saw that wonderful silver bowl bearing your name.*

**WT:** Well, that was a great thing for me. Virginia and I gave one thousand dollars to the association that year with the recommendation that 100 dollars would go to the next recipient, and I think they are still doing that at this point.

**SB:** *Oh yes. I have served as a chair of the awards committee. I can tell you that your name and Dr. Cooley's name, are right up there with the top awards that are given each year. I've served on the committee and there are a lot of applicants for the Wilbur Tincher Humanitarian and Caring Person Award.*

**WT:** Is that right?

**SB:** *Yes, and people really try for that award each year.*

**WT:** And a lot of people are deserving.

**SB:** *Yes, but unfortunately we can only give out one award. It comes down to one of the most competitive awards because people like the idea of having an award that bears your name.*

**WT:** Well, I appreciate that. Thank you.

**SB:** *Yes. Now looking back at both the association and the affiliation with Auburn University -- which you had many years for both. There are many students who are now members of the*

*association and they are actively involved. Tell me about your relationship with the students when they were in your classes.*

**WT:** Well, to get a feel for this you ought to be asking some of the students. But I loved the students. And I really did enjoy them and I really didn't feel like I was a professor to them, I felt like I was more of a friend. But, one thing that I've been impressed with is the number of students that have continued to write or to call to keep me informed about their children and that sort of thing. That has been very important to me.

**WT:** I can think of another graduate student. He was not in counselor education, he was in engineering. He was from China and we were his host family. So about once a month we would go out together; Virginia, my wife, me, and the student; and we would go to a Chinese restaurant. For years, he did not miss sending Virginia and me birthday gifts, and at Christmas the same thing. And you know, my wife died 5 years ago and he decided he was coming to Auburn for the memorial service.

**WT:** I was known as the hugger. That's still going on at First Presbyterian Church here with the students in our Westminster Fellowship Program. Thursday night dinner in late 2012 some of my children (Auburn students) were coming by to speak to me and this sort of thing. They had a copy of an editorial that appeared in the *Auburn Plainsman* recently about this old man who was a friend to the college students, and I appreciated that. [Note: The article was written about Dr. Tincher - see excerpt below and reference section for link to full article].

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

I have lived a good life, and I have been blessed with good health. I am pleased with the contacts I have. I love the genuine love that has been extended to me. Virginia was the most genuine person I have ever known and it was heartbreaking when I lost her. She was very artistic. She often carved beautiful wooden ornaments displayed in my house. We had two sons and they were blessings to us. Today they are very respectful and caring people. My four grandsons are role models. I could not ask for anything better, they have endeared themselves to us.

**JB:** *Theoretically speaking, where do you stand?*

My strongest influence was Carl Rogers.

**SB:** *In essence, if you could bring back anything in the profession from three decades past what would it be and how would you approach that in today's society.*

**WT:** People should be who they are and what they are and not assume that they can be somebody else. People are so important and everyone is worth doing something for. I have a sign on my desk that states, "No act of kindness however small is ever wasted." I think that is true of all of us in terms of receiving it and giving it.

**SB:** *I think that is a wonderful way to end the interview. I think that you are absolutely right. This is a great time to say that we thank you for allowing us an opportunity to come and work with you today in the sense of just hearing about the past not only the counseling education program at Auburn University, but also with ALCA.*

**JB:** After my second visit to see Dr. Wilbur, I told him goodbye and headed to my car. He said, “Wait just a minute, I have something to give you.” He walked back in his house and came out with a folded article from the *The Auburn Plainsman* - the Auburn University student newspaper. Faulk (2012), a current writer for the newspaper, paid tribute to him in “Her view: Elderly Companion Source of Priceless Friendship, Wisdom.”

The article started this way:

I have an 85-year-old friend, just as everyone should. The age difference allows you to learn hidden life secrets and the importance of friendships. He's witnessed events in history that I've only read in books.

This man is not only a friend, but a mentor.

Wilbur Tincher is a legend with my friends. I've only known him a short while, but he has changed my life. He's an 85-year-old man with a jovial spirit and an infectious smile.

When he laughs, you can't help but smile (Faulk, 2012, ¶ 1-4).

**JB - Post-Interviews:** A month after the final interview for this project, I found Dr. Tincher's guest editorial comments in the *Alabama Association for Counseling and Development Journal* (1987). He served as the guest editor for a special issue, “Issues in Counseling and Development.” His editorial words were inviting, compelling, and a fitting way to end a tribute to a counseling icon in our state. His own words recapitulate his fundamental nature -- remarkable, well-spoken, caring, respectful, and genuine.

As my mind wanders back to 1958 when I came to Alabama and as I scan the archives material, which recently came to me as AIACD Executive Secretary, I am amazed at the development and growth that has occurred with AIACD. I become almost euphoric when I recall the persons who gave so much of themselves and to whom our organization and its goals meant so much. Many dear and lasting friendships, personal and professional, developed because persons worked together long, hard, and conscientiously on common goals, concerns, and issues. And persons are still giving of themselves and new relationships are still being developed! (Tincher, 1987, p. 3).

Issues we shall always have. They should never be ducked, swept under the rug, or otherwise ignored. We must face them head-on but always with sound philosophical, ethical, theoretical, and research bases. This Special Issue of the Alabama A.C.D. Journal addresses selected Issues in Counseling and Development: Legal, Ethical, Personal, and Professional. I hope each of you finds something particularly meaningful and worthwhile in this publication (Tincher, 1987, p. 4).

**JB:** Thank you, Dr. Wilbur A. Tincher, Jr., for your dedication and contributions to our profession.

### References

- Abramson, L. (2007). Sputnik left legacy for U.S. science education. Retrieved from <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=14829195>
- Faulk, A. (2012, November 20). Her view: Elderly companion source of priceless friendship, wisdom. *The Auburn Plainsman*. Retrieved from [http://www.theplainsman.com/view/full\\_story/20887310/article-Her-view--Elderly-companion-source-of-priceless-friendship-wisdom?](http://www.theplainsman.com/view/full_story/20887310/article-Her-view--Elderly-companion-source-of-priceless-friendship-wisdom?)
- National Defense Education Act (1958). The National Defense Education Act. Retrieved from <http://encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com/National+Defense+Education+Act>

### Selected Publications

- Brogdon, R. E., & Tincher, W. A. (1986). High aptitude high school students' opinion of career choice. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED279632).
- Burtner, R. F., & Tincher, W. A. (1979). A study of resident and non-resident students at Auburn University. Retrieved from ERIC database. (ED172664).
- Tincher, W. A. (1966). Institutional research: An important avenue for research in teacher education student personnel work. *SPATE: Journal of Student Personnel Association for Teacher Education*, 5, 17–24.
- Tincher, W. A. (1986). Alabama College Personnel Association. *Alabama Association of Counseling and Development Journal*, 12, 44–53.
- Tincher, W. A. (1987). Issues past and present. Guest Editorial *Alabama Association of Counseling and Development Journal*, 13, 3–5.
- Tincher, W. A., & Brogdon, R. E. (1986). Attitudes toward teaching of high aptitude high school seniors. *Education*, 107, 35-41.