

**Oral Memoirs**  
**of**  
**David C. Grace**

An Interview Conducted by

Autumn Reisz

October 30, 2012

HIS 5067 Oral History Project

*University of Central Florida RICHES of Central Florida*

*University of Central Florida Public History Center*

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## **Interview Histories**

Interviewers: Autumn Reisz

Transcriber: David C. Grace

The recordings and transcripts of the interview were processed in the offices of the Public History Center, University of Central Florida, Sanford, Florida.

## **Project Detail**

RICHES of Central Florida is an umbrella program housing interdisciplinary public history projects that bring together different departments at UCF with profit and non-profit sectors of the community.

Central Florida has often been associated with large-scale, commercial tourism and housing development. While those aspects of Central Florida are important to the economic growth of the region, much of its history has remained unnoticed and under researched. The Public History program at UCF links many projects under one initiative to promote the collection and preservation of Central Florida history. By facilitating research that records and presents the stories of communities, businesses, and institutions in Central Florida, RICHES seeks to provide the region with a deeper sense of its heritage. At the same time, the initiative connects the UCF students and faculty with the community and creates a foundation on which Central Floridians can build a better sense of their history.

## **Legal Status**

Scholarly use of the recording and transcript of the interview with David C. Grace is unrestricted. The interview agreement was signed on October 30, 2012.

## **Abstract**

Oral history of David C. Grace, the Master Gardener and docent at the Student Museum and Center for Social Studies, located at 301 West Seventh Street in Sanford, Florida. Grace was born in Wichita, Kansas, on December 2, 1942. He attended Wichita State University and was commissioned as Second Lieutenant in the United States Army in 1965. He performed missile maintenance at Redstone Arsenal in Huntsville, Alabama, until he retired after three years. He accepted a job with United Telephone and moved to Fort Myers around 1970. When United Telephone purchased the Winter Park Telephone, Grace migrated to Central Florida. After being laid off, he decided to become a Master Gardener for the Student Museum, while also working as a Chief Financial Officer for the Florida Safety County. This interview was conducted by Autumn Reisz in Sanford on October 30, 2012.

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**David C. Grace**

Oral History Memoir

Interviewed by Autumn Reisz

October 30, 2012

Sanford, Florida

0:00:00

**Introduction**

**Reisz** Okay. Alright. Here we go. So I'm going to do a little intro, uh, that—I am Autumn Reisz and I am interviewing David [C.] Grace this morning. And we're gonna talk about, um, his experiences and work at the Student Museum in Sanford, um, as a Master Gardener and also a docent. And then—so if you want to start with telling us where you grew up, and went to school, and—and how you ended up here in Florida.

**Grace** Okay. Uh, how I wound up in Florida goes back in history. I am from Wichita, Kansas, where I was born in 1942. Went to, uh, high school there at Wichita [High School] East. One of my close buddies was Bob Gates...

**Reisz** Nice.

**Grace** uh, The Secretary of the Defense, formerly. Went to Wichita State University. graduated, unfortunately, four years later. Uh, I didn't think I was going to make it. I say "unfortunately," because I graduated with a business emphasis in accounting.

And I was also commissioned as a Second Lieutenant United States Army in 1965. So I tried to work on a Master's Degree, and that didn't work too well. So I found myself going on active duty and Redstone Arsenal in [Huntsville,] Alabama—missile command. So I was a missile maintenance officer for three years. Then I, uh, then I decided to retire early, after three years. I interviewed with a number of companies, and, uh—Firestone, um, uh—some other companies in the Midwest, but then somebody offered me a job in Fort Myers, Florida.

Now my connection to Florida goes back to 1914. My dad was born here in Okahumpka in Lake County. uh, my grandparents—my grandmother grew up in a little town called Bloomfield, Florida, which no longer exists. It's on the south side of, uh, Lake Harris—close to Yalaha.

My dad was named after, uh, the kaolin pit. Kaolin is a white chalk used as a filler in paper, china, that sort of thing. So, uh, things did not work out, eh, the price of kaolin went south, so the family had to move to Central Georgia, where

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the Kaolin was better quality. Dad decided in, uh, about 1937, he didn't want to be a pig farmer, or be in Central Georgia, where it was just a mining town. He went to aviation school and was later hired by Walter Beech—Beech Aircraft<sup>1</sup> in Wichita. So, uh, that is where my mom comes in and, uh—so my, uh—so, uh, that's where my life started in 1942.

Now, you know, we'd always go to Grandma's house in Central Georgia every year, until I was 17 years old. And from there, we'd always venture down to Florida. So I knew something about Florida and I guess that one of my decisions about going to work for United Telephone [Company of Florida] in Fort Myers. I've been here in Florida basically since 1970. I followed the purchases of, uh, Florida Telephone Corporation in Ocala. So I was there in Ocala for a few years, came here in 1978, with the purchase of Winter Park Telephone [Company]. And, uh, now we know United Telephone has the, uh, the company that is Sprint [Corporation]. And the other company is right now called CenturyTel. So that's how I got here.

**Reisz** Nice. That is quite the journey [*laughs*].

**0:03:42** **Involvement with the Sanford Museum**

**Reisz** So how did you become involved with the Sanford Museum?<sup>2</sup>

**Grace** Uh, when I retired, and I was at the regulatory with the phone company, the regulation went away. The telephone company was deregulated. Uh, so in 1997, at the age of 55, they said, "the regulation has gone away and so are you." So I retired and, uh, [*clears throat*] one of the things that I wanted to do was be a— a gardener. Moving to Florida and being a gardener— you have to understand that things don't grow like they do in Kansas.

So, um, I guess I wanted to be a Master Gardener. So I took the 14-week course, which is one day a week—essentially from 9 to 3. After that time, time you become a Master Gardener. So the day that I graduated from being a Master Gardener, I also went back to work with a, uh—as a CFO [Chief Financial Officer] for the Florida Safety Council. So I gave that up after three years. Now what was beautiful about, um—about workin' at the Central Florida Safety Council, being a Master Gardener— which requires 35 hours a year of volunteer service—every last Saturday of the month, here at the Student Museum was an opportunity to volunteer in the gardens. The gardens started here in about 1997-98 time frame. So over a period of three years, I was up here once a month to get my 35 hours a year. And after that, I just kinda hung around.

**0:05:18** **Teaching gardens**

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<sup>1</sup> Correction: Beechcraft Corporation.

<sup>2</sup> Correction: Student Museum and Center for Social Studies.

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**Reisz** Um, can you tell us a little bit about the teaching gardens? Um, and how they are used to teach the students?

**Grace** [clears throat] Okay. Well, when I retired the second time, I was asked to come in and be a docent. And, uh, I used to teach the majority of all the rooms here, but I did fall in love with Native American history. [clears throat] The individual that started the gardens was, uh, Walter Padgent, who, at that time, owned Higgins House [Bed and Breakfast], just up the street here. And he was also in the same class as I was for the Master Gardener organization. So, uh, being here, at the – at the Student Museum, I kind of fell in love with [clears throat] Native American history. and, uh – and Walt Padgent – that’s how the gardens started – was he had this vision of – and he used to be, I believe, a pioneer docent. so he wanted something out here – immediately right outside the windows here – uh, where the first grounds of a vegetable garden, or pioneer garden, which allowed the fourth grade students to come here, dig a trench, plant their beans, cover it up, water it, and end the exhibit part outside.

Couple of years ago, I challenged a lady – and I didn’t actually challenge her. I just said to her one day, “Wouldn’t it be nice to have a three sisters garden out here?” The three sisters – corn, uh – three sisters garden are corn, beans, and squash. And it, uh – it’s part of the – we gave up painting faces, which was about a 10-minute mission there, in the Native American [Exhibit: Life in an Ancient Timucuan Village] room. And what else are you going to do with the 10 minutes? I said, “Well, let’s take them out to the gardens.” ‘Cause out here, in the teaching gardens, we did have the three sisters garden. We showed the kids.

It’d be surprising that maybe some kids don’t what corn looks like, other than what’s on the breakfast cereal box. And of course, the three sisters are complimentary to each other. they give a balanced diet to the Native Americans. You – you get your carbs from corn, you get your protein from the beans, and you get a well-balanced, nourished diet from squash.

So, uh, we also have, out here, the coontie plant, which became a major industry here in Florida, because it was a source of, um, uh, starch. Everybody needs a li’l starch. The coontie plant would provide that starch. And it became an industry, uh – it was an industry up until 1909. Up here in DeLand, Florida, a company manufactured coontie starch. So I show the kids that, because the Native Americans used that. Uh, it is a poisonous plant, uh – with the red berries, it is kinda common. Nowadays, it’s become more popular in the local landscape.

Then we move on over to a beautyberry – the American beautyberry bush – which at this time of year, has some really beautiful purple berries on the stems. And we tell ‘em that grandma used to make jelly from those. Uh, Native Americans can use that as, uh, some – sometimes they say there’s a little color in there. It could get used for body paint. Or ‘bout the best use I know of is it’s a good insect repellent.

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Uh, we also stop at the herb garden, and, uh, most kids don't – they understand what an herb might be, um, but they probably have never seen one, like rosemary. Uh, I try to show 'em like four different kinds of herbs: rosemary, aloe – that we use for sunburns – thyme – you could use for casseroles and soups – and there's another – there's another one out there I throw in there if it is out there in the herb garden.

We go around and talk about the sassafras tree. And then lastly I take them to yaupon holly. We have a weeping yaupon holly here in our gardens. And, uh, the botanical name for that is *ilex vomitica*. And it doesn't take too long for the kids to understand there's something about the word *vomitica*. Uh, the yaupon holly was used as a ceremonial tea – a drink. Every morning, the chief and the elders of the tribe or branch would partake of yaupon holly tea – or we know it today – they called it "black drink." It'd make you – it'd make you sweat profusely. Uh, I've told it has six or seven times more caffeine than a cup of coffee. it'll keep you awake for 48 hours. So the hunters of the tribe would drink this. Uh, drink all they could get, throw up which was good luck. Uh, and they'd go out to the hunt and they would – would, uh, be in the stand – the steer dan – deer stand for 48 hours. And, uh, that was the hunt.

0:10:20

**Seasonal cycles**

**Reisz** Wow. How so – do you do plantings that are seasonal here? do you change as the cycle goes around? Or do you try and continue to keep the same basic things around to teach the students?

**Grace** um, we replenish, like the herbs. and we plant, of course, the three sisters garden. We didn't have irrigation here, until about 2003, which meant before that, uh – that in the summertime, we just covered up the gardens with plastic, go home, and don't come back until September.

**Reisz** oh.

**Grace** Now we have irrigation year round. Um, so it's all up to the climate and, uh, we've been a mode for the last several years, probably since about – since 2005. And that mode is – is what you'd basically call "maintenance." maintaining what we have because of the, uh, things that we heard about the school's gonna close up. it's gonna be sold. And some Master Gardeners even thought about coming here and digging up the plants, and moving back to the extension, which to me is called "trespassing."

So what's good about the gardens right now, we've maintained them. Haven't done a lot of planting, other than what we do here for the students: the vegetable garden, the herb garden, uh, butterfly garden – we kinda keep up on that. But the other plants and the other gardens, like our shade garden, subtropical

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garden, our wildlife habitat, is going wild and is flourishing. and we can stand back and trim and prune, as necessary.

**0:11:54**                    **Roses and maintenance**

**Reisz**                    Yeah. Do you have to do any extra maintenance with the roses or anything like that, other than regular pruning, or do you just let them be?

**Grace**                    You'd be surprised that the roses we have here, which are maintained by the Orlando Area Historical Rose Society. Uh, they're the ones that set it up back in 1997. They are what we call "antique roses." They have very little response to, uh, —in other words, they don't get black spot. They don't get diseases. Um, you can get an antique rose of any size, any color. We have one rose out there, which is probably about 15 feet in diameter —about 8 feet tall. Beautiful rose — pink rose. Ah, we have the other roses that crawl on the ground, like a ground cover. Uh, the rosarium that takes care of that rose garden right now is the president of that society. So he's an expert on roses. And, uh, while a homeowner might not think that, uh, they need a lot of care. I don't really care. I have some in my own yard. They don't get a lot of care. So they're by themselves. They're happy. but, uh, as an exhibit here, he comes out maybe two or three times a year. Gives 'em — gives 'em a good heavy feeding of fertilizer, uh, in the fall, we try to round up at least 20 bags. I mean big bags of leaves — oak leaves — and spread them in the rose garden, as well. So is there a lot of maintenance? Not really.

**Reisz**                    Yeah.

**Grace**                    We just make 'em happy.

**0:13:32**                    **Gardening questions from adults**

**Reisz**                    Yeah. make them happy. Um, I saw online — I looked up, um, the Master Gardeners, and it — there's a newsletter called *The Seminole County, uh, Green Thumb*.

**Grace**                    Yup.

**Reisz**                    It mentions that people can stop in and ask questions of the Master Gardeners.<sup>3</sup> Do you get a lot of, like adults coming in to ask you questions about planting, Florida planting, anything like that? Or they just come in and see the gardens?

**Grace**                    Especially they just come in on special occasions. and, uh, hoping that UCF [University of Central Florida] here — that we get people to — when they come in the front door, you want to get them to go out the back door, 'cause that's where the gardens are. And, historically, uh, people that have come and visited the

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<sup>3</sup> Seminole County Master Gardener Program.



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gardens do ask questions, but, uh, sometimes getting traffic back here to the garden has been difficult.

**Reisz** Yeah. Possibly that will change, since they changed the parking situation as well, since people have to see the garden...

**Grace** Right. right.

**0:14:33**

**Garden maintenance**

**Reisz** Before they go in. Um, how much time do you devote to the gardens now? I know you had said that you were doing, like, one Saturday a month to get your yearly. Is that the same? Are you doin' more time? Are you doin' little less time?

**Grace** Historically, we found out, over the years, that people get more active on the weekends.

**Reisz** Yeah.

**Grace** Especially at this time of year when there are a lot of festivals going on. And this is the best time to come out to the gardens and work. So, uh, and it's difficult to get volunteers to come here. The Master Gardeners – the main membership is probably about 40 – maybe 50 – members. And a lot of times they take the classes for one or two purposes. The guys come out – maybe they run a landscaping business – they want to become a Master Gardener and have that in their portfolio, so they can sell their services. We have a lot of ladies that come out. The last class of 24, uh, attendees, 23 of them were women. And so the odds are in my favor, because, uh, today – if maybe it was a little warmer – I'd have at least three ladies here on Tuesdays.

So, uh, we quit having the Saturday end of month work day. It just was not working out. People were not coming out. They're more active with families. So, uh, I try to designate, as each graduating class comes along. I tell 'em come on out, get interested in a project, uh, tell me when you can come out. and, uh, Tuesdays have become a favorite day. Uh, trying to get Thursday and maybe another day. Some people come out here on a – on a monthly basis. The ones I associate with on Tuesdays, come out on a weekly basis. We spend anywhere from – uh, right now, a day like today, we could work out here for six hours and think nothing of it. When the church bells ring across the street at noon, I call it quits.

**0:16:32**

**Being a docent**

**Reisz** Okay. So we talked a little bit earlier, um, about you being a docent with the museum. Um, when did you become a docent?

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**Grace** I was asked to come inside, uh, to be a docent in the year 2001, after I had retired the second time.

**Reisz** And then you said – you had mentioned you, um, you had taught the Native American room. Did you teach any of the other rooms?

**Grace** I've taught – one of my favorite ones, which I can get emotional about sometimes when I taught it, is Grandma's Attic.

**Reisz** Yeah.

**Grace** Because I'm old enough to realize that, when I went as a young man, to grandma's house or to a great aunt's house that lived down in Florida or Kansas, uh, you still had to go to the well to get your water. The outhouse was out in the back. Uh, we tried not to take a bath, because basically a bath tub did not exist. So you get all those, uh, things lined up and you try to tell these kids, uh, how life was. In fact the – teaching Native American history and pioneer history and Grandma's Attic – which is about a 100 years ago – wasn't that much different. And I taught the other rooms, as well.

**Reisz** Yeah?

**Grace** Geography [Lab: Where in the World Are We?]. Um, it was kind of interesting. When I came here, uh, my life as a young man, uh – going into adult – it kind of fits. I was in accounting for 30 years. I did so, because that's how you make money. Dad says, if you want to make a decent salary, uh, be an accountant – be in business. That didn't really fit like a glove.

**0:18:16**

**Interest in geology and Native American history**

**Grace** Uh, my dad and I used to look for Indian artifacts in – in Central Kansas, ever since I was five years old. Uh, we were members of the rock society, Wichita Gem and Mineral Society for, uh, I quit paying dues about five years ago. Uh, so I've been involved in archeology, paleontology, minerals – you name it. Uh, I fit here.

**Reisz** Yeah.

**Grace** And, uh, I love Native American history, 'cause I've been involved in that. We may have talked on the phone about – I was a member of Indian Guides. For Indian Guides, you're a Cub Scout in Wichita, Kansas. it's about Native American history. For Eagle Scout – Order of the Arrow. So all my life, in the summertime, we used to go out to the camp – Boy Scout[s of America] camp, every week, 'cause we were a special troop. We had, uh, costumes, you might say. and we danced for the audience. So, uh, Native American history been a part of my life, even though I am 50 percent German and 50 percent English and Scottish.

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**Reisz** Um, was the Native American room your favorite room to teach? Or was Grandma's Attic your favorite room to teach?

**Grace** Native American is probably one of the favorite rooms to teach. Grandma's Attic coming in second. Ah, [Turn of the Century] Classroom[: Lessons from 1902] coming is third. Pioneer [Pioneer Exhibit: Before the Settlement of Sanford] room is fourth, I would say. Geography, uh – it comes in fifth.

And, uh, when I started here the coordinator – the program coordinator – she was the one that taught Geography. So the other three rooms I – I used to teach the Classroom. It was okay. It takes a special person. We had a special person, by the name of Florence. Uh, she is a little older than I am, but she knew how teachers were in 1902. and she demanded that same, uh, discipline. So that's kinda cool. Pioneer, uh – since I'm not a native Floridian, I don't really understand that, until I read that book *Remembered Land* or [A] *Land Remembered*. I could really find out something about the pioneers of Florida. So, uh, being a collector of artifacts, uh, since I was a kid – we're talking about 60 years plus. I've donated artifacts, – fossils – to the museum, so that's where I fit.

**Reisz** Mmhmm.

0:20:51

**Teaching tools**

**Reisz** Do you have a particular, like, favorite teaching tool with the kids in any of the rooms? I know, that, um, for a lot of the docents – like especially with Grandma's Attic, or the Native American room – they'd have one particular artifact that they really used – liked to use to teach the children. Did you have anything particular like that?

**Grace** Well, one of the things that kids would always come and ask, the number one question: "Is this real?" So it kinda irritated me for some time, so I said, "Don't ask me that question. I'm going to tell you it's real, even though it's not." A lot of the materials we've had here – they're not exactly real, of course. You don't expect things to be real that go back to about 1500.

But in my collection, we used to collect a lot of artifacts out of Central Georgia, which are approximately three to four to five thousand years old. and I bring those with me. Sometimes, I'd wear pants that have the mini pockets and I'll fill the pockets up with anything from shark teeth, Uh – I've brought in a couple of meteorites that I found in Texas in a parking lot that was a gravel parking lot. Just so happens to be something I picked up, and it was determined by the University of Kansas to be a meteorite. I bring that in and I pass it around. Uh, sometimes I, uh, go out bounds. Sometimes, the, uh, program director sometimes gets a little – little irritated with me. Sometimes I go out of bounds, and – and teach some things and touch on some things that, uh, they don't want me to teach. But I – I bring artifacts. Uh, that's one thing I liked about Grandma's Attic.

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before UCF came, it was all cluttered. It looked like an antique store. So just about everything I looked at or touched is a memory. So it's kinda like the same thing with Native Americans, even though I didn't go back to 1513. It's about artifacts, pottery, Uh—I've brought in pottery shards of different designs. And asked the kids, "Well, how did this pattern get on this piece of pottery?" It was done with a paddle. it was done with pine needles. So I've tried to bring in the real stuff.

And I use the artifacts—the things in the room—uh, to get their attention. I like the "wow" factor. I like to challenge the kids, that when they leave they might go to the library, and grab a bunch of Native American books, and go home and read 'em. 'Cause I think it is the most fascinating history about how that—how it's all about survival. The hunters, the male [inaudible], the female [inaudible], okay? that was survival. The lady had to fix the guys buttons. the guy had to fix his meals. I ask the kids, "When you go home, who do ask—who do you ask in your family what's for supper? Do you ask your dad?" Probably not, 'cause he's in the living room. He's being a warrior. His face is painted orange on one side, blue on the other side, and he's got a big bowl of popcorn. Mom, she's slaving in the kitchen fixing your dinner for you. That's the person you go and ask. So nothing's changed over—since 1500. The men are still hunters—still warriors. mom does everything else.

0:24:18

**Teaching fourth graders**

**Reisz** so what is it like teaching fourth graders? How do you keep the children focused and—and engaged in what you're telling them?

**Grace** Well, sometimes that's interesting. It depends upon, the, h, school that comes, unfortunately. I used to have a list, of—okay. *This, uh—this school's coming this week. Okay. I'll bring some of my artifacts.* 'Cause I—'cause I know, in the past they—I can get their attention real quick. Some of the other schools—little bit differently. So I just go down the middle of the road, and stick with the subject matter. 'Cause some of the kids that come here, I—I extend myself. Um, some of the other students, I can almost figure it out, based on which elementary school comes. they're about the same as last year. So sometimes the days are difficult.

Um, you know, chaperones—I don't know if I can say this on tape—but we have chaperones that like to chit chat, when I am trying to present my presentation. Sometimes, the teachers are down here looking at stuff we're trying to sell in a rummage sale. So it's kind interesting just to see as each group comes through. They're all unique. they're all different. And as a volunteer, uh, sometimes you have a problem with discipline. Can't figure out how to do that. Sometimes, being an old codger, like I am, uh, I've got in trouble a couple of times. In Grandma's Attic, I point to the back and say there's a blue outfit. Give some clues. I might say, you know, it was a Victoria's Secret original. I'd say, *Oops. I*

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*just stepped in it. 'Cause it is a swim suit that goes back to 1907. Uh, okay. So I've been called down for that. But what the heck? I'm a volunteer.*

**Reisz** Yeah. Is it hard to stay on, um – with the kids that you're really engaged in, Um – I know you said you do go off script. Is hard to make sure you cover everything that is set out in the curriculum, while still covering the things you think are important?

**Grace** I've been kind of a rebel the last few years. Um, I guess it is because, when I first came on board, who taught me how to do this was the program director or the secretary. The secretary was very knowledgeable, because she was called upon numerous of times to do teaching. Secretary – yeah. Well, I gotta go teach that, close the door and, uh, 'cause I've gotta go teach Grandma's Attic or be a school teacher today. They're the ones that taught me what to say.

Uh, and it continues today. I've gone through, I think, three program directors. And the same wording I heard – what I learned – specifically is still used today. I mean we go outside and we meet the school bus. And talk about Romanesque revival architecture. And I've learned this since day one. You ask a student – you ask a class, "I wonder where Roman architecture comes from?" If a kid says, "Rome[, Italy]," okay. He gets a pat on the head. After 14 years, they still get a pat on the head. I mean, it's just like going around telling a story from number one to number 20 I seem to stick with the idea that ,when a student gives a correct answer, give 'em a pat on the shoulder – or, "You're a straight A student today."

0:28:01

**Favorite stories**

**Reisz** Do you have a favorite story about, um, either the gardens or, you know, being a docent at the Student Museum? Is there a favorite moment with a child or story with a child? Or even just, you know...

**Grace** One...

**Reisz** working in an exhibit?

**Grace** One of my favorite stories – again, this is something I don't know if it's unique to our education system – we used to have animals in, uh, the Native American room. We used to have a bobcat. And, uh, I'd tell the story, when things were getting kind of slow. Or, you know, this is – again, being kinda like a rebel – I'd tell the legend of how the bobcat got its, uh, spots on its fur. Well, he was chasing a rabbit one day, and, uh, the rabbit went into a tree trunk – a hollow tree trunk. Well, the rabbit knew he was gonna get caught, 'cause here comes the bobcat. The bobcat knows he's in there. And the rabbit tries negotiating. *What am I going to do now?* So he says, "I know you've got me now. So why don't you just set this tree trunk on fire?" Sometimes, the kids ask, "Well, how does the bobcat set the

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tree on fire?" I just say, "Well, that's for another time and I've got to keep this story kind of short." So when he set the tree trunk on fire, smoke and sparks were billowing out of the top of the tree trunk. And, uh, all of the sudden the bobcat realizes that these sparks are landing on his fur. Well, he's got to pay more attention to these little fires that are now appearing on his fur. And he loses attention of, well, you know, what happened to the rabbit. Now that the bobcat has all these spots on his fur, the rabbit is now gone. He's on up the trail. He has escaped.

0:29:50

**RECORDING CUTS OFF**

0:29:50

**Favorite stories**

**Grace** "that his spots come from this story about 5,000 years ago." So I think it is a kind of a cool story.

**Reisz** Yeah. I think so.

**Grace** It is legend. It's[sic] stories. It's, in some cases, superstition. And I've been—I've been careful to be—not to say a whole lot about superstition. It's like our three sister garden is—is grown in a circle. And that circle is because they believed that there were higher frequencies or things out there in the universe that were focused down on a—on a circular garden.

Same thing with a dunce cap. Sometimes—sometimes, I tell the kids that you won't learn this when you go to the Classroom., but the dunce class—the dunce cap that you will see in there was invented by Mr. [John] Duns [Scotus] in England in the 1700s. It was for a therapy of—of slow learners. Again, the dunce cap is in what form? A cone. So that cone focused down all this knowledge for you to absorb between your ears. Like, in the 1800s, of course, the dunce cap became a disciplinary method. But again, that's going back to superstition.

**Reisz** Mmhmm.

**Grace** It's common. you find it all over the place today. Go down to the local café, and underneath the counter you've got these little books that all about fortunetelling. uh, things you can do with your dog and get his emotions straightened out. Kinda cool.

**Reisz** Very cool. Any other stories you'd like to share? About the museum? your experiences here?

**Grace** Well, you know, it's—it's, uh, somebody mentioned today that, since they did the tenting of the termites, that the place smells better. I said, "You know, I kind of miss that—what it really used to smell like." 'Cause you can imagine, when you walk around here [clears throat] a lot of times, you'd say, *If only the walls could talk.*

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This building goes back to 1902. Sometimes, we—we don't really tell the whole story. [coughs] Like, uh, what happened during the [Great] Depression years? What did the kids wear to school? I know most of the kids—or a lot of the kids—came to school barefooted. A lot of the girls wore the same—uh, their dresses looked the same. Why is that? That's because their dresses were made by feed bags. Their mom sewed the—the feed bags. The lady down the street did the same thing. The girls came to school wearing basically the same thing.

And you wonder, *Well, you know, it must'a been cooler around here in Florida.* Which to me, I've thought about, *Why didn't I move to Florida?* If it wasn't for air-conditioning, I know I wouldn't be here. So it's—it's kinda cool. We've had visitors drop by that came here to school in the [19]50s, they relate to, uh—there was no air-conditioning. Uh, the railroad yard was just down the street belching out—the steam locomotives in the morning belching out smoke and soot and whatever comes out of locomotive stacks, and settled all over the city here. Imagine what, kind of—when—when you're walking to school as a kid, you hear the school bell ring—I mean it's so cool.

Those are the kinda things—I like—this public history, because I forgot to ask my grandmother what life was back when she was a kid. So that's what I like about public history. Reminds us to, uh, start asking questions about how life really was—not about dates, people, things. I don't care about what [Thomas Alva] Edison invented the light bulb. We have light bulbs. But it would've been nice to ask him, "What was life like in Fort Myers in 1900 or—er, 1900?" I don't care about your light bulb. I want to know about your life. "How'd your friend [Harvey] Firestone get down here to Florida?" I mean, I'm still trying to find out—my relatives came from Bearaboo, Wisconsin, and settled in Lake County, which was—at that time, was Sumter County, in about 1870. How'd they get here? I have no idea. From Bearaboo, Wisconsin. They came here. why? 'Cause somebody said, "You've got a child with asthma?" "Yeah." I had a great-uncle that had asthma. that's why they moved to Florida. I still don't know how they got here.

0:33:30

**Closing remarks**

**Reisz** Wow. Thank you very much. Um, we've covered everything that I wanted to ask about the gardens, and then your work as a—as a docent. Um, if there's anything else feel free. If not, I think we're all set.

**Grace** I think that's about it.

**Reisz** Okay.

**Grace** I really don't talk about—or I generally don't talk much at all [laughs].

**Reisz** Well, I'm glad you talked to me. Thank you very much.

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**Grace**            That's why I am out in the garden, ya know.

**Reisz**            Yeah.

**Grace**            Dig a hole, fertilize[?] it, fill it in.

**Reisz**            Fill it in. Yup.

*End of Interview*