

## **Museum of History and Holocaust Education Legacy Series**

### **M. Alexis Scott Interview**

**Conducted by Adina Langer**

**August 20, 2019**

**Transcribed by Adina Langer**

Born in Atlanta in 1949, Alexis Scott is a journalist whose family founded the Atlanta Daily World in 1928. Scott's father, William A. Scott III, served as an army reconnaissance sergeant and photographer during World War II. In April 1945, he was one of the first Allied soldiers to enter and photograph survivors of Buchenwald concentration camp. President George H.W. Bush appointed him to the United States Holocaust Memorial Council in 1991.

### **Full Transcript**

Interviewer: My name is Adina Langer, and I am the curator of the Museum of History and Holocaust Education at Kennesaw State University. Today is August 20, 2019, and I am here at the Museum of History and Holocaust Education with M. Alexis Scott for a Legacy Series interview during which we will remember her father, W.A. Scott III. First of all, do you agree to this interview?

Scott: Yes, absolutely.

Interviewer: Wonderful. Can you state your full name?

Scott: My full name is Marion Alexis Scott. Marion is my mother's first name, so I grew up being called Alexis. And that's why I use M-dot as a tribute to her. Alexis Scott.

Interviewer: And can you tell me when and where you were born?

Scott: I was born in Atlanta in McLendon Hospital, which was a private black-owned hospital, in 1949. And February 4 was the actual date.

Interviewer: And before we talk more about your life, I'd like to go back a bit and talk about your father.

Scott: Yes.

Interviewer: So, can you please state his full name?

Scott: His full name is William Alexander Scott the Third. He was named after his father who was William Alexander Scott the Second, who was named after his father who was William Alexander Scott Senior. And he is in a legacy of Williams. I have a grand-nephew now who is William A. Scott VI.

Interviewer: Oh, that's cool.

Scott: [Laughs]

Interviewer: And how far back can you trace your father's family?

Scott: On my father's side, I can go back pretty far. His grandfather would be my great-grandfather. He was the son of an enslaved African American who helped a Union Army officer traverse the swamps of Mississippi during the Civil War, and following the Civil War, the officer wanted to know what he could do for him, and he said, "Don't do anything for me, but educate my son." So my great-grandfather ended up going to school in Ohio at Hiram College. And he studied there and then went on to get a PhD in theology from an Indiana university that I cannot remember the name of right now. And while he was in school, he went to sell bibles to live—to earn money—and he knocked on the door of my great-grandmother's house in East Liverpool, Ohio. Her parents had moved there from Virginia after the end of the Civil War. And she was in school at the time. She became her class spokesman, and she won the Latin prize. She was the only girl, and the only black person, in her class of seven. And she married—they met and married in what I think was 1898, or something like that. And they moved back to Mississippi, which is where my great-grandfather was from. And he became a minister, and they had nine children. And her family told her—they said, "You can marry him. He's a good guy. But we're not going to come to see you. If you want to see us, you're going to have to come back up here. We're not going south." And so that's what happened. They would come back and visit in Ohio, but they never came down to Mississippi. But, in any case, my grandfather was the second son. Apparently, I'm told, back then they didn't name the first-born son "Junior" because he might die, more often than not, apparently. So my grandfather had an older brother named Aurelius. He was the first son. And because she won the Latin prize, all of her sons had these Latin and Biblical names. So, there was Aurelius, Augustus, Cornelius, and Emel, and who else? Daniel. And the three daughters. She had three daughters of the nine children: Ruth, Vashti, and Esther were the daughters. So, it was really an interesting family.

Interviewer: And your father—where was he born?

Scott: My father was born in Johnson City, Tennessee, which is where his father—his grandfather had moved because of his health. He went there to pastor a church, in Johnson City, Tennessee. Now I've never asked that question—how my father and his mother ended up being there, but that's where they were, I guess with the family to help take care of the baby. Because my grandmother was also from Jackson, Mississippi, and Edwards, Mississippi. She was my grandfather's childhood sweetheart, and the mother of his only two children. He had two sons.

Interviewer: So, they were your father, and he had one brother?

Scott: Yeah. He had a younger brother who wasn't that much younger. I think he was only two years younger.

Interviewer: What was his name?

Scott: Robert. Robert Lee Scott.

Interviewer: And your father, what year was he born?

Scott: My dad was born on January 15, 1923.

Interviewer: And can you talk about his early childhood? What was life like for him?

Scott: I think it was pretty interesting for him, in that his parents divorced early. My grandfather was married four times before he died at the age of 32. So, my dad and his brother were sort of with his mother—with their mother—and my grandfather's mother, from time to time, depending on what was going on. When my grandmother—when they first got divorced, my grandmother—and she died 14 years ago, and she was 103. But she wanted—she told me that after they divorced, he asked her what did she want to do, and she said she wanted to complete her education, so he drove her to Nashville, Tennessee, and she enrolled at Tennessee State, and she graduated from there in 1932. And when she graduated, she went to work at the Birmingham World, which is one of the papers that my grandfather also owned, and so my brother and his brother—I mean, I'm sorry, my father and his brother would go back and forth from her and then back to Atlanta during that period. And I'm not sure where my uncle was born. I think he was born in Atlanta, or he might have been born in Shreveport, because my grandmother's parents moved to Louisiana from Jackson at some point.

Interviewer: So, your father came to Atlanta when he was still very young. What brought the family to Atlanta?

Scott: The newspaper, and the opportunity that it presented for the entire family. My grandfather had been working as a—I guess a clerk on the railroad from Jacksonville to Miami—a mail clerk—and he had been saving his money, and he was going to publish a series of black business directories, so that people would know where to get goods and services. And the first one he did, he published one in Jacksonville, Florida, in 1927. But he came to Atlanta to do it next, because Atlanta was such a thriving black business community. He also had been there to go to Morehouse. He went to college. After he went to Jackson State, he went to—he did that for three years, and then he came to Atlanta and went to Morehouse, following his older brother, Aurelius, who also was at Morehouse. And he came to Atlanta in late—early in 1928, just after his father had died. And he was going to do—and he did do a business directory for Atlanta. And then he was going to go around the Southeast and just do that, but someone said, “You need to start a newspaper. We need a newspaper in Atlanta.” And he went to Citizens Trust Bank, which is the black-owned bank, and it opened in 1921, and they had an insurance company's printing press in receivership, because they had gone out of business, and I believe it was—it was either Mr. Gates, or Mr.

Milton—I can't remember which one—offered him a \$500 loan to start the business and to get—to buy the printing press. So he decided to do that. And he took off from there. He was—the paper started on August 5, 1928. It was, I think, the first issue, although I haven't seen the first issues, but the block of type that was the first editorial, I think, but the earliest papers that we have on record were 1931, and they've been put on microfilm and have since been digitized a year or so ago. It was an interesting time. Should I keep going?

Interviewer: So, so you mentioned that your family had kind of a religious connection. They were ministers. What—were they practicing once they came to Atlanta? Was religion important to them?

Scott: Well, I think that's why my grandfather was married so many times. Because he was a preacher's kid. So, he'd take up with these women. He'd just put one down and get the next one in line, so I don't know for sure, but only my great-grandfather was the minister. None of his sons became ministers. But they were always trying to do the right thing, even if they didn't—couldn't live up to it. But I'm trying to think if there's anything that I need to say about that.

Interviewer: Well, what did your dad tell you about growing up in Atlanta?

Scott: Well, he said it was fun, because they could get in the car and drive from the West Side, which is where my grandfather's house was, which is now Lowery and Spencer—it was Ashby and Spencer back then in the day. And he said his dad would never want to stop, so every time he got to a red light he'd turn right, and he'd just keep going in a circle if he needed to to get to where he was going, because he didn't want to stop. He was so energetic. He also said that—he told me that his father—and this is probably pejorative, and I shouldn't say it, but he said that his dad could “sell ice to an Eskimo.” Which means that he was a real smooth talker, and he could, you know, convince people to do things. And I don't remember—I remember seeing some pictures of my dad and his brother playing football in the backyard—stuff like that—so it was sort of a regular childhood until the tragedy that happened when my grandfather was killed. He was shot in the back at his front door at night on—I don't remember the exact date, but it was in February of 1934. And it was two years after the paper had gone daily. And so there was no witness. They never found the gun, and so no one was ever convicted. The street committee thinks that the perpetrator was the brother of my grandfather's fourth wife. Yikes. So, the story goes that he didn't think that my grandfather was—he thought he was a bigamist. He had been officially married to these women—but he was—he was a womanizer, I guess, is what they decided. But he also happened to be in a business deal with the perpetrator's father, his father-in-law. They were going to buy the Oddfellas Building, which was a building down on Auburn Avenue. And it was just kind of a grand mess. So initially they had an inquest and felt like they couldn't bring charges, but the paper and the family persisted in asking for any clues, or any evidence, and they

did it for a year. And finally, the D.A. was convinced to bring charges against this brother of the bride, and, but again, he said he didn't do it. They didn't have a witness, and they didn't have the gun, so he was not convicted.

Interviewer: And did your father—

Scott: My father—

Interviewer: See—

Scott: He was 11 years old at the time, and he didn't talk about it much as an adult, but there's a picture of him and his brother going into the courtroom, and they look like so sad and so pitiful. So, it was really hard for him. And I'm sure that that contributed to his, you know, his demeanor, and his lack of wanting there to be violence in the world. And that was further enhanced or exaggerated—or whatever you want to call it—by his experiences in World War II.

Interviewer: So, when his father died, this was only about five years after the start of the Great Depression.

Scott: Mmh hmm.

Interviewer: Did that have an important impact on the family, on the business?

Scott: Well, I think yes and no. I think that they were able to make money because it was a part of the black community. Everybody was anxious to get this daily newspaper. So, they made most of their money from circulation, and so they were really probably thriving at that point. I remember the headline on the paper where it announced my grandfather's death—above the fold it says, "ABC Circulation Audit 23,000." So that was the first time they had been audited by a majority white company, so that was really important. So, I think they were really thriving at the time—by 1934.

Interviewer: So your father was 11 years old. Where was he going to school at that time?

Scott: He went to a school—it was called Oglethorpe Elementary School, and it was part of Atlanta University. They called it a laboratory school because when it started it was a place where they could train teachers who were majoring in and getting their masters and graduate degrees in education. And I have a photograph of my dad—of the whole school—sitting in front of the school from 1932. And he started going there in second grade. And he's sitting right in front of my mother. It's amazing. And so—And I went to the same school! And the year that they closed it, my dad had them take a picture of the whole school. So, I'm in a similar picture from 1958.

Interviewer: Wow. So, the school closed—.

Scott: I think it was part of the move to prevent black people from desegregating white schools. Because they built a brand new school right behind our school. The

Atlanta School Board did. And they were trying to make it so attractive to stay in our community, so we wouldn't go to theirs. And they did. They also agreed to hire all of the teachers who were currently teaching at the school.

Interviewer: So, it was a shift, then, from this community-centered private school to a public school still specifically geared toward the people in that private school?

Scott: Mmh hmm. In that neighborhood. Yeah.

Interviewer: So, what were your father's aspirations when he was coming up?

Scott: Well I'm not sure, exactly, although I think he wanted to be a great chess player. I'm sure of that. He sometimes said that he could have been a grandmaster had he not had a family and business to run. Because he would have focused on that a lot more than he was able to. But he was rated an expert. And he got that rating from playing in tournaments. He played in the U.S. Open when he—he learned—he taught himself how to play on a ship during World War II. After Buchenwald was liberated back in April 1945, they disbanded his unit. And they put him on a ship to go to some place in Japan, or the South Pacific—something. And they went—he was on the ship, so he didn't have anything to do, so he taught himself how to play chess. And he really got into it, because it requires just enough thinking that you cannot worry about your stuff that you do every day, because you have to focus on the game. So, I think that was a good escape for him. But he played in 1953, I believe it was, he went to play in the U.S. Open so he could get rating. And it was in Nashville, Tennessee, at the Peabody Hotel, which was, of course, segregated. So, when he walked in, they said, "You can't stay here! You can't do this." So, the guy who was the tournament director came to the hotel and said, "If he has to leave, then we're all going to leave." So that was like—so they flopped around for a minute and then said, "Well OK. But he can't do this. He can't do this. He can't do this." And my dad said, "I came to play chess." So that was sort of the way he confronted the system. By just acting like he was a human being and doing what human beings do in spite of the resistance to it. But he was—I don't know. I say he led a life of beauty and grace, because he started oil painting, too, and he listened to classical music as he painted. So, he was just—he was just, I don't know, a sensitive soul, I think.

Interviewer: So, you mentioned that your father and your mother went to school together.

Scott: Mmh hmm.

Interviewer: Did your dad tell you stories about meeting your mom, or did your mom tell you stories about meeting your dad?

Scott: My mother does. She says that when they—they were in school together, as I said, and this picture where they were sitting together in second grade, it was just amazing. But they were all good friends, and then finally in the 10th grade, she said she wrote out a contract. "We're going to get married, and we're going to

have two children, a boy and a girl.” And he did not disagree. He said, “Yes, Ma’am.” And that’s what they did. They did get married. She—they graduated from Laboratory High School, which was another Atlanta University teacher training institution that was on the campus of Spelman College, and when Mother graduated—I think they graduated in, what was that? ’41? That she went to Spelman College, and my dad went to Morehouse. And so they were, you know, continuing to be classmates, and boyfriend and girlfriend. And then in the winter of ’43 my dad got drafted to go into the Army. And so in the—I guess it was the summer of ’44, he was about to be shipped out overseas, and so he took—he was home on leave, and he told my mother to pack her bag. “We’re going to get married. We’re going to New York.” So, she went with her future mother-in-law and my dad to New York City to get married. They had to go to three different places to get married because people didn’t want to marry them. My mother’s very fair-skinned, and they thought she was white, and they were from Atlanta, from the South. They can’t—they came here to get married. So, they ended up getting married in Harlem. They got a justice of the peace. And then two days later I think he left. He went to—to London, or England. Maybe it wasn’t London, but it was wherever the coast where the ship went into. (19:46)

Interviewer: And what’s your mother’s name?

Scott: Her name is Marion Willis, W-I-L-L-I-S Scott. And she’ll be 96 this year.

Interviewer: That’s amazing. So, she’s still—

Scott: She’s still alive.

Interviewer: Does she live with you?

Scott: She used—I used to live with her. I moved in with her seven years ago, because she went blind. And my plan was for her to move into me, but after she went blind, she wanted to stay where she is, because it’s the house—the only house that she’d known since her own house. And she and my dad built the house in 1949, the year that I was born. So, it’s the only house I had known growing up too, but she had a stroke three years ago. She’s in a nursing home because she can’t stand. She can’t walk anymore, so—

Interviewer: So, going back to this eve of war. Being in the newspaper business, did your father and his family have a special sense for the growing tensions in the world?

Scott: Oh, absolutely, and it was amazing how much coverage they put in the newspaper, because they had a subscription to the UPI (United Press International), which carried a lot of international news. And, because they were a daily, they got the attention of a lot of people. The newspaper had the first black White House correspondent, and Congressional correspondent, and you had to be a daily in order to get credentials. So, the Black Publishers Group joined together with the Daily World in order to get the credential for a reporter to cover what

was going on, so the national and international news played a big deal. In fact, I was on a panel a year or so ago about just that—the press coverage, and what did we know, and when did we know it, and there was a huge article on the front page about Kristallnacht, and how awful it was. And the persecution of Jews was a very readable story by black people in the south who feel persecuted by Jim Crow. (21:52)

Interviewer: Absolutely. So, did—was there speculation here about what would happen after Hitler invaded Poland and/or kind of advocacy in the editorials about whether the U.S. should enter the war, anything like that?

Scott: I don't remember seeing any editorials. There may have been some, but I don't remember seeing any. The paper just carried the stories, but most of the stories were, you know, pro U.S. and against Hitler, and against Japan after the Pearl Harbor incident. So, a lot of people did want to join, but my dad—he didn't join. He was drafted. A lot of his friends were also.

Interviewer: He was in college—.

Scott: He was in college. Yeah, he was a sophomore.

Interviewer: And did your family own a radio?

Scott: No, but there is—the street committee report says that my grandfather died with the papers for a radio station in a briefcase, so that was his plan to do that. But the first black radio station wasn't started until 1949.

Interviewer: And what about just a physical radio? Did they have one in their house to listen to?

Scott: I don't know. I'm sure they did, but I don't know for sure if they listened to it on a regular basis. But I'm sure they had one at the newspaper, which they did.

Interviewer: Did your parents share with you any of their memories of the attack on Pearl Harbor?

Scott: No. [Laughs] I don't know if I asked my mom about it or not. I'll have to do that. She'll probably remember at this point. But I just remember her telling me about listening to baseball on the radio with her father. And that was her favorite pastime, because she played softball. But I don't remember about the war. I think that initially they were concerned about things going on in the rest of the world, particularly with Hitler, but when the attack on Pearl Harbor came, I think they just thought it was—you know, we can't stay out of it anymore. We have to go in. Actually, she had just graduated from high school. She may have been a freshman at Spelman, because it was December, right?

Interviewer: Ok and did she tell you anything about rationing, and sort of having to save used fat or anything like that in the war effort?



Scott: No. I don't remember any of that.

Interviewer: What about the Daily World versus some of the other newspapers in Atlanta? Did they cover the war differently?

Scott: Well, they were, at the time, I think they were the only paper in town for the black community. In 1941 through—until the 1960s when the other two black papers got started. But they covered—they used a lot of UPI stories, as I said, and they used a lot of stories about my dad! They had his picture from when he first went to Europe with another soldier, you know, “G.I. William A. Scott is the son of the founder—” Because he was putting in the newspapers, so they knew that they would publish it, so there were several stories, and he was in pictures too.

Interviewer: And so what did your dad tell you about being drafted? What was that like for him?

Scott: Well, he—I don't know if he actually talked about it, because he didn't really talk about the experiences at all. I remember seeing the photographs—some of the photographs—at a very young age, and how horrific they were. Particularly, there was one with a pile of dead bodies outside of a crematorium with the black and the white soldiers standing behind them. They had put all the battalions—black battalions had officers who were white and/or Jewish. And there was—we found one of them was—I can't remember his name now. I met his son who worked here in Atlanta. In fact, he's credited—this Lieutenant who is a white Jewish lieutenant—my dad's unit was credited with discovering the Legionnaires Legionella stuff—Legionnaires' disease. He worked at CDC when he left the army. And so he wrote kind of a memoir. He was interviewed, and he said they would put—he said that the Army—some of the Army officers said, “Put the niggers and the Jews together, and let 'em all die.” So, it was terrible. And so there was discrimination going on on all fronts. And my dad's unit was never intended to fight. They weren't even given bullets until the Battle of the Bulge when they needed everybody. But my dad's unit was the 183rd Engineer Combat Battalion. And they were to do bridge repair, and roads, and find water. And that was their assignment, so they were all—all of them were service units that were intended to work behind—not behind enemy lines, but behind the fighting lines. So, they were to come after the fact. But at the Battle of the Bulge, which was in December of '44, they needed every human being. So that's when they first got some bullets, and that's when they fought. But it was in 1945 that he ended up being sent to this concentration camp to help with displaced persons, because it was Buchenwald, and this was the camp that the prisoners overthrew themselves, actually. Because it was really the political prisoners that had the strength to do that, and the Germans knew that the end was near. So, they started kind of fleeing, and they just left. And the prisoners said, “Ok, we're taking over.” So they did. But my dad says that when they got there they were told that they tried to kill 30,000 people in two weeks, just to get them off the planet, so that they would

have gotten their job done. But it was really horrific for him. And he toured—oh, here's the thing. We're working on a screenplay based on his experiences, and we were able to find out how he got there. He was a part of a reconnaissance team that was sent there with another white unit that was asked to go there—called to go there. And the black units were called core units, which meant they belonged to no one and they belonged to everyone. And you could ask for them to come help you if you needed some extra bodies. So, they got called up by the 1126. And they went in as an early reconnaissance team to see what was going on, and that's when he came into the camp. And he wrote about it much later, like in the late '80s. He wrote a brochure with pictures and a reflection on his experience there and what he said is that they had been told about the camps, but they didn't believe it could be as bad as they said. When he first got there it looked OK, but all of a sudden when they walk in they see all of these skeletal people—bones and bodies and incinerators with bones and stuff. He said it was just so gruesome he hadn't seen anything ever like it. And it was—he later said in an interview that it was hard to believe that the Germans who were known for their intellect, and technology, and love of art and beauty, that they could ever do something so inhumane. (29:36) It just didn't make any sense to him. And he decided—he said, you know, even in America, slaves had value because they could work and do stuff. They didn't want to kill them. But here they just wanted the Jews off the planet. He just didn't understand that. And he said, furthermore, they were white. So it was really baffling. It was hard for the soldiers to comprehend. And I think that's when he made a decision: you can't fight hate with hate. You have to fight it with something else, like love. Mmh hmm.

Interviewer: And he was tasked with actually taking photographs?

Scott: Mmm hmm. He was a photographer with his unit. An archivist for his unit. So, he took pictures. And he wrote later that he finally put the camera away because it was just too much, and he walked around in a daze like the rest of them. As they—as some of the other prisoners took them around to show them what was what.

Interviewer: So, prior to going to Buchenwald and just being this black core unit that could be sort of borrowed by different other units, did he have a sense—did European soldiers perceive his unit differently than the U.S. soldiers did? Or did he sort of have any—.

Scott: Yeah, I remember talking to another member of his unit Leon Bass, who did lots of—he went on to become a high school principal when he returned to the U.S. He was in Philadelphia. And he would talk to different schools. He came to here a couple times, to Georgia, to give talks with the Georgia Commission, and he said that when he was overseas—he didn't get married until he got back—but when they went to England, he said they'd go to parties with people who were native to London. They would be white, and there was no problem. And that was part of

the attraction to many of the black G.I.s who wanted to stay in Europe even after the war because they could be—just be themselves. Even if they were novelties, they could still—it was better to be a novelty than to be a cursed person and suffer from the indignities of being not seen as human.

Interviewer: And so, right around when your dad was in Buchenwald experiencing all of this, Roosevelt also passed away.

Scott: That's right.

Interviewer: Did he talk at all about what that meant to him, or—.

Scott: Well he passed away right at the time they were at Buchenwald, so I don't—he didn't really put the two together except that was when he was there. That's how he remembered the date. Because it was like April 12 or something like that. And I think they were—I think they decided that the war was going to be over at that point, because the Germans were in bad shape. I don't remember him talking about the connection between that and Roosevelt dying.

Interviewer: Did he have any strong opinions about Roosevelt?

Scott: Not that I know of. I think they all thought he was popular because he had helped get social security and do things like that which helped everybody, but I think—I don't know. I don't remember him talking national politics at the time of the war. (33:00) But in the South, because Roosevelt was a Democrat, right?—in the South, the Democrats were the segregationists. My dad was a Republican and his—I guess his father was too, but he was dead before he could really become active. My great-uncle who took over the newspaper when he died – when my great-uncle's brother who was my grandfather was killed, he was a Republican too. And most black middle-class people were in the South—were Republicans because it was the Grand Old Party, and they had the social—they were socially progressive. They were against, you know, segregation. All the Democrats were in favor in the South. So that's all I remember was my dad. He used to say he was an Independent who usually votes Republican.

Interviewer: So, your father was headed toward Japan when the U.S. dropped atomic bombs on Japan. Did he talk about that at all? Did he share memories of that?

Scott: He didn't. He just said that war is not a good thing. We've got to do anything but do that, because it's just killing people to kill people. And he became a real pacifist after that.

Interviewer: And what about your mother and your father. How did they—did they communicate with each other during the war? Did they write letters?

Scott: Yes, my mother wrote him every day. If you ask her now, I bet she could still say his serial number. (34:37) And she could have up until she had her stroke. I'd ask her and she'd just rattle it right off. She wrote him every day. In fact, a couple of

her letters are in a book called Love Letters from Home, or something like that, that this woman did—black G.I.s and love letters that they wrote during the war.

Interviewer: So, did you maintain any of that correspondence?

Scott: Some of it. Yeah. I have a few of the letters. Not that many survived. In fact, I have a duffle bag that belonged to my dad. My husband won't let me go into it right now because he says we have to get it de-loused or whatever that is. We've got to find a safe space to open it. That is something that we still have to do. We just discovered it. We've been doing some renovations on my parents' home, and we're discovered a lot of old things like that duffle bag.

Interviewer: Did your mother talk at all about what her hopes and dreams were for the future—waiting for your dad to get back from the war?

Scott: She just wanted him to complete her contract—that was to get married and have two kids. She was the devoted wife and mother. And she used to work at the newspaper, but she stayed home until we went—started school. After we went to school, then she went to work at the paper as a kind of support staff, and cashier, and then she did some secretarial support stuff. She really just wanted my dad to be successful and be happy and then she was happy. She was a traditional housewife type who worked.

Interviewer: So, you talked a little bit about how your dad taught himself chess. Did he play with the other soldiers?

Scott: I think he had trouble getting them to play with him, but they'd play some. He'd play himself a lot. And he went on to do the tournaments. We had a great trip out to the west in 1959, to a tournament in Omaha, Nebraska. And we ended up staying at this hotel, and I remember we had this big room. It was like a ball room, because they didn't want to give us a guestroom, so they brought us these roll-away beds, so we slept in this room. And my mother went across the street to the bus station and got us hamburgers to eat. So, it was—I think we were supposed to be insulted, but it was fun for me and my brother. I was ten, and he was twelve. We could play kickball in the room, because the room was so big. But he played chess every day during the tournament, and I don't know if he increased his standing as an expert, but when we came back home, that summer Ebony magazine did a story on him, and I think it was because the editor of the magazine, Ron Bennet, and his friend who was the editor of Jet magazine, Robert Johnson—he wasn't related to Mr. Johnson who started the paper, but he had the same name—started Ebony, but the Atlanta Daily World was the only place they'd ever worked beside Ebony and Jet. So, they did this wonderful four-page layout with pictures and everything on my dad being a chess champion despite segregation, despite barriers—something like that. So, I was impressed by that, of course. And they had my picture, sitting at a table scratching my head, trying to figure out my next move on the chess board, but—They had pictures of my mom

sitting there and watching him play, my brother playing me or him, or something. And a group of guys used to come to our house every weekend to play. They were students at Morehouse and other people that my dad had encountered along the way. And it was—I don't know—just an interesting time to be in my house.

Interviewer: And did your dad teach you to play chess?

Scott: Yes, he did, and I played until I got old enough to say, “Dad, I don't want to play anymore.” Because it required too much concentration. Too much thought. And I wanted to think about other things. So he let me stop playing, but he would do demonstrations at the high school sometimes. That was part of the picture spread. He played 20 kids. He'd walk down the board at every table. Of course, he would beat them all. And he just blew people's minds. He was so good.

Interviewer: That's kind of cool. So, what was your father's homecoming like from the war?

Scott: There was a story about his experiences in Buchenwald, and he didn't remember it, but I found it in the archives of the paper, right after he got back, when he talked about it. And he also wrote a story on the 40th anniversary of the Battle of the Bulge for the Atlanta Daily World. And these were just really thoughtful, reflective pieces about how horrible the war was, and how horrible war is in general.

Interviewer: What did he want to do next with his life after having this experience?

Scott: Well, he wanted to come back and join the family business. He did come back and apply to Georgia Tech because he didn't finish. Of course, they didn't let him in, so he went back to Morehouse. I don't think he actually graduated from Morehouse, but he stayed there for a year or so. He came back out because he was working at the paper. And he initially took over as circulation manager. And when he died he was advertising manager. So, his whole life was dedicated to preserving the paper, because his father had started it. And so, C.A., his uncle, ran the paper from 1934 until I took over in 1997. And that was what? 63 years later—60-something like that. And he was 89 when I took over. And I was like 40-something. It was amazing. I had already done 22 years at the Atlanta Journal Constitution and Cox Enterprises before I came to join the family business. It was five years after my father had died.

Interviewer: So, you mentioned that your dad went back to Morehouse. Did—was he able to access the benefits of the G.I. Bill?

Scott: Mmh hmm. Yes, he was able to access the G.I. Bill benefits, particularly for education, and for his house. He built the house in 1949 with the help of that.

Interviewer: Can you tell me more about his decision to build the house and where he built it? I know that became a—

Scott: It did become a thing, and I didn't really realize how big of a story it was until lately I read a book called *White Flight*. I can't remember the author's name, but he wrote about my dad actually building the house where he built it. Back then there was kind of an Apartheid of designated spaces for black folks to live. And they had expanded west from—originally most blacks, and most everybody, lived on the east side, and, you know, they went west after the war. Well, actually before the war, because the black high school was on the west side too. It was the first public high school—Booker T. Washington opened in 1924. And they expanded west, but they stopped at Chickamauga where they were supposed to not go beyond. And definitely not Chappell Road, because that's where the street changed from Hunter Street to Mozley Drive. And back then that designation—the name change of the street—would designate black and white. So, my dad had this property. I guess he got it from his dad. My grandfather had bought up a lot of property in the west side. And he was going to build a house on Mozley Place. It was the first house on the block, and this is what I learned from reading the book—I didn't learn it from my dad. He didn't talk about it. The Mozley Park neighborhood association came to him and said, "Don't build this house here." And he said, "Yeah, I'm doing that." And they said, "Well, if you have to build it, let it turn to face Chappell Road, not Mozley Place." And he said, "No, I'm not doing that." And so he did build the house. And they said he told them "If you don't want to live here no more then I know a lot of soldiers, G.I.s returning from World War II, who would love to have a home and would be interested in buying yours." And so that's apparently what happened. Because they all fled.

Interviewer: And then the neighborhood shifted?

Scott: The neighborhood went from white to black. And the park itself—Mozley Park—went from white to black.

Interviewer: Yeah—so in terms of its designation under segregation—it was a black park.

Scott: Mmh hmm.

Interviewer: Interesting. So, what are your earliest memories of your father?

Scott: Hmm. I don't know. My earliest memories of him—I don't know—just being a soft-spoken, cerebral storyteller. He loved to tell stories, and he loved to inform me. He used to tell me, "If you can read, you can do anything." And I would say, "Man, but I can't do that." He said, "Yeah, you can." And I remember he used to have people come over to play chess—students and other folk that he would run into—on Saturday night. So, they would go down in the basement and play chess. And one night, my brother had a friend spending the night—Sammy Westerfield whose dad was a professor at AU or something—and one of the chess players came in, and it was Gordon Knight. And as soon as he came in and went downstairs, Sammy said, "What was that white man doing in your house?" And my brother said, "That's not a white man—that's Gordon." So that seems weird to

me that that would even come up. And so when everybody went home, my brother went to my dad and said, “Why did you let that white man come over here?” And my dad looked at him and said, “That’s not a white man, that’s Gordon.” So that very summer he sent us off to a sleep-away camp in Tennessee where it was integrated, so we could see that white people were people too. And so they could apparently see that we were people too—but the main thing is that it was a group that was supporters of the Civil Rights Movement. That Freedom School that Martin Luther King Jr. went to was in Mount Eagle, Tennessee, and this is where this camp was too. So that—and I must have been seven, six, I don’t know. Really young. But I did learn how to swim in the lake. And we had archery, and we had arts and crafts and stuff, you know, it was fun. And I really liked the people. I don’t remember how many—there were other black people there, but not that many. It wasn’t a big, huge camp anyway. But there were black and white kids there.

Interviewer: So, what memories did you have of your neighborhood growing up.

Scott: Oh, it was full of kids. The people next door had three daughters—an older one, one who was close to my age, and a younger one. The people on the corner—it was the dean at Clark College, and his wife was a librarian. She was the first black librarian. So that was the MacVeter’s home. The parents of the three girls—the mother was a black social worker from the black “first ones.” Her husband worked at the post office. The people on the other side of us—he was the chairman of the board of Atlanta Life Insurance Company. So, everybody was educated. Everybody was a professional. The people behind us had a daughter who was older than I and then one much younger than I. And I used to use their house to go visit my girlfriend who lived on Chappell road. And her mother was a schoolteacher, and her father was—he was something with the Juvenile Justice System. I’m not quite sure exactly what he did. And the house that I used to walk through with the older daughter and the younger daughter—she was a social worker too. And her husband was a referee and coach at one of the black high schools. And so it was—everybody was—I thought everybody was smart and rich. In terms of relative—you know everybody was comfortable. You could go eat at anybody’s house. You could spend the night at anybody’s house. I had a lot of friends. And the girl who lived on Chappell Road, her name was Alexis. We had the same name. So there you go.

Interviewer: And, so what kinds of things did you do for fun?

Scott: Well, in the summertime we played outside a lot. We played “Throwing Poses.” You know that one? Where you just twirl—somebody is the thrower, and they swing you around, and you have to freeze however you land. And then it was “May I?” You know that one? And you’d start it together and you’d say, “May I?” And the caller would say, “Take two giant steps.” And if you just take them, you’re out. You have to say, “May I?” And then you take your two giant steps,

and the person who gets to the end goal is the winner. So it was a lot of fun to do that. My brother had a film projector. And we'd show movies on the wall in our basement in the summer too. And the one that I remember he got first was "Creature from the Black Lagoon." So everybody was – ooh—screaming and stuff like that. It was just fun. And I was the same age as Cathy, the little girl on "Father Knows Best" which was a T.V. show. And I just felt like I had the same kind of life. It was really weird, but the stuff that was going on in her house was the stuff that was going on in mine. Except that I got these mixed signals from the larger community that I wasn't worth a damn. I'm not good enough to do anything or be anywhere. And that was very frustrating and hurtful, and I think some things I'm still angry about—and I'll always be angry about—but on the other hand, I think I'm fabulous. [Laughs] (49:19)

Interviewer: What was that like to have—to consume media with no representation, or very little representation in the mainstream?

Scott: Well, the newspaper more than made up for it, because we had lots of representation, and Black History Month would roll around, and it would be Abraham Lincoln, Frederick Douglas, John Carter Woodson, and my grandfather! Those would be the people going across the top of the page. So that didn't—it didn't seem like there was not any representation. And the TV shows I didn't really mind, because they were funny, and they were good, well-written, and I could relate—because I was very middle class and very protected in that way.

Interviewer: How did your father react to the struggle of the Civil Rights movement—as it started to take off more?

Scott: I think he was most concerned about it being a nonviolent thing. His uncle, who was running the paper at the time, did not approve of the street demonstrations, because they thought, "you need to let us handle it, and we'll take care of it through the courts." Because they had won the banning of the all-white Democratic Party Primary in 1944, the County Unit system had been wiped out as unconstitutional in 1959 or something like that, and suits had been filed for equal pay for teachers, equal access to the park—it took five years though from the lawsuit—the golf course—from '51 - '55 for the state supreme court to finally rule it unconstitutional to have separate and equal—because they weren't equal! No public golf course for black people. So, but he just—they were afraid, I think, of what harm could be done to them physically by the confrontation in the street. And what I later learned—not from my father, but about C.A., and I don't know where my dad was on it, but I think he probably was concerned about it too, the business—impact on the business. Advertisers threatened to pull their business if he didn't stop the students from demonstrating and boycotting. So, he was caught in a rock and a hard place on that one. And it did—you know, there was a negative impact on the business as a business, and in particular on people like me. I went to work someplace else, other than the newspaper. Because I was trying to



cross those barriers that they had been working so hard to bring down. So, the paper really went through a hard transition in the '60s and '70s because of that—and a brain drain. It was a tough period. And that's when they closed the printing presses—1970, I think. And they went from six days a wee—well, they had started—they had been doing seven days a week. During World War II they cut back to six days so they could take Sunday off. They cut out the Monday paper. And then they went—after they closed the printing presses, I think they went to four days. And by the time I took over in '97, I think it was down to two days. And we launched the Website and made it every day, but we cut out—made it once a week, I think, in—after I'd been there for five years. Probably should have done it sooner, because the universe was just not trained to advertise like that anymore.

Interviewer: So, as your father continued to work for the paper, he would sometimes go out into more rural areas and cover struggled that people sometimes didn't see, right, in Atlanta, right?

Scott: Yeah—what was it? The lynchings in—what was it—Monroe, Georgia? Forsyth, Georgia, in Monroe County, I think that's what it was. He went with a reporter to interview one of the—what they thought—witnesses, because it was a kid who had gotten beat up. So, my dad took pictures of him, and it was really gruesome pictures. His face was all beat up and swollen. And stuff like that. So he was well-aware of what it meant to leave the metro area. And the paper did have a lot of correspondents who wrote things and sent them in still. But his primary focus was on Atlanta, and he was in Atlanta. He also, at some point—it must have been not until the '70s—he started doing a radio show on which he would interview different people about different topics. And I have a suitcase full of his cassette tapes of those interviews that I've got to get transferred or digitized.

Interviewer: So, can you tell me a little about your dad's increased involvement in Holocaust education and activism? Because I think that was also starting in the '70s.

Scott: Yes, it was. He responded to a call from Dr. Crawford at Emory University who led a call for liberators and survivors. And so he decided to go. And he took, you know, some of his pictures with him. And he met Alex Gross who was a survivor of Buchenwald, and they became fast friends, and they would do tours and lectures at different schools all over the state—and talking about their experiences. And Alex used to call him a “black angel,” because that was the way they felt when they saw these black soldiers coming into the camp. And I think Alex was around—somewhere around—fourteen or fifteen at the time. So, he was a little bit younger than my dad, but they really were great friends. In fact, he spoke at my dad's funeral.

Interviewer: And why was this work so important to him?

Scott: Because he knew that some people didn't believe it, and he had proof from photographs, and he needed to make sure it didn't happen again—that people needed to know.

Interviewer: So, what was your relationship like with your father as he grew older and you grew older?

Scott: Well, we disagreed on politics a lot. Because he continued to be—argued the Republican position. And I, of course, was more liberal and more prone to be confrontive in the street than he, even though I was a little bit younger to do that. I did not join any of the student movement here. I was still in high school. But I—I don't know—he was just so cool, so sweet. He stayed up with me all night when I was a senior in high school building a Roman home. That was my assignment. I was taking Latin for my senior year, because I had taken all of the Spanish I could take. So that was the assignment. It was to build a typical Roman home. So, he sat up all night and helped me do that. But he used to—you know—lecture a lot. And I didn't like that.

Interviewer: Did you feel that there was just sort of this generational divide in terms of how people responded to change, or—

Scott: Yeah, I'm sure there was some of that, because—oh, and I know, when I first went to college, Barnard College, which is a women's undergrad at Columbia in New York City—and when I came home, I had cut my hair off into an Afro, and Dad said, "The next thing we know, you'll want a bone in your nose!" They thought it was not the way to look. And plus I'd gotten my ears pierced, and that was not a good thing to do. Not the proper, ladylike thing to do. So, he was—and I think in retrospect, he was concerned for me in terms of how I'd be received by the larger community. If I looked like Angela Davis, they would think that I was a "militant, scary woman." As opposed to my hair all done up, I'd look like a regular—like the girl from "Father Knows Best."

Interviewer: And did your mother voice any opinions about these things?

Scott: Not a lot. My father believed in living by example, and that was really great except if you didn't get it. You know, what does he mean by that? What is that example that you're doing there? If you don't know—but he really didn't like to tell you what to do. He'd let you figure it out. He'd try to give you some guidance, but basically I was on my own, and I was very strong-headed, strong-willed too.

Interviewer: So, what do you think your father would most want students to take away from his life, and his experiences?

Scott: That you cannot fight hate with hate. It's just that nobody wins. Everybody loses. You lose your humanity. You take away other people's humanity. And that you have to find a way to work it out. And you have to disagree agreeably. It just

won't work any other way. It's just you got—it's something that Andy Young says all the time: "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth leaves everybody blind and toothless." And that's not good.

Interviewer: And what do you think are the most important things for students to take away from this history. His history and yours.

Scott: Pretty much the same—and you have to be a bridge-builder too. If you want to know what's on the other side of the bridge, you should go extend yourself. And exposure is important too. You need to see how other people live, how other people express themselves. There used to be a golden rule: do unto others as you would want them to do unto you. I think it needs to be expanded, so do unto others as they want to be done unto! And then they will do the same hopefully to you.

Interviewer: Is there anything that I haven't asked you about that you'd like to talk about today?

Scott: I don't think I can think of anything, except that I was Director of Diversity for Cox Enterprises before I left to go take over the family paper. And that sort of further built on my lifelong philosophy that grew out of my experiences with my father, and with the paper and everything. And our slogan was "Our Diversity is Our Strength." Because I needed them to understand through their businesses that people diversity is as important as business diversity. And so they had broadcast, newspapers, cable, and auction companies as their four main branches. So I came up with that slogan—"Our Diversity is Our Strength." And I do believe that. And sometimes it takes longer to get things done, but in the long run you have a better result by including more, different viewpoints.

Interviewer: This was in the '80s and the '90s?

Scott: This was in the early '90s. I went out in '93, and my dad had died the year before. I had been VP Community Affairs at the Journal Constitution for seven years. And I gave away the Corporate Philanthropy, and I became like a professional community volunteer, sitting on boards and non-profits, and stuff like that. So that further enhanced my bridge-building and outreach tendencies. I've had a pretty interesting life! And I ended up being publisher of the Atlanta Daily World for 17 years, which is amazing to me. We sold the paper, though, in 2012, because we just couldn't do it as a mom and pop anymore, based on the recession that happened around '07 and '08, and the tornado of 2008 took the roof off our building on Auburn Avenue. We never went back in, because we couldn't afford to fix it. We could fix the roof, but we couldn't afford to bring everything up to code. And the changes in the industry. Social Media was sucking up all the advertising. And we had launched a Website, but we didn't have the eyeballs. We just had no way to measure, and no marketing money either. So, in 2012 I convinced this company to buy the paper, and they did because they wanted the

Atlanta market. And it was a company based in Detroit called Real Times Media, and they had already bought John Singstack's newspapers, which were the Chicago Defender – which was the first black paper in 1905, and it was successful—, the Pittsburgh Courier, and Michigan Chronicle, and the Memphis Tri-state Defender. So that's the home that the Atlanta World is in now. And they have suspended publication altogether, but they have the digital daily, so it's still the Atlanta Daily World. And when we launched our Website in 1999, that's why we kept "daily" in the name too, because we could update and add to it every day too.

Interviewer: What do you think today is the roll of and, I guess, the balance between media that's targeted toward one particular community or one viewpoint vs. sort of all-encompassing, or attempting to be all-encompassing?

Scott: Well, I think that you need to have both. I think that there needs to be a kind of a caucus voice, if you will—for women, for people of color, or, you know, different ethnic groups, and then there needs to be the broader umbrella voice that includes them all, So, but I do think that they're all useful and good to have.

Interviewer: Well, that's great. And thank you so much for sharing your story and your family's story with us and allowing us to tell your dad's story here at the museum. I really appreciate it.

Scott: That's great. I appreciate you taking the time to let me tell it. As I'm in the process of trying to write it down now. So hopefully this time next year I'll have a book to share.

Interviewer: And we'll share a copy of this interview.

Scott: Oh wonderful. That's be great.

Interviewer: It will hopefully be helpful when you're working on the book.

Scott: Yes, absolutely. Thank you.