

SCHEDLER HONORS COLLEGE

ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

The Reminiscence of

Gerald Plafcan

University of Central Arkansas

2022

**PREFACE**

Narrator Name: Plafcan, Gerald

Interviewer Name: Rudolph, Avery

Date of Interview: 03/10/2022

Location of Interview: Remote Interview - Zoom Recording

Acronyms:

AR = Avery Rudolph

GF = Gerald Plafcan

UCA = University of Central Arkansas

### Interview Summary

The following oral history is the result of a recorded interview with Gerald Plafcan conducted by Avery Rudolph on March 10th, 2022. This interview is part of the Schedler Honors College Oral History Project. Readers are asked to bear in mind that they are reading a transcript of the spoken word, rather than written prose. The following transcript has been reviewed, edited, and approved by the narrator.

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**AR** [00:00:02] This meeting is being recorded. Perfect.

**GP** [00:00:03] OK.

**AR** [00:00:05] All right, this is Avery Rudolph with the Schedler Honors College Oral History Project. Today is March 10th, 2022, and I'm interviewing Gerald Plafcan today through Zoom. We will be talking about his experience leading up and during his time here at the Honors College. If you would not mind going ahead and stating your name, for the record.

**GP** [00:00:25] Gerald Plafcan.

**AR** [00:00:29] Perfect, all right. Welcome, Gerald. I just want to thank you for being here today and having this conversation with me this afternoon. First, we'll just kind of begin with a speed round of questions. They really just require one word or even just a short sentence answer and whatever kind of comes to your mind first, you can say aloud, but my hope is that this will kind of remove any jitters that you and I both have and also kind of lay down to some quick, generic facts.

**GP** [00:00:53] Okay.

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**AR** [00:00:54] All right, where were you born?

**GP** [00:00:56] I was born in Stuttgart, Arkansas.

**AR** [00:01:03] Do you think you could describe the town for me?

**GP** [00:01:06] At the time, it was October 1957, it was like two weeks after Sputnik was launched. Yes, we've been in the middle of harvest for my dad. He worked on the farm. I was the second child of the family.

**AR** [00:01:28] And what was your father's name?

**GP** [00:01:30] His name was George.

**AR** [00:01:33] Is that with a G?

**GP** [00:01:36] Yes. G-E-O-R-G-E.

**AR** [00:01:40] And did he spend most of his career or life working on the farm?

**GP** [00:01:44] Yes, his whole life, except for when he was in the service.

**AR** [00:01:49] And what kind of farm did he have?

**GP** [00:01:52] We farm mainly rice and soybeans, though we did have some cattle and chickens

too.

**AR** [00:01:58] Did you enjoy growing up on a farm?

**GP** [00:02:01] Yes, it was because we farmed with my uncle, Johnny - my dad's brother. The farm was founded by my grandfather and it was kind of neat. Years later, when I heard people talking about spending quality time with your parents and your mother or father. I spent a lot of time with my dad riding around in a pickup truck around a farm, or riding a tractor with him before I learned to drive one myself.

**AR** [00:02:33] You were probably under the age required to learn how to drive?

**GP** [00:02:39] Oh, they had me drive the pickup around the farm when I was 10-11 years old. They would not let me go out on the road.

**AR** [00:02:49] And did your mother also work on the farm or did she stay at home taking care of the kids?

**GP** [00:02:53] She was mostly at home. Later on, when us kids were mostly grown, she started working at the hospital in Stuttgart, in the business office. And yes, she worked there for about 20 years.

**AR** [00:03:10] That's amazing, and what was her name, real quick?

**GP** [00:03:14] Marian Sue. Although she likes to go by Sue.

**AR** [00:03:19] My grandmother also liked going by the name Sue too, and she worked in the hospital as well.

**GP** [00:03:23] Oh, that's right.

**AR** [00:03:27] And if you could describe yourself in one word, what would that be?

**GP** [00:03:35] Oh, analytical - if that makes any sense?

**AR** [00:03:43] Why do you say that?

**GP** [00:03:47] I like to do puzzles and things. I like to figure things out, so I study patterns and whatnot. I think that's kind of what led me to accounting. It was just the - I could say joy of figuring out how things fit together and fitting them together in that manner.

**AR** [00:04:14] And that makes sense, especially for accounting and we will definitely go into that a little later in the interview. But let's go back to roots with your childhood home. Let's see, you've already said that you grew up in Stuttgart, Arkansas.

**GP** [00:04:30] I was born in Stuttgart. I actually grew up 10 miles north of Stuttgart in a little community called Slovak.

**AR** [00:04:37] Yes, do you mind reiterating about that story of your grandparents and how you got the last name Slovak?

**GP** [00:04:43] Yes. Slovak was founded by Slovak immigrants around the beginning of the 19th century. Excuse me, the 20th century. Let me say that right. My grandfather was born in 1891, and when he was about 18 his mother said 'come here to America.' And his older brother was already

here and he had an uncle here also. They were living in Pennsylvania, and he actually worked in coal mines there for a few years before he got enough stake built up to come to Arkansas and buy a farm. There was a group called the Slovak Colony Company, which had bought a bunch of acres here in Arkansas, and they were selling them through these immigrants who were coming. They all bought farms around Slovak and grandpa started actually baling hay because Prairie County, Arkansas, was mostly prairie; and baling hay was an easy way to get started there, and later on he started farming row crops and they got into rice eventually and it kind of went from there.

**AR** [00:06:08] I bet the landscape has changed a lot since you've grown up being mostly farm fields to now some cities?

**GP** [00:06:14] Not so much where I'm at, because in eastern Arkansas, the population actually has been decreasing, so the towns are not really growing there. There is still a lot of farmland. I can go back there now, and it pretty much looks the same as it did 30 years ago.

**AR** [00:06:32] Why do you think the population is decreasing?

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**GP** [00:06:37] The population in what? I'm sorry, I didn't quite catch that.

**AR** [00:06:41] Why do you think the number of individuals living in Stuttgart has lowered over the years?

**GP** [00:06:47] Part of it is, if you're not doing farming or something that supports the farming industry, there's not much else to do in that area. So people looking for opportunities are moving to other places where there's something other than farming or farm related activities going on. Plus, the farming has gotten to - my grandpa started out with 160 acres. I'm being told now you need a couple of thousand acres to be a successful farmer there. So that means fewer people could actually have farms in that area. So fewer people there.

**AR** [00:07:36] And does your grandfather's farm land still exist? Is it still under your family's name or has it been absorbed by someone else?

**GP** [00:07:44] My dad died in 2014, and it was a couple of years after that my brother - who was still working on the farm, said he 'couldn't handle it anymore,' we actually sold it. So no, it's not in the family anymore.

**AR** [00:07:59] How do you feel about that?

**GP** [00:08:02] What I remember about the farm was who was there: my grandparents, my uncle Johnny, my dad, my uncle Cyril - who had his own farm and worked with us too, and after my uncle Johnny died and my aunt Frances was the only one left there - and she eventually had a



broken hip and said she 'couldn't live there by herself anymore,' and it kind of got to, okay, it's the land. But the people I knew, the people who made it special were gone. Yes, it's kind of like, okay something has passed, but what was there wasn't what I knew. If that makes any sense?

**AR** [00:08:51] It does make sense and it's very sentimental. You cared more about the community that you're in, that you grew up with more than the physical lands. That makes sense though, and were there a lot of high schools in the area that you grew up in that you looked at that?

**GP** [00:09:10] There were two high schools, one was in Stuttgart. The other was in Hazen, Arkansas. And where I grew up, we were actually in the Hazen school districts. When I was very young we actually had a church school in Slovak, but it closed when I was in third grade there. We all went to Hazen schools after that.

**AR** [00:09:38] And did you have a pretty good friend group growing up while there at the Haitian school?

**GP** [00:09:45] In Slovak, , yes, I thought I had some pretty good friends there. There was one who was my age who lived not far from my house. We ran around together a lot. The other kids, we get on our bikes and we ride all over the place. Yes, I kind of had a group of kids there, and I wasn't the type of person who had a large amount of friends. I usually had a few that was really close to, and when I moved to Hazen, it was a bit of a change for me because all of a sudden there was a lot more kids there; and , you're coming in and I really didn't know anyone in Hazen and I kind of stuck with the Slovak kids that I knew but eventually did start developing friends there. But I only went to Hazen schools through eighth grade, and then I went to Subiaco Academy for high school.

**AR** [00:10:54] How do you spell that?

**GP** [00:10:55] Subiaco? S-U-B-I-A-C-O.

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**AR** [00:11:00] Okay, and that was for the rest of high school?

**GP** [00:11:03] Yes, yes, it's a Benedictine boarding school between Fort Smith and Russellville on Highway 22.

**AR** [00:11:16] And what was your mode of transportation in order to get to school?

**GP** [00:11:20] We rode the bus when it was Hazen - we rode the bus. That's all there was. I'm sorry you broke up there, I didn't quite catch that.

**AR** [00:11:32] You're good. Did it cost you to ride the bus every day?

**GP** [00:11:35] No, because the school district provided it. They had to transport kids to school so there was no cost to us.

**AR** [00:11:46] And during your experience at the Benedictine Subiaco School, did you have any particular professors - or did you have any teachers or coaches that left an impression on you during your time there?

**GP** [00:11:59] Yeah, there was a couple. Father Frowin who was the chaplain there, he also was the bandleader. We had a little ensemble that I played, and I got to know him pretty well, and he did make an impression on me to some degree.

**AR** [00:12:24] And apart from just the band, were you involved in any other curriculums like sports, did they offer that at the school?

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**GP** [00:12:30] They do. They have a lot of the regular sports you see in other high schools. They had a football team, basketball, track - I actually played basketball one year when I was there, but I definitely was not the best on the team; and that was my freshman year there that I played it. I didn't play after that, because I realized I'm not going to get in the game partly.

**AR** [00:12:57] Have you stayed in touch with any of your friends from school or even Father Frowin?

**GP** [00:13:07] Father Frowin died about 25 years ago. He had a heart attack one day. But as far as Subiaco, yes, we stay in pretty darn close that the school has a very strong alumni association and they actually have an annual reunion every year. Anyone who's ever graduated can come back and you keep in touch pretty well that way.

**AR** [00:13:36] Have you gone back already for this year's reunion?

**GP** [00:13:39] That's going to be in June, and yes, I'll probably go. They do it over a weekend, but I may just go up on Saturday because that's when the most people are there.

**AR** [00:13:51] I think that it'll be really fun. I definitely feel a lot of high schools these days, or at least the ones in Little Rock and Fayetteville don't do as good of a job as far as trying to keep their alumni interested in their programs or aren't up to date. I think that can be the beauty of a smaller school. Sometimes you are much more of a close knit community than others.

**GF** [00:14:24] Yes.

AR [00:14:25] And when you were thinking about attending a higher level of education like college, did your parents encourage you to pursue that, or did they want you to stay at home and tend to the farm?

GP [00:14:29] No, they were receptive to me going to college and Subiaco - they advertised themselves as a college preparatory school. They encouraged their graduates to go on to college. I actually did for two weeks after my senior year. I did go to college for two weeks, but I realized I'm not was not ready to do college yet. I went back to work on the farm for six years and it was - on the farm, because prior to me doing it, my mom was trying to keep the books for dad and she didn't like to do it because he'd go out and do his business and bring back slips of paper and she was trying to figure out. When I started working full time on the farm I said, 'well, maybe I could try to do it because I'm right there with him. I know what's going on,' and that's where I found out I really love doing accounting. It just felt natural to me. Like you asked me to describe myself as '*analytical*.' Maybe that's why. But yes, I was there on the farm working for about six years and my younger brother - he graduated from high school in about '82. He actually did like me. He tried to go to college. He was hoping to play for a baseball team, but then he realized once he got up there, 'I'm not going to make the team.' He came back home, and that's when I told dad, I said, 'I think I know what I'm going to do now. I want to go on to college and get my accounting degree.' Yes, and again he was receptive to it and off I went.

AR [00:16:21] Wow, six years really helped you figure out what you were very passionate about?

GP [00:16:26] It did. It really did. I think I needed that time to really understand who I was and what I'd love to do.

**AR** [00:16:35] And at the time, what universities existed in Arkansas that were available?

**GP** [00:16:41] Most of the people I knew around the Slovak area - those friends of mine, either went to Arkansas State, Jonesboro, or the University of Arkansas in Fayetteville; and a few did go to UCA. I had already been around Conway because my older brother lived here for about a year or two. I kind of already knew, and I knew what the school was like and I really didn't consider anything else but UCA when I decided where I was going to go to college.

**AR** [00:17:18] And you already knew the major that you wanted to go into - which was accounting and you applied. But since technology and things are different now, how did you hear about the Honors program when you started at UCA?

**GP** [00:17:34] That is an interesting story. I did not know the Honors College existed when I applied in the Fall of '82 to go in December - probably about a month before classes were going to start, I got a call from the admissions office and they said, 'we have been looking over your paperwork and we have a program here we think you will benefit from.' And I said, 'oh, really?' He said, 'yes, it is something new that we have started. and we're still recruiting students to attend it.' And they said, 'could you come up and visit with the director of the Honors College?' And I said, 'well, yes, I can.' In fact, the next day I was up there. Okay? Because I knew the crop was in, there wasn't anything to do on the farm, so I was free to go. And I did go to the Admissions Office and they said, 'okay, well,' and they took me over to MacAllister Hall and that's where I first met Dr. Schedler.

**AR** [00:18:46] That's a funny story, and when you met with Dr. Schedler, how did he describe this

program to you and get you hooked?

**GP** [00:18:57] He talked mainly about how he was trying to approach education a little differently as far as not just training you in a technical way, but trying to provide a more global kind of education. That's about the best way I can describe it. But letting you kind of explore things that

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you're interested in and , we'll try and help you work through that; and I just found it really interesting and we talked for, I don't know, 30-40 minutes at the end of it he says, 'well, we're going to get you in here, okay?'

**AR** [00:19:47] And you started that following January with them then?

**GP** [00:19:52] That following January.

**AR** [00:19:55] And you said that it was Norb and Bob Lowry who taught your Core I class?

**GP** [00:20:01] Yes, they were the primary ones. I mean, there were a few other teachers at that time too, but they were the primary ones. And, yes, my Honor's Core I Dr Schedler lectured and Dr. Lowry was an assistant.

**AR** [00:20:18] And what was your impression of Lowry since that was probably the first time you met him?

**GP** [00:20:25] He was a funny guy. He would pull pranks and stuff, things that he was kind

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of easygoing, but , it was very instructive on things too. I got to know him more socially than academically at the time. But I really enjoyed being around him. Like I said, he would pull pranks and things in class. I don't know if he was trying to just see if he could rattle Norb or what? But I don't think he ever successfully did that.

**AR** [00:21:03] Is there a particular prank that you recall that he pulled in class?

**GP** [00:21:08] On Dr Schedler's birthday, he brought in a belly dancer.

[giggles]

**AR** [00:21:09] How did he do that?

**GF:** [00:21:10] I have no idea!

[giggles]

**GF** [00:21:12] If you asked around - she came in and did a dance and Norm just sat there at the desk doing like this, just watching. Never cracked a smile or anything or indicated he was upset.

**AR** [00:21:36] That's hilarious. Yeah, I'm sure the students. we're just as surprised!

[giggles]

**GP** [00:21:41] Yeah.

**AR** [00:21:43] Wow, and in your Core I class, what kind of conversations did you have? Or what were the lectures based on?

**GP** [00:21:54] Wow, that's really having to dig through some memory there. I mean, we talked about a lot of different subjects. I think one particular one that stuck with me, at least that first semester, was a discussion about evolution and what it meant. Things like that and bringing in a Biology professor to talk about what evolution really meant, because at the time here in Arkansas - they had actually passed the bill in the Legislature mandating that you teach the Creationism story in school, and I think that's part of why Norb brought that in and what the Biology professor said. And I think one thing that really stuck with me out of that lecture was the Biology professor saying that really saying survival of the fittest was not the correct way to view evolution. He said, 'really, it's just this, the survivor, the survival of the survivor.' This is what it was.

**AR** [00:23:12] And coming from predominantly high schools that were religious-based, was learning about Evolution a little bit conflicting with your morals?

**GP** [00:23:22] Actually, no. When I was at Subiaco, they taught evolution. They discussed things that at a public school they probably would have never discussed. It was never conflicting for me. I had a teacher, Father Jerome, who taught a religion course, but discussing the Bible, and whether or not to take it literally, he made an impression on me. He said that, 'the Bible shouldn't be viewed literally.' He said it. 'it was never intended to be a Biology book or a Physics book, or even a literal history book.' He said, 'it is a history of salvation.' And you have to look at it that way. What has formulated with me over my years is that what's in the Bible is stories trying to translate a truth to people who don't have a full understanding of what actually goes on. Evolution was never a



conflict for me. I can read the Bible and say, 'well, it kind of spells out an Evolutionary process in the first chapter of Genesis, if you look at it right.' It's not that it literally happened in seven days. It was just explaining that over time, at different periods, certain things happened. And that's how I view it, but I got that one from what I learned at Subiaco and then again, when I was in Honors College. All of that kind of helped me formulate and understand what - how life came about upon this Earth.

**AR** [00:25:12] I can tell you're very much an Honors student. And what you just said, they're finding that sense of self was always something or a core value or search that I feel Norb wanted us to find a sense of identity. Yes, and what was the housing that you guys were living in that freshman year?

**GP** [00:25:36] The housing I actually had was my own residence and my first year and a half, I was living in a mobile home, and then I moved into an apartment later for my junior and senior year.

**AR** [00:25:52] Did you miss your family during this period?

**GP** [00:25:56] No, because when I was at Subiaco, I was there for four years. I lived there, so I often did not see them for a couple of months at a time. I was already used to being away from my family physically, but I was still close to them. I called them if I needed to talk about something or anything like that. When I was here at Conway, I usually went home at least every three or four weeks anyway - spent the weekend with them. So no, really that was not a problem for me when I went to college.

**AR** [00:26:30] Hey, that's good. It's probably better than most students who never leave their

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parents house until the day they leave for college, and then it's a whole new world for them.

**GP** [00:26:39] Yeah.

**AR** [00:26:41] And were you paying for college yourself or did you have scholarships or anything to help you?

**GP** [00:26:46] I was the first year and a half I did pay for college myself. I used the money I saved up that I earned on the farm to do that with my junior year. Norb did put me on a partial scholarship. So that helped out there too - pretty much, I paid my own way except for that scholarship through all those years; and it was many years later that my dad told me, he said, 'I'm really proud of what you did, , earning that money here and then using it the way you did.' He said, 'I just felt like he did the right thing.' that made me feel good, and it was many years later that he said that to me.

**AR** [00:27:34] That is very heartwarming to hear. Our class was also required to watch a little documentary about the history of the Honors College, and it is mentioned that Norb opened his home to students and even accommodated them with living arrangements at his own house. Did you ever take advantage of that opportunity?

**GP** [00:27:53] I did, because oftentimes when we had a guest lecturer come in, he would have some sort of reception at his house and he always invited us over there. It was kind of fun to go over there and visit with people and meet Norb and Carol; and that's when he lived in that house on College at the time, which was an older home and just to sit around and listen to Norb talk to some of these people sometime. I can remember one time when we - I forget what the actual lecture was about, but at his house - later talking to Jay McDaniel, I remember was the lecturer, but they got into a

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conversation about God and Dr. McDaniel asking Norb straight straight off, 'do you believe in God?' Guy's like, 'oh my gosh, here we go.' Norb's answer was he kind of studied it. He puffed on his pipe and then he finally said, 'not the traditional God.' He never explained that too, and I've always been a little bit puzzled but I think I understand now maybe why he answered it that way.

**AR** [00:29:17] And why do you think he answered it that way? Or what did it mean to you?

**GP** [00:29:21] I think it meant his understanding of the nature of God had changed over his life and it wasn't the same One. The same understanding he had with it grew up as a kid or when he was a Lutheran minister even. I think how he viewed God had changed overtime. I think that's why I said

'not in the traditional God,' because I think his view of the nature of God had changed during his lifetime.

**AR** [00:29:58] And it seems like you could probably say the same for yourself, too, on your perspective of God and what we were talking about earlier?

**GP** [00:30:05] I think to some degree, because where I grew up in Slovak, we had a Catholic church and that was what I was raised in. So you did get a lot of traditional elements of God being perfect and all knowing and omnipotent and all of that. And I think as did some studies of the Bible and other things I think I've kind of come to my own conclusion exactly who God is; and it's not necessarily the perfect being that you're taught as a child, but still a pretty awesome guy.

**AR** [00:30:46] That's beautiful ,and then going back to the housing situation, do you feel that treating students and faculty like a family provides a more enriching experience on campuses and especially, today I don't think the Honors College lives up to that standard as it once did - that level of intimacy, what are your thoughts on that?

**GP** [00:31:07] Yeah, it was different because when I was a freshman in college, there were probably about 40 of us, total and big. We were up there all on the third floor - Norb's offices right there. It made it easy if you were up there and went to go talk to Norb, just walked in and talked to him. He was always receptive to you coming to talk to him. Over my time I viewed Father, excuse me, Norb, as kind of my college father in a way because there were a couple of times in my life where I really had something on my mind that I really needed to talk to someone and Norb was willing to sit there and listen. That was one thing he didn't try to talk to you about. He would just let you talk and just listen in some way. That was a comfort just to be able to say it to someone and just have them hear you and he did.

**AR** [00:32:14] Yeah, do you feel that the other professors also were good listeners like Norb, or was it a different type of relationship there?

**GP** [00:32:22] Dr. Bob Lowry was probably pretty much like Norb in the same way. He didn't have an office up there, but he was often around and he was always easy to talk to also. That's what kind of made it nice - we were all up there together. And it's easy just to walk across the hall and talk to one of them if they were there. You didn't have to make an appointment or something or wait for their office hours. You just go in and talk.

**AR** [00:32:56] Right. I wish it was that way now. Yes, wow we have to schedule appointments and

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office hours and a little more complicated and prevents accessibility. But let's talk a little bit about your capstone, which was titled 'Government Intervention in the Economy.' Do you recall what inspired you to write about this specific thesis?

**GP** [00:33:19] One part of the Accounting major required you to take some Economic forces, there was a 'Principles of Economics' that you had to take for two semesters. There was a Macro-economics course, you had to take too and I got really interested kind of in that stuff. Dr. Loren Guffey was the teacher on all of those, and his wife was Norb's administrative assistant at the time, too, I kind of got to know him and who he was. And the whole subject of economics kept interesting to me because at the time in the '80s - Ronald Reagan was president. There was a lot of talk about wanting less government. That was or, as Reagan put it 'government is not here to solve the problem, it is the problem,' sort of thing that somehow all of a sudden government became bad, and what I wanted to write was an indication that, yes, government is not perfect but sometimes you need government for certain things. And I was trying to make the argument that markets are not perfect because that's kind of what they teach a lot and particularly at the kind of politicians saying, 'we just need to let the market forces take care of this because the markets always take care of it in the right way,' and I was thinking, 'no.' From my understanding, markets don't necessarily do it in the perfect way or come up with the right solution because that can be manipulated. It's not something that people go in and on equal terms or on equal footing. I mean they often would want to quote Adam Smith and how he described it of two people meeting in the market. And one offering to sell the other's offering to buy and they sit there and talk about it, they come up with the price that they're willing to sell it or buy it. You can't do that going into Walmart, I can't walk into Walmart and argue with them over the price of a bag of beans. They're not going to take it. Either take it, or not with it. The market to me doesn't necessarily work the way they think it does, and often it can be manipulated. You can still read stories about people trying to corner a market so they can extract the price they want and not necessarily the fair price. I think there is a need that

sometimes the government needs to regulate markets in order to make it fair in order to balance the weight of a large corporation against the individual consumer. That's kind of what I was trying to express in my paper.

**AR** [00:36:32] And what were your main resources for this, did you use the library, interviews?

**GP** [00:36:38] I used the library a lot, trying to read different things I didn't do much interviewing. I tried to use what I have learned in my economics courses. I remember trying to read a conservative writings to see where they were coming from. One that particularly stuck in my mind was an author named George Gilder, who wrote a book called 'Wealth and Poverty.' Mainly, we had our thesis advisor, and that was Pat Cantrell for me. She was an Economics teacher herself. Going up there and talking to her about this is what I've been reading, this is what I've been finding, and kind of hashing out with her these different ideas. That was really special to me.

**AR** [00:37:29] And did she require any grants for your capstone research?

**GP** [00:37:33] I'm sorry, you broke up there, I didn't quite get your question.

**AR** [00:37:37] Did you require any grants in order to complete your capstone research, was it even needed?

**GP** [00:37:43] No, I didn't need it. I was able to find it - if I couldn't find it in the library, I sometimes could find it, or Dr. Cantrell would help me find where it was. No, I didn't need any grants or any special help trying to find stuff. I pretty much found what I needed.

**AR** [00:38:02] And after finishing your thesis, how did you feel? I'm sure you probably did a presentation in front of everyone.

**GP** [00:38:09] Yes, we did do a presentation and where people got to ask me questions and I kind of felt afterwards like maybe I should have talked to more people about some of this stuff because I came up with some good questions that kind of made me go, 'hmm, maybe I should have thought about that a little more.' But that's all right?

**AR** [00:38:20] Yes! Of course!

**GP:** [00:38:22] I can't remember any particular questions. But, I think some of them were thinking that I was trying to say that, 'sometimes you just can't help people.' And that's not what I was trying to go for, but I also was trying to say, 'sometimes there's sometimes there's not a solution to something.' He kind of made it sound like, 'well, we're just giving up.' I'm not trying to say we're giving up. Just try to say, 'that's what it is right now. Maybe we can solve it someday, but not right now.'

**AR** [00:39:12] Well put.

**GF** [00:39:13] Yeah.

**AR** [00:39:14] And then throughout your Honor's experience, were you able to connect very well with your classmates and form a good friend group there?

**GP** [00:39:23] Yeah, we did have a good friends group there, particularly when we got to the junior year and because there were 15 of us and we were always in class together. When we took our honors courses, we got to know each other really, really well. And after I left college, I kind of drifted away from them, but then I started reconnecting. And that was one good thing. I know Facebook gets a lot of criticism, but when I got on it, it was so nice to be able to connect with people I hadn't talked to in years. And still be able to talk to them, it was kinda neat to find out what they had been doing over the years. Yes, we were a really tight knit group. I think.

**AR** [00:40:13] That is sometimes the beauty of social media is the ability to connect with those that we have not seen in a long time. And my next question is actually focusing after graduation, but when you were graduating though, what were some of the emotions and thoughts going through your mind as you were pretty much closing this large chapter in your life?

**GP** [00:40:33] Oh, there was a great sense of accomplishment of just this pride that I had gone through something. Years later, I told someone that education wise, I had had some unique experiences in my life. I mean, going to high school and a Benedictine boarding school was very much different from other high schools, - a public school. And then going to college and getting what I got through the Honors College was really different. It was a different way of doing education, and it's just this sense of pride and accomplishment of doing it made me feel really good.

**AR** [00:41:18] Good, and when you left UCA, where did your degree take you?

**GP** [00:41:24] I got a job out of college with the Arkansas Division of Legislative Audit. That was



kind of a funny trip to get there because it definitely was not a group that I even considered. I thought I'd get a job with an accounting firm or something and be doing audits and taxes. I had three different interviews with accounting firms when I was there, and one of them turned me down because they said, 'we don't think you'll stick with us,' because when I've interviewed, I talked a lot about the farm and stuff, and I got the impression I was going to go back to the farm eventually. And the other one was a smaller firm, and they turned me down because they said, 'well, you're going to get hired by a bigger firm.' And the third one said, 'well, we'd love to hire you, but we've already hired all the people we're going through this year.' What do I have to do to get hired? Bill Humphreys was the chair of the Accounting Department at that time and after I had that feeling frustrated, he said, 'let me call someone I know,' and he said, 'I think you might like this.' He called a person at the Legislative Audit and they came up. I didn't have to go to them. They came up to UCA and interviewed me and they offered me a job and it was, I think, probably the best fit for me. It's kind of one of those things. Yeah, kind of went through all those other things but legislative turned out to be a great fit because I hardly have to work overtime there. It was 40 hours a week. That was it. You went home. We're talking to some of the other people I went through in my accounting courses and what type of jobs they got. They were flying halfway across the country, working 6 days a week, and hardly had family time. And when I found out what salaries they were making, and what I was making - I was making more money and not working overtime. It just turned out to be a good fit. I stayed here in Arkansas those first few years we're doing a lot of audits of small towns and school districts and things like that. Most of it was spent actually in Southeast Arkansas at the time, working down in that area, which was a really neat experience because a lot of it was small town. I understood small towns, the types of people were there. I felt comfortable with them. I've told people what I learned in Honors I think helped me because what you learn there, to actually listen to people like I told you about me going in to talk with Norb and just listening. I learned, if you just listen to some of these people, you could find out a lot without ever asking the question. And I think that my experience in honors did help me to be a better

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auditor.

**AR** [00:44:59] I was actually just about to ask you that question, how you felt the Honors program fitted within your career and how long did you work with the Arkansas Division of Legislative Audit?

**GP** [00:45:08] I worked for them for 17 years, up until 2003. From 1986 to 2003, I actually moved here to Conway in 1992, because my wife was wanting to change something about her job, she needed to move here, and it turned out Audit had a position that just opened up here in Conway, and they were able to transfer me. I spent the rest of my career with the Legislative working here in the Conway area and going far over to Searcy, down to Little Rock, sometimes wherever they needed or needed, go to do an audit. And I really got into some interesting things when, during that period of time, some of the things that I had to audit - particularly coming across some fraud cases in dealing with those - were very interesting. Yeah, there was one in particular, it was a small town here that was not a fraud case. But the mayor there had a reputation of running off auditors. If he didn't like them, he would just say, 'get out, I don't want you coming back here anymore.' They'd have to send someone else and when it came time to do the audit, they turned to me and said, 'Gerald, we're sending you up here -but this is what that guys like,' and told me how to behave and comport myself; and he was kind of a gruff kind of guy. But again, I just tried to listen to him and what he wanted, what he was just trying to do and things like that and kind of came to understand it. I remember it came to a point. We had a conversation about something and he said, 'I'm going to do what I need to do to make this town better. No matter what the rules are'. And I was like, 'well fine, I understand that I know you're trying to make your town better, but just understand my job is to write you up. It's violating rules.' And he said, 'well, okay.' And I said, 'well, okay'. After that audit, he actually wrote a letter that I found out later to the head auditor in Little Rock saying, 'what a great auditor I was.' And that's about it. Oh, well, he was.

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**AR** [00:47:01] It must have felt good.

**GF** [00:47:21] He called me up, he said, 'how did you do that? How did you get along with this guy?' I just said, 'I just tried to listen to him and do what you all told me to do, to keep my head down and to do my job.' He said, 'well, that's just amazing.'

**AR** [00:47:52] And there you go. There's the Honors college experience shining through in that moment for you.

**GP** [00:47:56] Yeah.

**AR** [00:47:58] And now how do you feel about the current state of the Honors program? Do you feel it continues to live up to the expectations and legacy that Norb and Rob had set up?

**GP** [00:48:10] I think so from what I understand of how it's going. That they have so many students there. I think you don't quite get the experiences that we had. As you were saying, you got to schedule an appointment with someone to be able to go talk to them. You don't quite have the living experience that we had, being that there's so many, it's a little bit harder to connect with everyone else there. I mean, even after my freshman year when we started bringing in other students, a new class, you kind of still got to know them because we were still all kind of congregated up there on the third floor of McAlister, we weren't spread out all over the place. I'm glad to see they have a dedicated dorm just for the Honor students, something Norb talked about having that. But one thing that takes away from that, the experience is that even though we had our own tight knit group up there on the third floor - we all went out and talked to other students too

and mingled with them and talked to them. Yes, it's great to have that dorm, but also you kind of lose a little bit of contact with the rest of the campus, too, that way. I mean, you've got to weigh it out, which is what's the best because here - I know I told Norb in my senior year, one time I said, , one advantage we had as being the first class here is we didn't have the burden of tradition. We pretty much set tradition, I said, and I thank you. I told him I said, ' I think that could be a problem in the future if you're trying to do it the way we did it. All the time, because you're going to lose something. Those students need to be able to have their own experience or their own tradition about things and not be tied to how we did it. That will be a problem in the future.' In some degrees, being bigger. It does provide you with certain things. People get grants to go overseas now. I wish I had that when I was - we don't have that. That's different from what we'd have. They're getting a different experience than what we did. I think it makes the college better. I kind of wish, though, we still had that tight knit

group to get together too. Not being there, I don't know exactly how students - congregate together right now. I don't know that experience, but I'm hoping that they're not burdened by the traditions of it and finding their own way through the Honors College.

**AR** [00:51:12] I certainly think that they're finding their own traditions from what I've heard. I have never had to live in Farris Hall because I was ahead of my classmates. But really, Farris Hall is just where they co-mingle and they're able to create their own sense of community and have that tight knit group of individuals. And I think that's great. Certainly from what I hear, it has changed a lot since the first class of the Honors College. But I don't think in a bad way per se.

**GP** [00:51:45] Yeah, yes. You have to find your own way.

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**AR** [00:51:50] And that's, I think, the whole point of a young adult life leading up to deciding to settle down and maybe start a family or a career - you have to figure out what opportunities are out there for you. And then I want to backtrack just real quick before I asked my last couple of questions here, you also met your wife while you were working at the Arkansas division as well, didn't you?

**GP** [00:52:16] Yes. I was doing an audit of the Education Cooperative in Pine Bluff. Now my wife actually worked for the Deaf school, but they provided for an office out there because the area she covered on her job was Southeast Arkansas. She was a consultant if a school district in the area had a student with a hearing impairment, she would work with the teachers and the school administrators to make sure that that child received the resources that they needed to succeed in school. She told me that at some times she needed to basically tell the parents, you need to send her to the Deaf school because that's the best place for us. But she was trying to keep them local if she

could have them stay there. But yes, that's where I met her. She is a very outgoing person. Where I'm more of an introvert and when I started working there and had my office, she was often coming down and talking to me about stuff; and one day we were talking, it was getting to be about [inaudible], and the two older ladies down in the office called up and says, 'well, are you going to take that guy to lunch?' And we went out to lunch together, and after I finished the audit, it was sometime later that I called her up and said, 'you want to go see a movie?' and they kind of took off from there. We got married a year later.

**AR** [00:53:54] Wow. What movie did you guys see?

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**GP** [00:53:57] Movie - I tried to remember the name of it, but I remember it had Kiefer Sutherland and Dennis Hopper in it, and Kiefer Sutherland was a child of a hippie family trying to live down there. And it keeps coming back to him. I'm sorry, I can't recall the name of it, but I do remember that, I think I was more excited about being able to spend an evening with her than the movie itself. It wasn't that special.

**AR** [00:54:28] That's understandable, I can relate. And do you guys have children?

**GP** [00:54:33] We had one daughter. My wife had been married previously, she also had a stepson. That's our family.

**AR** [00:54:43] Do you have any grandchildren yet?

**GP** [00:54:45] No grandchildren?

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**AR** [00:54:47] Not yet. Any prospects of it?

**GP** [00:54:50] Not yet.

**AR** [00:54:55] I guess we'll just have to wait and see.

**GR** [00:54:56] We will.

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**AR** [00:55:00] And finally, before we leave, is there any bit of wisdom or advice that you would like to give to our listeners?

**GP** [00:55:10] When you have an opportunity to do something through the Honors College or, even in life, take it up. Do it. I did some things that I thought I never, ever would have done otherwise. And some of the opportunities you get to do, don't turn them down if you don't have to. When we had the Presidential Election in 1984, a lot of our classes were focused around the bill - the democratic process and they brought in George McGovern, to speak during that time; and Norb came to me and said, 'would you be willing to be Mr. McGovern's escort?' That meant I had to go down to the airport, pick him up and I took them up on. It was one of my greatest experiences in the Honors College. George McGovern, who ran for president against Nixon in '72 and I got to spend the evening with him that close. I'd never thought I'd be with someone that well known or be able to be around him for that period of time. I don't think I would have ever gotten to do that in another type of program. Take advantage of the opportunities when they come around.

**AR** [00:56:43] I think that's great advice. Do you have any pictures of George or any

memorabilia?

**GP** [00:56:51] Oh yes, I need to scan that. I haven't done that yet, that little old little leaflet I found on our graduation day. I need to do that and send that to you. I'll try and dig around and see if I could find some pictures that I think I may have a few still around. I wasn't a great photographer. I don't know how they look, but I'll see what I can find on that.

**AR** [00:57:19] Wonderful. Is there anything else that we didn't talk about today that you wanted to bring up real quick in relation to the Honors?

**GP** [00:57:31] I've got something on my mind of trying to see how I want to state it. But I was an older student at the time when I started in the Honors College, I was almost twenty-five and a lot of the kids at the time were just fresh out of school - AP.<sup>1</sup> I already had some experiences that they did not have at the time. I'm hoping that maybe some of that rubbed off on them, because I remember one time I was having discussions about books being banned and things. They were saying, 'yes, where I went. they banned to kill a 'Mockingbird' or the 'Grapes of Wrath.' And I was like, that was required reading when I went to Subiaco. We had to read those things. They didn't say they couldn't read them in their school. That just kind of blew my mind sort of like they had experiences I didn't have and that opened me up. But I'm hoping maybe it worked the other way, too. Talking to people, you can learn a lot.

**AR** [00:58:45] Can I ask why the books were banned in their schools?

**GP** [00:58:50] A lot of places where they come from were small towns, they were often dominated by a local church and the church people did not want those subversive kinds of books in their community. The school didn't offer them. They probably have to tell you for sure, but at least from what I got, that's generally what was happening in their schools.



**AR** [00:59:22] That's certainly unfortunate, but I can imagine and just simply being in the Honors program, no matter what age you are, I feel that all of us have imparted something on each other, whether a bad thing and no matter whether it's a positive or negative thing, I think it leads to more fulfilling experience, probably.

**GP** [00:59:43] Yes. I mean, that's all part of it. You can hear things. But when you talk to someone who's actually experienced it, it makes it different to you. I can go back and talk or remember talks I had with my grandfather when I was a kid about his experiences coming over here and why he came over here. I mean, he had to sneak out of the country to get here to America. They were not letting people leave at the time. It just kind of blows my mind that people had to go through that kind of stuff. You can read about it when you talk to someone who actually experiences it, it's really, really different. I still learn things from people, and some of it is not necessarily me talking personally to them. But listening to an interview and them expressing themselves - I catch the emotion in it, but the hurt that they may have had because of something and I keep learning about what people experience out there in the world that I've never been around and never experienced myself.

**AR** [01:01:10] I've always believed that even after college, people continue to learn, as they should, because...

**GF** [01:01:13] Yes.

AR [01:01:14] ...it should never end. Wow. Gerald this has been a fantastic interview...

GF [01:01:16] Thank you.

AR [01:01:18] And I think it's going to be very valuable for the archives, and I just wanted to mention A.) make sure to forward me your consent form, and then if there's anything in particular in today's conversation that you feel that you want removed, you can let me know or just type up in your Deed of Gift form and make sure to send it my way.

GP [01:01:49] Okay, I'll do that. I'll try to get that done this afternoon.

AR [01:01:52] Sounds good. All right, but other than that I think we're good to go.

GP [01:01:57] This has been good. I enjoyed doing this - being able to talk to someone again, like I said about what they experience makes it a little more real. Sometimes I think about it, I wish I'd been able to record my grandfather or some of the other people who know about what they experienced in life, because listening to it and hearing their own words really makes it more personal. I've taken in terms of now, with my mother who's still alive, and she's experienced some memory loss, but she keeps going back further and further with memories, digging up stuff I never knew about her. And it's like, I need to get this down. My brother, my older brother Dennis, is more into genealogy, but we sometimes forget that we probably need to be recording mom when she gets all these pairs talking about her past, because once she's gone it's going to be harder to recollect

some of that stuff. I'm glad you're all doing this.

**AR** [01:03:10] We are too! It's been a challenging but a very rewarding experience, and I think you'll find the same by recording your mother with as much time as you have left. Yeah, it'll be good. Yeah. Awesome! Well, thank you again for being here, Gerald, and I am going to send you

the recording just for your own purposes once it's finished filtering through some editing things, but other than that we'll just keep you up to date if anything happens.

**GP** [01:03:41] Okay. All right. Sounds good. Again, I enjoyed it. Glad I did

this. **AR** [01:03:47] I did, too. It was really wonderful to meet with you.

**GP** [01:03:50] All right, and I'll get those documents to you soon as I can. All

right? **AR** [01:03:55] Awesome, well you have a good rest of your day.

**GP** [01:03:58] All right. Sure thing. We'll see you next time around, maybe? Maybe we can meet in person someday. That'll be nice.

**AR** [01:04:05] Of course you can! You can probably find me on Facebook, it's just Avery Rudolph.

**GP** [01:04:10] Oh, okay. All right, I may look you up then! All right. Well, I'm going to sign off then and then we'll take care of this other stuff for you. All right?

**AR** [01:04:16] All right. See you later!

**GF** [01:04:18] All right. Bye bye.

**[END OF INTERVIEW]**