

ARTHUR MEREDITH WALTERS

My name is Arthur Meredith Walters and I was born to Thomas and Mabel Vena Meredith on November 6, 1918.

My grandfather and father were farmers. My father owned the only land in Kentucky by a person of color and I grew up on the 60 acre farm. There were individuals in the area that owned homes and lots but so far as a farm that made money, my father was the first and only person during that time to do so. I soon found out there was no time to play because there was always work that needed to be done.

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One teacher taught eight grades and each class came up for a 20 minute presentation. No accolades were given for being gifted. However, during those eight years, I skipped two grades. The beauty of being in one room was, if you missed something, you could hear the 20 minutes presentation of the class you missed.

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In 1939, I graduated from high school as the Valedictorian of my class. In the fall of that year, I entered Kentucky State College, which was all black. My major was Elementary Education. The reason I selected this major was because I had been taught by all women teachers and I thought there should be some male role models. I decided I was going to change that

by becoming a teacher and an administrator of an elementary school. I qualified at Colorado College to teach in Kentucky, Tennessee and Indiana.

In My first year of college, I worked two jobs. I had received a scholarship from the American Baptist Youth Group for \$50.00 and that is what I took to Kentucky State my first year. I lived in a cold water flat that my pastor recommended. A lot of students that were poor and without financial resources lived there. I soon got a job working at a room and board for state workers in town. I would go there on weekends and clean the house, wash dishes, mop and wax the floors. I also had a job on campus checking inventory of new books coming in and cataloging them on the Dewey Decimal System. I also checked out books to students who came to the library. It was there that I met my wife, Noralee. She was from Louisville and knew nothing about the country. She was a city girl.

After my first year, I made the honor roll and stayed on the honor roll during the three and half years I was at Kentucky State. I was drafted into the military at the end of my junior year and was assigned to Fort Carson, Colorado. I then transferred my credits to Colorado College, integrating the all white private school. The people in the school were very welcoming. There was no discrimination on campus or among the professors that I discerned. I lived in the Bachelor's Officers Quarters at Fort Carson. I was a Captain and going to school under the GI Bill. Although I went into the Army as a recruit, I was soon promoted to Corporal and was able to use some of my teaching skills with the recruits.

I became a commissioned officer and married Noralee on September 6, 1954. We received a military assignment to the Philippines. I became the Battalion Commander near Clarksville Air Force. I retired from the army in 1963-64. I then attended the University of Louisville and graduated with a degree in Public School Administration.

Noralee and I moved to the James Taylor Subdivision . We had three children, all college graduates, and a total of five grandchildren.

It was during my last six months at the University of Louisville that I was called by Charles T. Steel, the Director of the Louisville Urban League for an interview. The position was for the Industrial Relations Secretary. At my suggestion the title was later changed to Director of Economic Development. When I was asked what salary I would accept, I told them I would accept whatever salary they had for the position for one year, at the end of one year, I would tell them what it would take to keep me. Mr. Steele and I made a good team.

I think we have traveled a long distance but we still have not reached the promised land. First we need to understand how to distinguish prejudice and discriminatory practices in the behavior pattern of individuals. We have to become sophisticated enough to analyze situations and to plan before we start to challenge something we do not understand. We must address these issues together as a partnership to come to a satisfactory outcome. That is my philosophy and it works for me.

One of the problems I see is that people of color are rapidly retiring and there is very little in the pipeline to replace them. And we need to concentrate on replacing them by providing education for our young people.

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Printed out: June 8 for review

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James Taylor Subdivision
Interviewed xxxxxx

Arthur Meredith Walters

(b. 1918)

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I grew up with an older sister and a younger brother. Their farm was located at Magnolia, Kentucky, near Lincoln National Park. (There are several Lincoln park sites in that area. Please specify which one.)

My father grew tobacco as his "money crop." He also grew corn, alfalfa, hay and raised hogs and cows. We butchered cows and hogs on the farm. There was a smokehouse where pork and sausage were cured. When my mother made sausage, I was responsible for turning the handle to grind the meat. I helped to carry the food she canned — preserves, pickles, sauerkraut — that were packed into stone jars. We never had a hungry day in our lives.

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Arthur's grandfather and father were farmers. His father owned the only land in Kentucky by a person of color and he grew up on the 60 acre farm. There were individuals in the area that owned homes and lots but so far as a farm that made money, his father was the first and only person of color during that time to do so. Arthur soon found out there was no time to play because there was always work that needed to be done.

He grew up with an older sister, Florence Carter and a younger brother Their farm was located in the Magnolia, Kentucky area, near Lincoln National Park. At that time the post office had a rule that mail could not be delivered to people who lived on private property, so they had to go a half mile to a mailbox to pick up their mail.

His father grew tobacco as his money crop. He also grew corn, alfalfa, hay and raised hogs and cows. They butchered cows and hogs on the farm. There was a smokehouse where sausage was cured. When his mother made sausage, Arthur was responsible for turning the handle of the grinder to grind the meat. She also canned preserves, pickles and sauerkraut and packed them into stone jars. They never had a hungry day in their lives.

Arthur attended Buffalo Elementary School which was four miles one way from his father's farm. He, his sister and brother walked it every day. In the winter at school, the first order of the day was not reading, writing or arithmetic; it was bringing in coal from the schoolyard to stoke a pot bellied stove that sat in one corner of the room. It was the only source of heat they had but once the stove got warm there was not a worry about keeping warm.

One teacher taught eight grades and each class came up for a 20 minute presentation. No accolades were given for being gifted. However, twice during those eight grades, Arthur was allowed to skip grades twice.

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In his first year of college, Arthur worked two jobs. He had received a scholarship from the American Baptist Youth Group for \$50.00 and that is what he took to Kentucky State his first year. He lived in¹² cold water flat that his pastor recommended to him. A lot of students that were poor and without financial resources lived there. Arthur soon got a job working at a room and board for state workers in town. He would go there on weekends and clean the house, wash dishes, mop and wax the floors, whatever was necessary to be done. He also had a job on campus checking inventory of new books coming in and cataloging them on the Dewey Decimal System. He also checked out books to students who came to the library. It was there that he met his wife, Noralee. She was from Louisville and knew nothing about the country. She was a city girl.

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He became a commissioned officer and married Noralee September 6, 1954. They received a military assignment to the Philippine Island. This was great duty because they had servants that were paid for by the military. He became the Battalion Commander atnear Clarksville Air Force. He later served at nearly every military installation in the United States that had a significant engineering function. His primary MOS became Operations Officer, the individual who plans projects, allocates resources for projects and supervise the completion of the project. He retired from the army in 1963-64. He then attended the University of Louisville and graduated with a degree in Public School Administration. He and his wife had three children, a son Reggie, two daughters, Arthurlee who insisted on being called Artie,

and Michelle. They are all college graduates and have given Arthur and Noralee five grandchildren.

It was during his last six months at the University of Louisville that he was called for an interview by Charles T. Steel, the Director of the Louisville Urban League. The position was for the Industrial Relations Secretary. At Arthur's suggestion the title was later changed to Director of Economic Development. When asked what salary he would accept, Arthur told them he would accept whatever salary they had for the position for one year, at the end of one year, he would tell them what it would take to keep him. This turned out to be a good position as Arthur and Mr. Steele made a good team, he was able to do things he had not done before. And soon developed a vision about where he was going and some rationale for why he was going there.

Arthur thinks we have traveled a long distance but still have not reached the promise land. First we need to understand how to distinguish prejudice and discriminatory practices in the behavior pattern of individuals. There is still this concept of power brokers, having meetings behind closed doors. They are supposed to include everyone but the decisions have already been made. So we have to become sophisticated enough to prepare to analyze situations, to plan before we start to challenge something we do not understand. "I can't speak to you unless I know your hurt". Together people must plan how they will address these issues; it must be a partnership, joint planning and joint publicity about the rationale behind the decision. It is more about what the outcome is going to be than about the people involved in the outcome.

He believes there are certain jobs we have traditionally done as slaves and that is still so. We have got to start thinking clearly, plan well, coalesce with groups that can be educated to our way of thinking and help you understand what it is all about. It is not about the individual, it is about making sure that tomorrow is going to be better than today for a lot of people, including the people that are doing the planning and implementation.

One of the problems Arthur sees coming is that people of color are rapidly retiring and there are very few people in the pipeline that will replace those retiring. Our children and grand children are being taught by predominantly white teachers. He thinks the educational process should be neutral in terms of what can be developed in the student's character and intelligence that ought to be without regard to any force that's been demonstrated. We have an example of what can be done with rough timber. It can be trimmed, placed in the right place and make a beautiful building. And that's what we should be working on. He still worries about the way we

deal with problem children in school. When they are put out of the classroom or suspended, they are not going to learn. He thinks we will pay for that process with more incarcerated youth. When they are released, they are bitter and no better than when they went in.

Arthur belonged to two Greek letter organizations, Alpha Phi Alpha he joined his second year in college. He first heard of Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity from the late A.B. Harris and joined in 1979. He had never heard of Sigma at that time. It may have been because the fraternity's philosophy was not to market or publicize the composition of its members so the basic message of Sigma Pi Phi Fraternity, Psi Boule' Chapter in Louisville had a lot of individuals doing things in the community. The things they were doing do not tie into Sigma Phi Pi. That rationale has been changed. The organization tries to partnership and work with other local organizations to get the message out. Sigma is an organization that is comprised of quality people because they say, 'we pride ourselves in being the talented ten of the nation's population of people of color'.

WOLK
Arthur has been a member of the organization for 25 years now. There are no chapters on campus because this is a graduate fraternity. Unless it's waived, one, you must be a college graduate. Two, you must have contributed significantly to your field of endeavor or to the community's needs in which you reside. And that must be documented as you get there. The exception to that is, if an individual is outstanding, despite their absence of an undergraduate degree, has contributed significantly, they may be considered. That has to be recommended by the chapter and the executive committee of the national body. No one can apply for membership; they must be selected by a member that is already a part of Sigma Pi Phi. W.E. Dubois, George Washington Carver and people like Vernon Jordan are men of stature and men of accomplishment.

MARY OF US ALB
Arthur is always proud to wear the Sigma Pi Phi fraternity pin and to say that he is a member. He has held the position of Grapter, which is the individual that writes all of the news and submit it to a national journal. He served in this position for four years and was singled out as being one of the outstanding Grapter's of the Central Region. He has served on the Finance Committee, the Membership Committee and chaired the Budget Committee. Arthur thinks Sigma Pi Phi was a little late getting out of the starting gate so the finish line is a little farther away than it would be had they started with the other groups. He is optimistic that they will get there since they have had a change in philosophy about what the fraternity will do in the future. Because of the fellowship, socialization, lifestyle and quality individuals that are members, his two favorite groups are Sigma Pi Phi and the Esquire Club.

Arthur served in the U.S. Army for 20 years, 24 years with the Louisville Urban League and 10 years in a consulting role. He worked with David Jones to bring the Presbyterian Church of New York and Atlanta to Louisville. His original dream was to be an individual that organized a preparatory school. It was to allow young people to choose their life's endeavors, not based on what someone said, but through the exposure to these things. He thinks that is something Sigma is doing. They help sponsor individuals and give scholarships through the Black Achiever's Program.

Arthur has worked with a number of organizations in Louisville and has received many awards and recognitions. He is well thought of in the community. When he retired, the Louisville Urban League gave him a scrapbook with newspaper articles that list all of the awards he has received over the 23 years he worked at the Urban League. Many politicians and community leaders turned out to wish him well in retirement. He says he takes pride in the distance the Urban League has covered during the two plus decade of his association. He leaves in place some bridges of understanding and respect that helped span the gap between racial and ethnic groups. He leaves a task unfinished because the goal of equality for all Americans remains a goal to be sought, found and possessed. He passes to his successor the unfinished task, but a foundation on which to build as he has tried to build during his stay. For both the challenge and the opportunity to serve, he shall remain eternally grateful.

Urban League's Arthur Walters dies

Peter Smith psmith@courier-journal.com

Ex-director 'built

a lot of bridges'

By Peter Smith

psmith@courier-journal.com

The Courier-Journal

When Arthur M. Walters returned to his native Kentucky in the 1960s as a decorated Army officer and veteran of two wars, he found he was refused service at Louisville restaurants.

He chose to channel his indignation into change rather than rage.

Walters, who died Saturday at 91, was executive director of the Louisville Urban League from 1970-87. For seven years before that, he was its economic specialist, finding jobs for hundreds of people each year as he prodded and persuaded businesses to open job opportunities to black workers.

"What we said we were fighting for, we found more out of the continental United States than the country we came from," Walters, a veteran of World War II and the Korean War, told former Courier-Journal columnist Bob Hill. "With what I went through, I should be a very bitter man, but I'm not. What you do is come out of negative experiences with wisdom, and lessons learned, and you apply those to the arena of change."

Ben Richmond, president of the Louisville Urban League, said Walters' death is a loss to him because he continued to give strong advice on how to set goals and achievement.

"He built a lot of bridges among a lot of different groups to help them understand what it means to be tolerant, to help people work together," he said.

Walters' efforts to break down segregation in the 1960s took place through relentless efforts to open up opportunities for African Americans to obtain jobs — and job training — where they had been denied.

"He was very similar to Louis Coleman," Richmond said, referring to the fiery leader of regular protests, who died in 2008. "The difference is he (Walters) didn't carry a bullhorn. His bullhorn was getting into the boardrooms and places of influence and talking about solutions."

In 1969, for example, Walters led efforts to place 345 workers in jobs paying them a combined paycheck of more than \$2million, according to Urban League statistics reported at the time.

"He was one of the old-timers who believed in helping his people," said Ollie Moore, who obtained an apprenticeship as a machinist with American Saw & Tool through a referral from Walters in the 1960s.

"He saw that I was serious about trying to better myself, and he just helped me out," Moore said Monday, recalling that Walters observed his initiative in taking night courses to prepare for such work even though jobs for black machinists were scarce at the time. Moore worked eight years at the company before moving on to Ford, where he retired after 31 years as a toolmaker.

Walters worked for years to persuade area companies to train and recruit black workers.

"We have convinced the 'doubting Thomases' that disadvantaged people can be good employees, and that the only way to determine if they can perform is to put them on jobs," he told the Louisville Times in 1970.

The Louisville Urban League has worked since 1921 to help disadvantaged people attain jobs, homes and other economic achievements. It is an affiliate of the National Urban League.

Born in Magnolia, Ky., Walters grew up on his father's 120-acre LaRue County farm and began working in tobacco fields at an early age. He attended a one-room schoolhouse before graduating as valedictorian at Bond-Washington High School. He was attending Kentucky State College when he entered the Army during World War II.

"I made a decision to maximize the fact that I was in the military since I couldn't do anything about it," he once recalled. "But I had no idea it would be a 20-year career."

He started out working in an engineering unit of black soldiers — led by white soldiers. He retired in the 1960s as a lieutenant colonel. He completed his undergraduate education while in the Army.

His military recognitions including the Medal of Merit, the Bronze Star for heroism, the Soldier's Medal for Bravery, the American Campaign Medal, the European-African Middle Eastern Campaign Medal with four bronze stars and the World War II Victory Medal.

The Louisville Urban League named its Arthur M. Walters Champion of Diversity Award in his honor.

Walters' death at St. Joseph Hospital in Lexington followed an extended illness, according to the Urban League.

Walters was preceded in death by his parents, brother, sister and first wife of 55 years, NoraLee Bryant Walters. He is survived by his wife of six years, Mary Anne Walters; his three children, Reggie Walters, Artye DuLaney and Michele Barnett; two stepchildren, Lisa Higgins-Hord and Anthony Higgins; five grandchildren and three step grandchildren.

Visitation will be Wednesday from 6-8 p.m. at A.D. Porter & Sons Funeral Home, 4501 Bardstown Road. Visitation will continue on Thursday at Green Castle Baptist Church, 4790 Murphy Lane, from 11 a.m. to 1 p.m., followed by the funeral there at 1 p.m.

Reporter Peter Smith can be reached at (502) 582-4469.