

Dr. Ervin “Chip” Wood**Executive Director, Alabama Counseling Association****Acknowledgements and Introduction:**

JB: *I would like to thank Dr. Chip Wood for this interview conducted on August 14, 2013. Chip's years of service with the Alabama Counseling Association offer a rich history and unique perspective, evident in the following paragraphs. In January 2014, in a follow-up dialogue, additional questions were asked. The following information reflects excerpts from both interviews. This version was reviewed and approved by Dr. Woods, prior to publication.*

JB: *I will start by asking you when you began your career at the University of West Alabama?*

CW: Sure. Thank you. First, let me tell you it is a pleasure to talk about these things. I am honored that people would think I have made contributions worthy of noting. It pleases me. I probably should tell you that my career in higher education began not at the University of West Alabama (UWA) but at one of the technical colleges in Georgia. I taught English. Most of my training is an academic background in liberal arts, and that is what I taught. That training has been a real asset to me over the years.

In 1972, I went to Troy State University (now Troy University) as the Assistant Dean of Admissions and Records. I spent eight years there rising to the position of Dean of Enrollment Services. I went from Troy University to Livingston University, now the University of West Alabama (UWA), in 1980. From 1980 until 2000, I was at UWA in various roles in student affairs/student personnel positions, including 16 years as Vice President for Student Affairs.

I would also say that my experience with the Alabama Counseling Association (ALCA) and its predecessor organizations began at Troy. I had always been in the admission office wherever I was, and the initial reason for working with the ALCA was not so much professional, but it was just a practical aspect of running an admission office and wanting to be involved with counselors. As I became more involved in ALCA, I realized that I appreciated what the organization was about and more importantly what the people were about. One thing led to another, and I eventually became a leader in the organization, and that led to my present position as the Executive Director of ALCA.

JB: *So how long of a career span have you had?*

CW: My higher education career was about 33 years. I have been the ALCA Executive Director since 1991. I was one of those people who reached the point that I did not feel that I had to stay in my position at the UWA and have people “haul me out of the office” at death. I wanted to be able to contribute. In particular, I realized that ALCA was an organization that had tremendous potential to grow as an organization. I also felt that the unusual set of skills that I brought to ALCA (from my previous professional experiences) might allow me to facilitate that growth.

In 2000, after 33 years in higher education administration, I decided that it was time to “move on.” I will say humorously that there were also some political motivations at UWA at that point. I had, over time, prepared a role for myself so that when it came time to “move on,” I could do so and not have to worry about the repercussions of job security.

JB: *I hear the business side of you in these comments. As someone who has been in the Alabama Counseling Association since the 1990s, I have watched you from the sidelines, and it has been fun to see you lead this association.*

CW: You are very kind. I think that most of us go through a stage in our careers where we want and need recognition and to be “in the spotlight” and have people appreciate what one has done. The thing that has been good for me is that I did most of those things during my collegiate career and the roles that I was in with my positions. I was constantly “in the spotlight.” I was the person who planned and led most events. I was also the person who chaired most of the committees, and so forth. I had the opportunity to do all of that, and the thing that I have brought to ALCA is the fact that I do not need a lot of recognition from it. I have really been able to stay in the background. I have tried to help our volunteer leaders do the things that make them successful and allow them to lead our organization for the period of time they serve. I have no interest whatsoever in sitting at the head table at the conference or getting on the microphone and giving instructions.

JB: *On the other hand, there is much planning and organization needed to set-up a conference, and you are the backbone of that process.*

CW: I appreciate that, and that is certainly where I derive my pleasure--from seeing all that happen and having everyone feel as though it has been successful.

JB: *As you know, I have enjoyed talking to other icons in the field, and I look forward to these interviews being published in the months ahead. It is important to ask icons such questions as, "What was it like being a counselor educator during your career?" I think that people moving into this counseling field today need to know what it was like some decades ago. You have watched the field grow, and you have a unique perspective on that. Can you tell me more?*

CW: I have thought about this. You are definitely correct that my perspective is somewhat different. I am pleased and complimented because several times as we have talked you have referred to me as a counselor educator. I have never particularly thought of myself in that sense, but by the same token I see where perhaps it is appropriate for people who have done the things that I have done. When one really thinks of the icons you were talking about and the leaders of this organization, they were not necessarily all classroom professors. Some were administrators, at various times, including Dr. Wilbur Tincher. Basically his background was as an administrator in student affairs, like mine.

I want to focus for a minute on the student affairs/student personnel part of being a counselor/counselor educator. Forty years ago when I started doing counseling work, there were only a few institutions in the country that had a degree called "student personnel services" or that had student affairs training. Largely, what one did was get an academic degree and then found a student affairs/student personnel type position and went to work. One learned through on-the-job training and mentoring, and that is exactly the route that I had to take to get to where I wanted to be.

JB: *Let's talk about your role as the director of ALCA. I know that is at the heart of being the icon that you are today. You had one person that preceded you, Dr. Wilbur Tincher. You inherited the ALCA Executive Secretary position from Dr. Tincher. Later, you became the ALCA Executive Director, a role you have had since 1991. Could you tell us more about this role?*

CW: Yes! In my mind, being the Executive Director for ALCA is just about a perfect job. In fact, people do ask me often why I keep doing this when I do not have to work. I think the answer is simple: I enjoy what I do; it keeps me involved. My wife and ALCA colleague, Lin Wood, told me to mention that our "feelings for people of ALCA are the inspiration for everything we do." Those feelings keep us at the forefront of what we enjoy doing. ALCA keeps us involved and active. We are able to go to enough meetings and be around enough professionals that we are very much a part of what is going on. Thus, I would certainly say that being the executive director is a high point for me.

It is interesting when one reflects to the beginning of ALCA. Two of the early objectives of the association were: (1) to administer a member survey to define the average Alabama counselor. I can even describe that counselor; and, (2) to establish a state office and hire an

executive director. That was in 1967, when the organization became a national affiliate of the American Counseling Association (ACA). It took from 1967 until 1987, when Dr. Wilbur Tincher was hired as the first executive. He established an office at Auburn University. Dr. Tincher served as the Secretary of ALCA from 1987-1991.

When I became the Executive Director of ALCA in 1991, I was still very much involved at UWA. I was one of its four vice presidents and I had two thoughts. My thoughts were: (1) ALCA had enough potential that it could be even better than it was; and, (2) I did not want the opportunity to get away from me. With those thoughts as rationale, I was able to convince the leadership at UWA that "having ALCA on our campus could benefit UWA." The leadership of the association indicated they would like for me to take the position if I could work out the details with UWA. The University president and Board agreed. As a result, I was able to take ALCA to the UWA campus and set it up as an on-campus office. I ran the association as part of our student affairs division. I had graduate students as workers, and I was the supervisor. We functioned with that structure until 2000, when I retired. At that point, we moved the office off campus.

I have to tell you that I have an unbelievable perspective on our ALCA. First, I realize that Dr. Tincher did a wonderful job. He was the perfect person to be the first ALCA Executive Secretary. He was actually the first ALCA president (when ALCA had its beginning in the 1960s). He was the in-the-position leader at that point, and so he was the perfect person to step in as Chief Executive in 1987. He was a unanimous choice. I was surprised that he did not serve any longer than he did, but he and his wife obviously had other interests, and he "stepped down." I took over the position in 1991.

At that time, computers were coming to the forefront of administration. At Auburn, Dr. Tincher used his personal influence and that of long-time Auburn administrator and ALCA membership chair, Ms. Gail McCullers, to arrange for Auburn University (through its graciousness) to computerize our membership files. With their effort, we had address labels and printed reports on the association, its chapters, and its divisions. That was the total extent of what we were able to do for the association at that time. But that was unbelievably advanced for what many organizations were doing in the 1980s. Until then, "we passed the proverbial cardboard boxes from one place to another, from one officer to another." That's how an organization was run.

It was a big deal when Dr. Tincher received filing cabinets from Auburn University to store our files. In fact, I remember that, by the time I was involved in a leadership role, we had reached a point to where there were so many cardboard boxes that they would literally fill a room. I remember the time that Dr. Bob Comas decided the clutter was ridiculous- all these boxes around and nobody knowing what was in them. Bob organized a work party at his home in Tuscaloosa and invited all the past presidents to his house on a Saturday

morning. We spent the day going through all these boxes and culling everything. We had lunch, and we may have had a glass of wine in the afternoon...it was a wonderful and beneficial experience. We threw away a truckload of trash.

JB: *Tell me the ALCA history. I know you have alluded to the history in what you have already said today. There was a lot of history - to think in terms of the boxes of data and collections you inherited. You moved the organization forward in the digital world. Thinking back, you had foresight to retain and, in more recent years, digitally store historical data. Could you describe some unique recollections about our association's history?*

CW: Gladly! Let me start by stating that, in my mind and in the minds of everybody in this organization, the ALCA is a volunteer organization. It is totally run by volunteers and how much they are willing to contribute to their profession. It has always been that way. Even now, both Lin and I are to a certain extent volunteers. There may be some people who think that Lin and I are full-time employees and that ALCA pays us these tremendous salaries to run the Association. The reality is that I am probably making 20% of what I made when I was at the university. We do what we do simply because we enjoy doing it; it is fun and because it makes a difference. Fortunately, we have wound up in a situation with our family where we can afford to do that. I really do not know what the future holds when it comes time to look at who is going to follow me. I very definitely see the organization as a volunteer organization, and its success is dependent on us as volunteers.

That fundamental fact leads to an interesting history- a history I probably know more about than anyone else because I have been involved in much of it. I see my role as being the conscience of the association. As we approach most subjects, I am able to say "Well, maybe so, but here is what we have done in the past. Here is the history of that particular subject." Remember, if I have been involved since 1971, that is not quite all of our history, but our history as a part of the American Counseling Association (ACA) started in 1967. There was not a lot before me other than the initial organizational steps.

JB: *Let's talk about the beginning of the counseling field. Dr. Cooley and Dr. Tincher were influential during the early stages of counseling in our state. You have a unique vision because you were influenced by and affiliated with Dr. Cooley, Dr. Tincher, and many other leaders. Can you tell us some association information during the formative years? Your perspective is valuable.*

CW: The counseling profession had its beginnings in Alabama in the 1950s. The earliest record that we have of our organization meeting as a group was in 1954. This state-based organization was called the Alabama Guidance Association (ALGA). ALGA met from 1954-1966 as an independent state organization. It had no national affiliation. In 1964, there was talk at the group's state convention held at the Dinkler-Tutwiler Hotel in Birmingham about affiliation with a national group. That group was the American Personnel and

Guidance Association (APGA). Wilbur Tincher, who was then president of the Alabama Guidance Association (ALGA), appointed a seven-member committee to investigate national affiliation. This committee came back to the state convention in 1967 and recommended affiliation with the APGA. The charter was issued by the APGA in November 1967. Thus, we have functioned as a state branch of ACA since that time. We have been through a number of name changes, but we trace our beginnings back to these events.

There has been one dissertation written about the early history of the ALCA. It was written by a gentleman named Dr. Robert Ware, who was a doctoral student at Auburn University. We even know the name of the chair of the committee and the committee members. I have one copy of the dissertation. I assume it is on file at Auburn. When I took over for Wilbur, he passed the dissertation on to me, and I still have it.

Initially, instead of having chapters as we have today, we had regions. For example, Birmingham was Region 5. Somehow, over time, we went to chapters, and it became Chapter 4. The first division was the Alabama College Personnel Association (ALCPA). The second one was the School Counselor Association (ALSCA). We do have a complete set of the ALCA Journals that have been published and a complete set of every newsletter that has been published. Both are now distributed and filed electronically. There are a couple of journal histories of ALCA and the divisions. I have written a 5-6 page history on ALCA, which was just enough to document the high points. It is on file and posted on the ALCA website.

JB: I am going to ask you a few more questions. What is your greatest impact on the field?

CW: Well, I am going to change the word from *field* to the *association* itself. I think I would tell you that I brought an unusual and rare set of learned skills to the operation of the ALCA. Not a lot of people have been a public relations person, a marketing person, an English person, and a business person.

JB: You have been an administrator, too.

CW: Right, I was a university administrator with responsibility for a good-sized budget and supervision of a number of institutional functions. I think that experience has allowed me to focus on and improve ALCA, especially in attracting and retaining members because that is what I did at the university level.

I have also been able to enhance the business and financial aspects of the Association because I figured out very early on that one could be forgiven for lots of mistakes, but when dealing with other people's money, one cannot make many mistakes. As a result, financial credibility and openness have always been my focus. I remember 15 years ago one of the leadership priorities was to collect enough money in reserve to be able to operate even if

we had a bad year. Over the years, that has been a focus for me. We now have enough money in reserve that we could operate in a financial crisis, if necessary.

The last thing I would mention is the technology that I have brought to ALCA. I am not a “techie,” but I am an administrator. Being an administrator allowed me to figure out what tools were needed and to incorporate those into our ALCA operations.

My personal philosophy, to be sure that every person who asked for my help got help, if I can possibly help them. I am quick if somebody asks me to do something and for some reason I know that I cannot or am not going to do it to tell that person “up front.” I think that is what good administrators do.

JB: *What kind of advice would you give new counselors, if you could look at new people in our classrooms that are training to become counselors?*

CW: That’s a very good question and a difficult question. I would tell a new counselor or aspiring counselor three things: (1) To be prepared. Get a good education and pay attention; (2) Have confidence and apply what you have learned; and, (3) Care about people and show them that you care.

JB: *How would you like for the members of ALCA to remember you?*

I would like for people to remember me as a person who was a friend to all and cared about all of them. I have tried to treat every one of our members as though they were equally important. They are professionals, and if they have problems and questions then we need to try to help them.

I would hope the people of the Association remember me as an administrator who was able to lead ALCA, to facilitate it to become the organization I envisioned, and others envisioned.

I also think that one of the things that is important is that we have been able to keep all of our divisions together under the ALCA umbrella. Very few of our state branches of the American Counseling Association (ACA) have actually been able to hold all of their various divisions together and to avoid the controversy of the school counselors, the mental health counselors, the college personnel people...all saying “well we are different, we need our own group.” I really would like to think that the fact that we have been able to hold all of our groups together and maintain the strength of having 13 different divisions in ALCA and 2,000 members was a reflection of my leadership, in some way. That may be a function of personality and leadership or a function of trying to do all the things that all the various entities have needed to have done, so there was no advantage to them thinking that they ought to strike out on their own. It just seems so obvious that any rational, reasonable-thinking person can figure out that we are better off if we have a larger organization with more money and more clout. We can influence things in Montgomery; we can do things if

we have the money to do them. Regardless of the reason, I am proud that we are united.

JB: *I have seen that disconnect in other states. Truly, that is something you will be applauded and remembered for holding together. It is an effort that takes listening and working with all groups to keep them from disengaging or leaving.*

CW: Every time I am around our school counselors or around people from other states, this division topic inevitably comes up. Right now, it is the school counselors. It was mental health counselors and college personnel counselors a few years ago. Around the country it is like “we’re splitting.” Then you come to Alabama, and the people that I ask cannot imagine why we would have to split because we are united in Alabama. It is wonderful that we maintain this unified status.

JB: *It is a tribute to you. In my years of interactions with members, I have not heard of groups wanting to split, even when AMHCA and ASCA had rifts with ACA. I think that you and Lin should get credit for helping the state associations and divisions to remain harmonious, even when nationally that was not the case.*

JB: *I am going to reflect back and ask you one more question and this will be the last one, Chip. If you could bring anything back into the profession through decades past, what would it be?*

CW: Well, I have philosophical thoughts about this, but I also will say- from the heart- that I wish it were possible for us to have all of these icons that we are talking about back and in the prime of their careers and their lives and to know them. These people are/were just absolutely wonderful...the proverbial “when they made this person they broke the mold.”

I hate to even start naming them, but I had the pleasure of knowing Dr. Jean Cecil and her cryptic wit. I had the pleasure of actually training under Dr. Vernon Blackburn and Dr. John Seymour. I was very close to Dr. Al Miles, whom I consider one of these icons. How much fun it would be, too! I remember listening to Dr. Seymour talk about higher education and Dr. Blackburn talk about student affairs. It was just incredible, and I learned a lot.

From a philosophical standpoint, I wish for our counselors in their present day setting to somehow experience an environment of the safer, simpler, less complicated times of the past. There have always been social, emotional, and psychological problems, but they are so prevalent today that counselors really have difficulty “keeping up.” I know that in the 1960s and 1970s, we had problems with the Vietnam War and all the unrest, but the drugs and broken families, and the myriad of problems were not overwhelming our social support systems and schools. I am telling you there has never been a more crucial time for counselors to be able to concentrate on helping students and clients as exists today. As a profession, we are up to the task, but I do think about my colleagues and what they face in

their work settings daily. I am proud of them.

JB: *I appreciate the time you have taken to talk today. I know the rich history is there. However, we need to tap into this history a bit. That's the idea behind talking to you and other icons in the counseling field. We need to hear these stories.*

Several months later, Dr. Wood was given additional questions to consider.

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

CW: I was born in Moultrie, Georgia, a small city in south Georgia. I always thought my town and school were tiny, but after my experiences in Alabama. I have had to reevaluate. Moultrie has perhaps 15,000-20,000 people, and my graduating class even in 1963, had over 400 seniors. I grew up on the farm. We raised all kinds of "crops" from turnips to cotton and peanuts. The real money crop was tobacco. Having worked with tobacco from an early age, I realized that there was no way it could be "good" for anyone. I have never used tobacco in any form. I do like a glass of wine though. Ha!

My family was a typical southern farm family. My parents were wonderful people who worked hard, were God-fearing, and loved their children and family. We did not live in the proverbial "log cabin," but our means were modest. My father farmed and my mother ran our family-owned country store. The store was one of the centers of life in our little Kendallwood community. My childhood experiences were varied but most were centered on church and school activities. My parents did somehow make time for me to participate in the various youth sports activities. I even managed to make both the high school football and baseball teams. Certainly, there are things I would have changed if I could go back, but all in all my childhood gave me a good basis for becoming an adult.

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

CW: As I have mentioned the primary influences in my early life were family, church, and school. My parents were wonderful people who were totally committed to each other and to our family. My mother was close to her extended family. My father was not. He became part of her family, as did my sister and I. Many of my early remembrances are of times spent visiting and even staying with other family members for extended periods of time. While both my parents spent their entire lives within five miles of where they were born, her family all left. Six of her sisters spent their adult lives in Alexandria, VA and the other two brothers and her father went to the Orlando, FL area. This family dispersal gave me some wonderful experiences because either was a long trip and one stayed awhile when one visited. The trips to Alexandria afforded me the opportunity every year to visit Washington,

DC and all the interesting things there. Likewise, the Florida visits afforded the opportunity to become familiar with the great Florida citrus industry and to watch Disney World grow from the “ground up.”

Church was almost a daily event in my early life. I remember so well two services on Sunday plus Wednesday night prayer meetings followed by the church business meeting. Then, there were the socials and fellowship gatherings as well as Sunday lunch on the grounds. Yes, I still love cold fried chicken and “mushy” banana sandwiches. I will always remember the Sunday School teachers. They helped my parents guide me as I developed my personal values. I still think of them. One of them was my self-appointed godfather and I think about him almost daily. He is still alive and no contact with home is complete until my sister and I have discussed what and how Joe Clark is doing.

Without question the teachers at Funston Elementary School were significant influences in my character formation. Funston Elementary was “old school” as we teach it in educational history. The teachers were all pillars of the community and church that everyone knew and admired. The best I remember they were all female back then. I know that my impression was that they were all a solid combination of elementary teacher, Sunday School teacher, and parent/mother. They instructed you, corrected you, and loved you. This atmosphere extended from the time you got on the school bus until you returned home. If they saw you outside school, they were still committed to making you a better person. There are a lot of funny stories of my childhood, but the thing I always remember is the caring that was so evident from everyone. This atmosphere allowed me to learn, but more important it gave me the courage and confidence to know that I could go forward and make a place for myself in the world.

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

CW: I have mentioned Joe Clark. He and his brothers have influenced me through my life. They were there as I learned to be a young adult. They taught me how to act and how to treat people. Also, as a high school athlete, I was influenced a great deal by the coaches who worked with us. They were tough and they expected a lot, but in the end they made something of most of us. I admire and respect them to this day.

Interestingly, I am a solid pro-fraternity person. I am not one of those “Animal House” fraternity people. Rather, I am one of those people who saw what a fraternity could do to help a young man develop, make contacts, and friends and then move along after college. Every job I have had came about as a result of my contacts through the fraternity. To a certain extent, the fraternity made me the man I am and then gave me the opportunity to use the skills I had learned to contribute and help others. I see fraternities and sororities as organizations that can make their members outstanding individuals who know how to act and contribute.

One of the great influences of my young adulthood was Dr. George Young, the Dean of Students at my *alma mater*. I met Dr. Young when I was a young naïve freshman struggling academically, financially, and personally to get started with the great college experience. He took me “under his wing” and through his guidance I was able to develop into a competent college student. By the time I graduated, I had an excellent grade point average, was paying my own way through college, and had a solid resume of collegiate achievements from fraternity to student government activities and even honor societies. He is responsible for making me realize I wanted to be a student affairs professional. At a national student affairs meeting before his retirement, Dr. Young and I were recognized for our achievements as a team. He was the mentor and I was the student, but the parallel between our careers was so obvious no one could miss it.

Finally, I would be remiss if I did not mention the influence that the people at the University of Alabama have had on my personal and professional life. I was a student affairs professional when I went back for my doctorate. I was concerned about being able to compete. I had never been in a school of the size and reputation of Alabama. I met Drs. John Seymour and Vernon Blackburn. By their actions, they made it clear they were going to make something of me. In the process of my enrolling and beginning classes, they introduced me to Dr. Al Miles, a man who would become my life’s mentor and close confidant. Dr. Miles and I somehow bonded on a special level. I was his first doctoral level graduate. My dissertation was the first one he successfully guided to completion. From there, his mentorship and our friendship only grew. He helped me develop the student affairs division at UWA and he became involved in ALCA beginning with my presidency back in the late 1980s. To this day, I think of him often and miss him when I have important decisions to make.

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

CW: While I have referred to her throughout my comments, I think I would be remiss if I did not emphasize how important my wife, Lin Wood, has been and is to what I have contributed and what I have tried to become. Most of the people in ALCA know that they have gotten not only me but also Lin as part of the ALCA leadership staff. We will celebrate our 40th wedding anniversary this year. Lin is my partner, wife, colleague, and “best” friend. People comment that we are inseparable and we are. Lin is the “real” counselor in our partnership and somehow we work well together, even in the same space. She has a strong theoretical background and has had significant experience in helping people solve their problems. Her experiences range from social worker to hospital public relations and real estate. She also spent a number of years as director of a university counseling center.

We both retired from the University of West Alabama about 10 years ago. Following retirement, I assumed the role of fulltime Executive Director of the Alabama Counseling Association. Lin has always worked with me in that endeavor. Most people only know about that aspect of our lives. In addition to that arena, we have

what we think are full-time family responsibilities. Both our sons and their families have remained in Livingston, living only a couple of miles from us. We have six grandchildren and we see some or all of them everyday and are very much involved in their lives. We are also engaged in businesses with our sons, who own and manage apartments that they rent to the college students as well as a couple of motels, cattle, and tree farms. Each son has his own operation, so that they do not get in each other's way, and we referee. Lin and I could not wait to get away from the farm as young people, but now we love spending a couple of nights a week out at our farmhouse.

JB: Theoretically speaking, where do you stand?

CW: This is a very interesting question for me. Remember I am not a "trained" clinical counselor. My background is largely in the liberal arts and my counseling training has come from my forty plus years of experience in dealing with students, parents, colleagues, and the public. I suppose my theoretical basis is grounded in a genuine desire to help people coupled with a personality and skills that allow me to make things happen. I see myself as a problem-solver. Over the years, people have learned that if they have a problem, go to Chip and he will help figure out a no-nonsense solution. In my roles as a university administrator, ALCA Executive, consultant, and general organization leader, I have seen myself as being the person who comes up with solutions to situations the people and entities around me face. I am practical and results-oriented. At the same time, I think people perceive me as caring and nurturing. I am a "straight shooter," in that I try to be as honest and forthright as I can, while maintaining my southern courtesy and gentlemanly way.

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

CW: I think we have it, at this point. I was pleased when you first told me about this project. I have grown excited as I have become aware of the people you have interviewed. I really look forward to reading what others who have had so much to do with the development and growth of ALCA have to say.