

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW  
WITH  
DORETHER TUCKER

28 AUGUST 1995

MURFREESBORO, TENNESSEE

INTERVIEWED BY REGINA FORSYTHE  
FOR THE Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW #QMS.075

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Albert Gore". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

ALBERT GORE RESEARCH CENTER

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MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

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# ABSTRACT



**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH  
DORETHER TUCKER**

Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW #QMS.075

FORSYTHE: This tape is part of the Q. M. Smith Collection designated as QMS.1995.75. This is Regina Forsythe. I am interviewing Mrs. Dorethe Tucker. Today is Monday, August 28, 1995. The interview is being conducted in the home of Mrs. Tucker located at 1020 East Clark in Murfreesboro, Tennessee. The tape of this interview along with a transcription of the interview will become a part of the Quintin Miller Smith Collection and will be available to the public. Future researchers may include portions of this interview in their publications. Is that all right with you Mrs. Tucker?

TUCKER: Sure.

FORSYTHE: What is your full name?

TUCKER: Dorethe Louise Pigg Tucker.

FORSYTHE: And what is your birthday and place of birth?

TUCKER: January 15, 1919 Russelville, Arkansas

FORSYTHE: What was your father's name and occupation?

TUCKER: William H. Pigg Sr., he was in the men's clothing business.

FORSYTHE: That would be Pigg and Parson's?

TUCKER: Yes.

FORSYTHE: Your mother's name and occupation?

TUCKER: Louise Walker Pigg, she was a homemaker and gardener, rose expert.

FORSYTHE: Did you have any brother's or sisters?

TUCKER: Yes, I have two brothers James E. Pigg, and William H. Pigg Jr. both were in men's clothing business but James E Pigg, is now in historical restoration. He is restoring old houses, and doing most of the work himself.

FORSYTHE: What was your husband's name?

TUCKER: H. Clay Tucker, he had several occupations. After he graduated from the naval academy, he served on destroyers. Then he went into submarines and during WORLD WAR II was in submarines. After he served at the Bikini bomb test, he resigned and went into men's clothing business in Columbia, Tennessee. After a stint with that, he decided he would go back and get his degree in English. He got his Ph. D. in Vanderbilt, then he went into college teaching and administration.

FORSYTHE: Where did you get your degrees?

TUCKER: I have a degree from Middle Tennessee State University. My intensive drama work was done in New York in the American Academy of Dramatic Arts. That was the late thirties and early forties, '39, '40, and '41.

FORSYTHE: When did you graduate from MTSU?

TUCKER: When I moved back to Tennessee, I had several years of college, but I finished my degree here. I went to Belmont in Nashville in '37, '38, and then I was at Martin College in '38, '39 taking work and assisting the drama director there. Then I went to New York. But when I came back to Tennessee, after my husband retired from the Navy, I decided to finish off that degree and went to MTSU. I got a bachelor's from MTSU in '56.

FORSYTHE: I want to ask you about some of the students that you have mentioned to me. Phyllis Murphy.

TUCKER: Phyllis was a very talented actress. While she was at the University she showed quite an aptitude for writing, would often write skits and one act plays, that we did in the drama club, the Buchanan Players. She went to New York. She did some comedy routines in comedy clubs, and she wrote a play that was produced off Broadway. Just recently that play was published by the dramatist play service. After several years in New York, she went to L.A. and has been working in the Hollywood area. She was working for a law firm, writing at the same time, and has done various television projects. Now she has been signed by a major writing group and is able to do her writing full time rather than make out with the law job too. She is just a multi-talented girl, but I think she has found her love. Rather than the acting, she's honing in on the writing.

FORSYTHE: Mel Black.

TUCKER: Mel was an extremely talented fellow. He had a beautiful voice. He did professor Higgins for me. He went on and pursued a theater administration degree and later was in the management of several theaters in New York. He was also in some off-broadway musicals in New York. Unfortunately he died a couple of years ago.

FORSYTHE: A'Leshia Crenshaw

TUCKER: A'Leshia was a very dramatic, talented girl who came here to take theater work. She had a varied background in Las Vegas. She had done several "B" movies. I remember she did one with Don Knotts and I can't remember the name of it. But anyway, she was a great actress and lots of fun, a great addition to our drama group. She did the lead in "The MadWoman of Chalet" and has since worked in regional theaters all around the country. She has been on tour with theater groups including the Barn Dinner Theater in Nashville. She is still very active.

FORSYTHE: Jim Crabtree

TUCKER: Jim is now the director of the Cumberland County Play House which was founded by his father, Paul. Jim is a talented actor and director and has had quite a success with the theater in, near Cookeville, it is in Cumberland County, Crossville is where it is. He married a girl that he married in drama club here. A very talented pianist, she is his musical director in a lot of productions. They make quite a good team.

FORSYTHE: George Clinton

TUCKER: Well I think that you must know that George was given just this year the award for the outstanding alumni awards. He has done so many things, including directing the London Symphony in a guest spot. His main line of work, he has his own company in LA and he has his own composer. He does many background compositions for movies and you often see his name. He also did Broadway work. He was in "Pump Boys and Dinettes" and he toured in that too.

FORSYTHE: Stan German

TUCKER: Stan was a very talented pianist. In the early years, when we did not have anyone to help us with musicals, he would just take over and he would be my musical director for the touring show and any musical that we did. Later on we were fortunate in having some people in the Music Department who helped us. There were several very cooperative people, Joe Smith, Johnny Duke, and Lawrence Harvin. I won't forget those names because they were so gracious with their time. It is a big job to help with something like that and they had their own agenda in the Music Department. But these were just outstanding people to just help. Early on, Neal Wright cooperated on "My Fair Lady."

FORSYTHE: Chris Urbaniak

TUCKER: Chris was teaching in..... she was a very talented actress and director. She helped me when we did our summer program which was called.... it was a drama portion of a program called "Upward Bound" with high school students coming in. We did a program with them. They lived on campus. She was most helpful, worked for me in my office and later became a college teacher.

FORSYTHE: What was the "Upward Bound" program?

TUCKER: The "Upward Bound" program was for students who had the ability to come to college but they were disadvantaged. A number of the students we had came from homes where it was poverty, sometimes abuse. I was not involved with the selection of students. Mrs. Dorothy Howard and Dr. Womack were in charge of the program and they did a wonderful job with that. It was a great program and I did the drama part of it. They had classes, sort of enrichment classes, in math and English for these students and many of them were able to go to college. It is a great program, I can't say enough for it. I know one boy in our program went to Vanderbilt and he became a professional football player. I have forgotten what team he is with now. He has retired from that, of course, and he is teaching at a high school and coaching football. I remember early on we had all sorts of activities for them. These were people who were never able to go anywhere or do anything because of the economic situation, and we would have a special banquet for them. They would plan certain courses that they had never seen before to teach them the etiquette of going to a dinner party and that sort of thing. Then we took them out to restaurants. But, before all of this they were coached. It was almost like classes in manners, you know. They were able to go on an overnight trip to Atlanta to see the Braves play and they stayed in a motel. This was an experience that they were told how to deal with. These people came a long way. It was really gratifying to see those of them that were able to go on to college, and those that weren't had a greatly enriched life because of it. I can't say enough for that program, I didn't do anything for the oversight of it. I just worked with the students that they brought in and we did drama work.

FORSYTHE: That football player, do you remember his name?

TUCKER: Dennis Harrison

FORSYTHE: Mary Sklba

TUCKER: She was the first costumer that the University hired for me. Up till that time I would search frantically for someone who could sew, because I couldn't. I could fit things to go on stage with paper clips and scotch tape and safety pins and hide them, but I didn't have that talent. There were often people who would be glad to do that. In fact, in one of my drama clubs, one of the girls got interested in that and went on to get her masters. She is now the costumer at MTSU.

FORSYTHE: What is her name?

TUCKER: Virginia Ann Donnel, she is currently there.

FORSYTHE: Jim Howard.

TUCKER: Jim is a talented actor and has done a lot of very difficult stunt acting. He was hired when they opened the Indiana Jones show at Disney World and he did all the tricks. I don't think he is still doing that, but he does work in a theater in Florida. He married an actress and they both are involved in theater.

FORSYTHE: Clayton Halls.

TUCKER: He was a technical director at the theater and a very talented young man. He was killed in an automobile accident. I worked with him longer than any other technical director, and he was such a joy to have.

FORSYTHE: Lane Davies.

TUCKER: Well Lane is still working in theater. He loves to do Shakespeare. He directs some Shakespeare and does some in the regional theater in California just up the coast a bit from LA, I have forgotten the name of it. His longest stint was in a soap opera called "Santa Barbara" where he became quite a well known face; but, you see him frequently in bit parts of all the important sit-coms. He did a brief bit on "The Bold and the Beautiful" but he did not want to be tied down to the soap opera schedule which is very demanding especially for someone like Lane. Because he has this lovely rolling resonant voice, they would write long reams of script for him that he would have to stay up half the night to learn. He was very verbal and he had more lines than anybody. It was a very demanding job that he did.

FORSYTHE: Connie O'Connell

TUCKER: Connie worked in a lot of productions that were put on by corporations and so forth. They often have a play or musical production or something and use it at big conventions and things like that for entertainment. Connie became the spokesperson for one of these. She starred in their shows. She had this job as spokesperson and toured for some time. She was on Broadway in "Diamond Studs" and had a beautiful voice. She was Miss MTSU, a beautiful girl.

FORSYTHE: Ron Martin

TUCKER: Ron is still directing the theater in Oklahoma City. He has been managing and directing in theater since he graduated here. He did some acting while he was here. He is a very talented, very dependable person, makes a good administrator.

FORSYTHE: Ruth Halls.

TUCKER: Ruth is in LA. She is married to Terry Cortzer who is the producer of a Fox television show called "Martin." Her stage name is back to her maiden name which is Ruth Cordell. She was married to Clayton Halls, my tech director. She

does a lot of local television commercials, local in the LA area and even Burbank, and she also does regional theater out there.

FORSYTHE: Russ Fox

TUCKER: Russ is quite active in musical theater, has a nice voice. Most of the time he works in Florida, and he also tours with shows.

FORSYTHE: Rebecca Salisbury

TUCKER: Rebecca was a very talented actress. She became a teacher and later on got very involved with women's programs. She was the director of women's programs.

FORSYTHE: Larry Barker.

TUCKER: Larry was a talented actor. He is, I believe, a doctor in Arkansas.

FORSYTHE: Carolyn Anderson

TUCKER: Carolyn is the chairperson of the theater at Skidmore College in New York.

FORSYTHE: Tell me about John Bradley.

TUCKER: John is an English professor. He teaches at Cleveland State . Over the years he has been active in all theater activities in Tennessee, at one time was the president of the Tennessee Theater Association . He directs theater at Cleveland State and is very successful in having an extra curricular program there.

FORSYTHE: Jan Allgood

TUCKER: Jan was a great comedy actress and a very good writer. She wrote some one-act plays and so forth. She worked in New York and she was the stage manager of "Godspell." Of course "Godspell" early on was such a hit and they were having touring shows go out of the main office in New York. I wanted to do the show. The problem was you have to get permission to do that script. They let me do it at the University before their show was going to tour this area, so we had quite a hit with it. It was a fun show. We had all sorts of students from the Music Department, some doing music and theater, who donated their time. We had this great little band, and the nice part about it, they wanted to, because they wanted to do this music. Then we had such a success with it that Mr. Halls thought it would be a marvelous opportunity to do a professional production of it and let the students see what it takes to do a really professional show. Well, starting off we had to get permission. They told us that they were going to have a touring show out of New York which would probably play in Nashville and therefore we could not do our show in Nashville after their tour started. We wanted to do it in Nashville because we wanted to use the new Grand Old Opry House. So with our

former student, Jan Allgood, in New York stage managing the show, we contacted her and asked her if she could come down for our production and critique it and she did. She went back and told the leasing agents that our production was just as good as the New York touring show; therefore, we should have the permission to do it because we paid them a big royalty to do it anyway and they would not go into Nashville with their touring show. After we got that permission, then we had to raise money because it was not a university production and we couldn't do it until spring break when the students were not on campus. Mr. Halls spent lots of time raising money for this. The main thing was just to break even and let them have the experience. In fact, let the student know what a tremendous expense it was to hire the Grand Old Opry House in Nashville, the new one, and pay a very large insurance fee for liability for anything that could happen for twenty-four hours. It was staggering. In any event, from all of these things from promotion, publicity, and getting permission, and using union musicians, because some of our musicians were union member which meant that they had to be paid - of course our actors were all doing it for experience - we had to pay union rates for them and get permission for the ones who were non-union to play with the group. It was very involved and gave the students a great deal of insight into the complexities of professional productions. Hallelujah, we even made a little money and we were able to go back and pay back everybody that had donated money for this initial project - pay them back and give them a little extra. We had several faculty members who donated and parents of students who had seen the show and thought that would be a wonderful experience. It worked out just fine. We were lucky.

FORSYTHE: Tell me how the University theater became the Tucker Theater.

TUCKER: I don't know, all I can say is it was all student motivated. I learned later there were several students who had been writing the university over the years saying that the theater should be named after the Tuckers. Of course, Dr. Tucker was the Dean of Liberal Arts during the time that the theater major was structured and helped guide that. So, it was named after both of us. Of course I lived in it, many hours, day and night.

FORSYTHE: Tell me about the Tucker scholarship.

TUCKER: That was a brainchild of the Alpha Psi Omega group, the honorary dramatic fraternity. At the end of the year, I think that the students were saying that they ought to have a Dorethe Tucker theater scholarship. I am sure it was turned into the foundation with their recommendations and probably the smallest amount of money that has ever been. . . the collection of dues which I never knew it to be over \$30. But over the years, a lot of us have donated to it and then we were able to take some money from the production of the children's plays and put it toward the scholarship. A number of years before I retired, I had received a grant to do a summer children's production from the Tennessee Arts Commission. Early on

anything that came in from the theater, such as admission, went back into the general fund. I think now a portion of that goes to scholarship funds.

FORSYTHE: What about the Clayton Halls Scholarship in technical theater.

TUCKER: Some of Clay's students organized that. I really don't know all the details of that. But I know that some of the children's shows that they do now, one of which, I think the person who,..... I am not sure, my memory on that is just too sketchy.

FORSYTHE: Are there any other scholarships in the theater?

TUCKER: Yes, the family of a former student. I will have to give you the name later. There is one other scholarship.

FORSYTHE: I want to ask you about "Mrs. Tucker's Marvelous Mini Traveling Troupe"

TUCKER: Well that was the bright idea of one of our students. Every year we would have a little group that would go around to play at high schools, or just to let people know that we had a theater department and do little scenes and sketches, mostly musical comedy type things. The year that we used that, I don't know who came up with that, but I had some interesting students in that group. We played, besides doing high schools, we were asked by the Tennessee Arts Commission, to travel across the state with them. The chairperson of the Arts Commission was lecturing at different clubs across the state, and then we were the entertainment. Then after that, by being seen by certain people, we were invited twice to perform at the Governor's mansion for the legislators.

FORSYTHE: I want to ask you about a couple of plays, how about "My Fair Lady"

TUCKER: Well that was the first big production we did after the new theater was opened. Prior to that we had been in Kirksey Old Main, in the old stage over there. But that was not the very first thing we did on that stage. The first thing we did was "Finnians Rainbow." It was designed by Bob Jones, my technical director. He was my first technical director. He also played Finnian for us, a very talented man; he was the technical director prior to Clay Halls.

FORSYTHE: How did Bob Jones come to be here?

TUCKER: I think he worked for CBS. He had worked for a number of theaters but we were fortunate to be able to get him because his wife's mother lived in Smyrna. They were attracted to this area because of that.

FORSYTHE: What about "Carmen"?

TUCKER: That was the first thing I did here. They asked me when I came if I would be the stage director for "Carmen." In my ignorance, I said, "Yes," having absolutely

no concept of what all was involved. Because when we didn't have a budget, that was the first years I came here and we didn't have a budget. Everything had to be scrounged from things that people would let you borrow. I had just moved to Murfreesboro. I didn't know who to look to, to borrow anything. Besides you have to know someone pretty well before you go to them and say, "I need some of your clothes." Fortunately the students were quite clever in putting together things and the costumes came out fairly well. Being the artistic director is the term that they used in the New York opera, as opposed to the musical director. Because Mr. Wright directed the show, I knew that I was responsible for the staging, and the acting and so forth; but it never occurred to me that I was responsible for the costuming and the make-up and the sets, or sweeping the stage. But yes, it was quite an experience. There were times during that production when I wondered if Murfreesboro was the place for me. But we weathered that storm. I had to practically memorize the music because I didn't read music that well and then all of a sudden you have fifteen or twenty girls from the cigarette factory on stage and they start singing. I've got to get the music and count back how many measures it takes to get them on stage. Because there was no script, I had to write it all. I had to time how long it took to get everybody on stage and when to start because all of a sudden they are supposed to be singing and if I didn't have them on stage to sing it was panic time. But anyway, that is just one of the things that you learn. After that I did seven more operas with the Music Department and I was more prepared. Then later on you could get scores that had notations of the New York Opera. It would have entrances and exits on them which was very helpful.

FORSYTHE: How about "Dimmy and the Witches"

TUCKER: Oh that was a fun show, we did that in the arena theater. I did that two different times. It was just one of these things that goes so fast that if something goes wrong you never know it, you just keep going.

FORSYTHE: You told me about doing off the main stage. You would do just one act of a play. You would do several one act plays. Can you tell me about that?

TUCKER: Yes, we would do that on drama club night because we could take scripts and give the students an opportunity to work with a type of play that was not something that you would do as part of your regular program. It would be maybe "far out" something that perhaps your audience wouldn't accept; so if you wanted to have, I guess it sounds strange to say that you would have something that your audience wouldn't accept, (since I have been retired fourteen years, I don't think there is anything that the audience doesn't accept now, or at least have to accept now), but these were years when you were very careful to taylor your program to the audience and build audience. It is good to be adventuresome, but I think you just have to build on that and train your audience.

FORSYTHE: Who was your audience on that drama night?

TUCKER: Just the drama club. Then we would critique it and let them say, "Well do you understand what this is?" There would be things that would be maybe a little heavy for other audiences, or boring even to some of them. After all, you don't want to bore your audience. What you are trying to do is build a following.

FORSYTHE: Where would you hold these plays?

TUCKER: We would do that in the arena.

FORSYTHE: Would you do the lighting and the costumes?

TUCKER: If we had them. We didn't have a budget for that, but we began to build a costume closet. We could usually put together something.

FORSYTHE: How often did you do this?

TUCKER: Weekly. That is what is overwhelming. It gave students, who would never be on the main stage, opportunity.

FORSYTHE: How did you prepare for it?

TUCKER: Most of them were student produced.

FORSYTHE: So the students would pick the play and who would do the different parts?

TUCKER: They cast their own. That is where all of these students, that I had, that went on into directing, had their first experiences of selecting and casting their little scenes.

FORSYTHE: Can you tell me about the story theater?

TUCKER: That was a fun show, particularly some of it that had music to it and we did that in the arena theater. It is a collection of Aesop's fables with a twist. It was something that was in these little episodes. We could use them in our touring show, some different episodes in that, but the story theater was a real hit. It gave a lot of students a variety of parts to play.

FORSYTHE: How often would you do story theater?

TUCKER: We used it as a regular production as one of our, well we were having four a year and we ran that a week in the arena, as one of our regular productions. After that, we would take a little sketch out of it, maybe one little fable, and use it in our touring show.

FORSYTHE: So the audience would be the community?

TUCKER: The audiences were mostly high schoolers, you mean in our regular productions?  
Yes the campus people, students and faculty and towns people.

FORSYTHE: And when you took it on the road it was to high schools?

TUCKER: Yes usually. Though we would occasionally do things for things like the  
Woman's club here or, I don't think I took that to the governor's mansion, I don't  
believe we used that one; it was a fun thing to do. It gave us a lot of experience.

FORSYTHE: Tell me about Laura Leford

TUCKER: Well Laura was my student helper and an excellent actress. She was so good in  
period plays and handled costumes in such an elegant way. She did the lead for  
me, Dolly Levi, in the last production I did of the "Matchmaker," which is the  
show from which they took "Hello Dolly." Laura has been very active in St.  
Louis theater. She has worked with several different theaters in St. Louis and  
right now she is playing the role of, I have forgotten the name of the character, the  
mother in "Steel Magnolias. " Anyway it is the part that Sally Fields played in the  
movie. She has spent the summer doing that in summer theater in a state park in  
Kentucky . She also does touring shows of classic scenes . She has her own  
company, and they do that for high school English classes.

FORSYTHE: Thank You.