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Interview With Dr. Stewart

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An Interview with Dr. Stewart

Born August 7, 1934 in his grandfather's house in Acton, Tx. in Hood county (a rural community). "I was born...in my grandfather's house--I didn't have the benefit of being born in a hospital, if that's a benefit." An only child.

He didn't always live in Acton before he started school, but he attended Acton common school (elementary), which was a rural school about 100 ft. from his home. The school was a traditional 3-room, white frame building. The school only went through grade 10, and by the time he completed his work there (7 years) it was reduced to 8 grades and 2 rooms. System back then only provided for 11 grades, but while he was still in elementary school, the rule was changed to give students a choice of going 11 or 12 years. He actually went only 11 years because of the transition period of the change which occurred when he was in the 3rd or 4th grade.

Had this to say concerning his experience in the Acton school: "I might add at this point that I'm very proud of the heritage I have from attending this kind of school. It wasn't all bad, I can assure you; I think that having 3 or 4 grades in a classroom has some advantages. That may have been the forerunner of modern day grouping."

He did remember his first grade teacher, Ms. Thedford. In fact, he mentioned that she had been present when he received his doctor's degree; she happened to be there to see a relative of hers receiving a master's degree. He encountered his first male teacher in the 5-7 grade, but only remembered having women teachers in the 8th grade. Both of his parents were teachers in the Acton school when he began in the first grade. His father was also the principal--under a system called "teacherage". He remembered having class under his mother for at least one year, and had American History under his dad during his junior year in high school. His father became county judge and school superintendent when Dr. Stewart was in the 2nd or 3rd grade.

His first experience with bussing was when he attended Granbury High School, riding the bus from Acton for a distance of about 8 miles. After attending his freshman and sophomore years at Granbury, the family moved to Lipan, also in Hood Co., to complete his last two years of high school. His dad had gone back into school business.
He had promised the voters that he would resign after 2 terms. He was elementary principal at Lipan and taught at the high school, while his mother still remained in Acton, teaching there for 1½ more years (his dad drove back and forth during this time). He had a big family.

Besides his parents, Dr. Stewart had other relatives in the field of education. All of his father's brothers(2) and sisters(2) taught, as well as his dad's mother. His mom's brother taught as a young man and then went into law and served 34 years as a district attorney.

When questioned as to the period in his life that he realized his career objective, Dr. Stewart said that it was his first semester of his freshman year in college. He told about a professor who he thought had influenced him to reach this decision:

"I think (I decided) largely on the basis of one professor I had, whom I thought was a great teacher. I was influenced somewhat by him. I think most people point to individuals that have influenced their lives and I think in many cases, teachers fall in that category of people—that we say have influenced us. So that was the case with me during that period of time.....I don't mean that he influenced me by telling me I ought to be a teacher; he influenced me by example and by what he was doing in the field of education."

When asked if his parents had any influence on this decision Dr. Stewart replied, "No." He said they did not influence him one way or the other.

Other fields of study Dr. Stewart considered going into were civil engineering and business administration. When he first entered college he took general courses, as he believes is typical of most freshmen.

When asked if he had always planned on attending college Dr. Stewart said there was never any question about it. He said that although he couldn't think of a specific event or time that his parents influenced him toward college, he felt the environment he was brought up in influenced his going to college. He recognized the importance of it and his parents knew he did—it was just an accepted fact.

Dr. Stewart's main sports involvement in school was in basketball and baseball.
However, he did play football at Granbury during his sophomore year. He played basketball and baseball all four years of high school. Granbury had no baseball team, so he played on an American Legion team, which was very strong during this time. Lipan did have a baseball team at the high school and he continued to play on the county team during the summer. For two years, he played on three baseball teams—school, American Legion, and an independent team at Lipan. He played both left-field and center-field.

Basketball was the big sport at Lipan, which was the only town in the county that had a gym. They had some very strong teams and made it to the regional tournament both his junior and senior years; should have made it to the state tournament his senior year—got beat by 4 points in their first game at the regional tournament by the team who went on to represent their region at the state tourney. Dr. Stewart played the guard position, in Class B competition.

He explained his less spectacular performance in football on his small stature—he was only 16 when he graduated from high school. Also, the team had no real coach—a man who was principal and taught, and a citizen made up the coaching staff. He said it was not set up like it is today in the schools.

Dr. Stewart had this to say about his academic performance: "I don't say this boastfully, I say it with a certain amount of pride, --- I had a pretty good record in school, both in public school and college. But this was one of my problems—I was interested in most all areas and therefore, it was difficult to really find something I didn't like; so that may of had something to do with my decision to get into the field of education, because I could still maintain contact, I saw this as an opportunity to maintain contact with the total field of education."

He said that he really liked mathematics, which is probably why he thought he would like engineering as a career. But then, he could say that about most all subjects.

From Lipan, he attended John Tarleton Jr. College for 1½ years (located in Stephenville, about 25-30 miles from Lipan).
He spoke of the junior college as being one of the finest in the state at that time with great emphasis on quality. It was and still is part of the Texas A & M system, although the name has been changed to Tarleton State University. UTA was then a jr. college and was a sister to John Tarleton, both being agriculture schools. John Tarleton had about 1200 students then. He did not graduate from J.T., and regrets it even to this day. However, he says it was just one of those situations—he wanted to take a full load in the Spring, but could only transfer 7 more hours to a senior institution. This would have defeated his objective of finishing college in three years. (he had accumulated 59 hrs. up to the spring semester and could only transfer 66). He did play basketball while at John Tarleton, who had a very rich heritage in athletics and had established good basketball records.

From J.T. he transferred to North Texas State. When asked why, he said that there was no question at that time that North Texas was one of the strongest colleges in education. It stood out and had quite a reputation Stewart said. Also, he said he was limited to considering state schools because of cost. While attending North Texas, he worked in a grocery store mopping floors, checking groceries and delivering them.

His first job in education was as custodian of the Acton school in the 7th and 8th grade. The school had the old-fashioned wood, "pop belly" stove and Stewart's job was to see that the fires were always burning, as well as sweeping the floors. He said he remembers getting up at 5:00 and having to get to the school in time to get the fires going and to see that there was plenty of wood for the day. Other boys were allowed to assist him in bringing the wood in and as Stewart said, "that always was good because they liked—we liked to get out of school".

Stewart said school back then started about 8:00. He says he wishes his boys today could go back and follow him around for a day to see the advantages they do have, although he doesn't feel he was unduly limited. He states, "What happens to an individual depends a lot on the individual anyway."
When asked if his experience in the small classroom had influenced his educational views Stewart stated that he thought his views were influenced more from professional study and experience. He believes you can't just go down the line and say that every class should be small—it's situational, he says.

Stewart said that once he decided to go into the field of education, he realized that he would need more than one degree. He said his realization of getting started on a first graduate degree came almost immediately after his career decision and this is the plan of action he took. He said he could relate this decision to his being around a lot of educators in his lifetime and seeing the significance of a graduate degree. He states that a master's degree was certainly not as common as it now is. However, he didn't start work on his master's degree right after finishing his B.A. work. He worked a summer for "Triple A" (now P.M.A.) surveying crops for allotment purposes. In the fall he began his first teaching experience and began work on his M.A. degree the following summer.