

UNIFIED COMMITTEE FOR AFRO-AMERICAN CONTRIBUTIONS
Oral History Documentation Project

Carlton Wendell Dyson
Owner of Antenna-Vision

March 13, 2025
Interviewed by Alma Jordon
at the U.S.C.T. Interpretive Center
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Alma Jordon ([00:03](#)):

Good afternoon. My name is Alma Jordon and today is March 13, 2025. We are at the United States Colored Troop Interpretive Center in Lexington Park, Maryland. I have with me today?

Carlton Dyson ([00:23](#)):

It's Carlton Dyson.

Alma Jordon ([00:25](#)):

Okay, thank you. We have some other members of our group today.

Merideth Taylor ([00:32](#)):

Merideth Taylor.

Anna Mosley ([00:34](#)):

Anna Mosley.

Alma Jordon ([00:35](#)):

Okay. We are all from Unified Committee for Afro-American Contributions. Okay. Carlton, can you tell me, give me your full name, you've just given it to me, but give it to me.

Carlton Dyson ([00:56](#)):

It's Carlton Wendell Dyson.

Alma Jordon ([01:01](#)):

Okay, thank you. Tell me about your people and where you were raised.

Carlton Dyson ([01:04](#)):

I was actually raised in Park Hall, Maryland. My parents are generally from that area. My mother was from Park Hall Hermanville area, whereas my father grew up in Pearson at his younger age before he moved to Prince George's County. Then he moved back to Pearson area after the military base was built. Actually before the base was built, he moved back to the area. He left again to go to stay in Prince George's to work at the University of Maryland. He came back just a little bit before the building of the base and then after that he acquired property south of that in Park Hall, and that's where he moved and lived the rest of his life out at.

Alma Jordon ([01:49](#)):

Okay. Carlton, what is your earliest memory of anything?

Carlton Dyson ([01:56](#)):

Probably when I was only about four years of age. I spent a lot of time with my grandfather. I was the youngest of 12, so of course in a crowded house I was trying to find someplace else to go. My grandfather lived next door so I can remember he and I working a little bit of gardening, a little bit of farming, a little bit of gardening. We did other things like repairs on the home and on the house. He was one of those ace of all trades. He did plumbing, carpentry, the plumbing that they had at his time, and even though it wasn't central system, but he pretty much told me how to do all those things, the basics of all of it.

Alma Jordon ([02:36](#)):

Okay. Tell me about your early education.

Carlton Dyson ([02:40](#)):

I attended school, elementary Park Hall at then when they built a new middle school, Spring Ridge, excited about going to a new school, only lived a half mile from it. Then I went to Great Mills High School and graduated there. As far as additional college education, I took other qualification courses for different things in my career, but I didn't pursue a full-time college education.

Alma Jordon ([03:04](#)):

Okay. What other education did you pursue?

Carlton Dyson ([03:09](#)):

I actually have training to minister bible school, which is actually a life-long course. You'll never graduate from it. You continue to learn in the course. I took also additional training in radio, TV repair, cable theory and communications, and other things related to cable communication networking.

Alma Jordon ([03:34](#)):

Okay. What did you dream about being when you became an adult?

Carlton Dyson ([03:41](#)):

The funny thing about that is that I did not intend to pursue a career in the electronic industry from the standpoint of physical point. I was expecting to go to work for Maryland State Police in the technical portion of the work. While waiting on a job assignment, I happened to notice one day that there was an opening for someone in the cable field, for technician in the cable field. I applied and got the job and

then being actually my full-time job, it was in cable. After I left that I became a contractor in the cable industry, at the same time while I operating my own private business.

Alma Jordon ([04:22](#)):

Okay. Well good. Tell me more about your business and how you really got started in it.

Carlton Dyson ([04:31](#)):

Well, actually my work was always a hobby. I never saw it as a means of a living, though it turned out to be that. Even to this day, I enjoy being able to take time to help other people. It's that thing about the satisfaction of seeing that a product at the end actually works. In servicing and helping other people with electronics things, I decided, Hey, let's just make a living with this at the same time. It gives me freedom and opportunity that I'm not pinned down, to be able to take out time to do other things, to help individuals in the community.

([05:06](#)):

I have actually been doing the electronics, audio, video and electrical work now since I was actually about 13, 14 years of age. When I actually started my business in electronics, it was wiring for cable, at the time antenna systems, telephone systems, and alarm systems. I had a ten-speed bike with a basket on the back of it and I'd put my tools in it and pedal it to jobs up to as much as seven, eight miles away from home. Old thing called brace and bit. You drill all the holes, run the wires. I was certainly happy when it came out with electric drills and then cordless drills I could use. Muscles popped out from spinning that brace and bit so long. It kept growing and as time went on and technology changed, I continued to try to adapt with that to provide the service to individuals in the community.

Alma Jordon ([06:00](#)):

What is the name of your business?

Carlton Dyson ([06:02](#)):

My company is actually titled Antenna-Vision. The name quote came from the beginning was the fact that you using an antenna to see things, so I came up with the title Antenna-Vision.

Alma Jordon ([06:14](#)):

Mm-hmm. You actually started, your business was actually started because you have been doing types of work in that area.

Carlton Dyson ([06:27](#)):

Yeah, it started out with family. I grew up in an area where at least a two-mile stretch of road was all family. When TV came about before me, but then when everybody started to get them and they wanted a good TV, I started building and installing antenna systems. Started out even actually making antennas. At the time we only had Channel 5 in Washington D.C. and six in Richmond, Virginia. I used to take, like my grandfather showed me, take a stick, take a piece of twin lead wire, figure out the frequency for that antenna, and make a half wavelength antenna. It would stick those on in the neighbors', family members' houses so they could watch TV. That's how I started out and it just started growing from that.

Alma Jordon ([07:13](#)):

Oh my goodness, that sounds really interesting. Well, did you actually develop a business plan for your business?

Carlton Dyson ([07:22](#)):

It was never really a full plan. It was really a matter of, just as it is now, to providing the service needed in the community. I do say county, but just not county because through the years my business has stretched that I worked from Miami, Florida all the way to Boston. Now I'm older, I don't want to travel as far, so I try not do anything more than an hour away. It was not so much business strategy because I never saw it as a means to an end to become wealthy. It was more providing the service to people that they need. The money comes naturally. Yes, you do have to have money, you have to have that, and you have to be a gold winner in business, but that was never really important thing to me. If so, you'd be interviewing me from my mansion.

Alma Jordon ([08:13](#)):

Well, did you actually go to any training or school for electronics?

Carlton Dyson ([08:26](#)):

I went to school for, while in high school I did do vo-tech. I took audio, video repair and radio, TV, technical repair. Then through cable, there's qualification courses and certification courses that you have to take. As the industry changes, you have to go back and become re-qualified to work with the equipment to do the installation and do repairs. I've just done that, whatever it take to get certification to work on new equipment and new technology.

Alma Jordon ([08:58](#)):

I see. Okay. You're constantly needing to get re-certified in different areas of your business. Well, who actually are your customers? You mentioned family, but can you extend on that a little bit, expand I should say?

Carlton Dyson ([09:16](#)):

Yeah, it's actually, I've only advertised and did one advertisement since 1980. I've only done one ad through the local papers. My customers are all word of mouth. My customers are individuals that have lived and family members that have lived here through the years. I'm doing some of their great-grandchildren. I have other customers that have moved to the area. A great increase in my business came about when NAVAIR moved to this area. Now I'm doing ones that moved here from NAVAIR, I'm doing work for their grandchildren. Yeah.

Alma Jordon ([09:59](#)):

Okay. One of my questions were who are your customers, so that sort of explains your customers. You did mention that initially you were traveling with your business, but basically it's all locally now.

Carlton Dyson ([10:15](#)):

Mm-hmm. Yeah, primarily locally now. When I traveled it was because of the cable contracts. We would go in new areas to build new systems. Pretty much while we were there, we were hiring new individuals in the area, train them in the cable industry. Once we get the system built, we leave them behind to operate it and we move on to the next location.

Alma Jordon ([10:39](#)):

Well, do you have employees that actually work for or with you?

Carlton Dyson ([10:45](#)):

Not anymore. I guess that's one habit I got from my father. He was a waterman. He always was a waterman alone. He never had anyone working on the boat with him. That way you are totally responsible for what you do. You're totally responsible for your outcome. You're totally responsible for only your safety. I've kept the same attitude when it comes to business. Yes, I've hired individuals from time to time to work for me. In the cable industry, of course, I had to hire, I think it was a total of 17 workers I may have had.

Alma Jordon ([11:21](#)):

Mm-hmm.

Carlton Dyson ([11:21](#)):

As far as now, I'm solo.

Alma Jordon ([11:25](#)):

Mm-hmm. Okay. Okay. Do you basically have sort of a motto for your business or is it sort of just helping people?

Carlton Dyson ([11:40](#)):

It's really just a matter of helping people. It's not to me about, it's business, but it's really a hobby and a pledge of seeing people happy when you're done.

Alma Jordon ([11:57](#)):

Mm-hmm. Therefore, as your business has grown now, are you planning to grow it anymore or try to grow it anymore?

Carlton Dyson ([12:09](#)):

If I could, I would retire completely tomorrow. When you've serviced primarily from Mechanicsville, Virginia to Northern Virginia and Baltimore area, with the number of customers I have and their children and grandchildren, they won't let me retire. My father was a waterman. He finally came off the water completely when he was about 90 years of age. I don't plan on being on anyone's roof or anyone's attic at 90 years of age, but I think I'll continue working.

Alma Jordon ([12:43](#)):

Oh okay. Well, what does a business day actually look like for you, your business day?

Carlton Dyson ([12:52](#)):

I tried to plan it, but now most of my work is service-related. We don't know for sure, I don't know for sure what's going to take place once I get to a call. It could be something simple, it could be something complicated. I have to play it by ear when I get there. I try to schedule no more than three calls a day, place three hours in between them. I always have a waiting list if someone's like, "Get to me as soon as

you can," so I might have to squeeze them in between one of those three hours if I get a time slot to put them in.

Alma Jordon ([13:23](#)):

Mm-hmm. Okay. As a minority business, have you had any challenges?

Carlton Dyson ([13:32](#)):

I'm going to be honest with you. I recognize from the beginning when I first started doing the work, I would always have to do my work a little better than the next company out there. Always give the customer a little more than what they paid for. I've always had to do that. Starting out, one of the challenges was for the first about four years I operated, I had to operate without a license. They wouldn't issue me one. They would not issue me a license in this county. I kept going back repeatedly to get a license and they kept telling me because I was not living in a home at the time, I was living in an apartment, not far from right here, actually about 500 feet away I lived in the original, or what they call flat tops here. They said because I live in an apartment, I could not operate a business. I'm like, "But I'm not doing any business out of my apartment. I'm doing service work." "No, you can't get a license."

([14:28](#)):

At that time, I was the only minority to provide that service in this area. We're speaking of the eighties, it's not that far along about the eighties. Only because I was persistent and one day I went and called to see about getting a license, and a new young lady in the office answered the phone to me, "Sure you can get a license, come up and get it." I went to get the license, the gentleman that was blocking me each time, I can't even remember his name, he came in from his lunch break and he saw me getting a license. I quickly signed a check, handed it to her and she stamped it and he asked her, "What are you doing?" She says, "I'm issuing him a license." "Well, he can't get a license." She says, "Well, why not," and she named four or five other businesses who worked out of apartments in the area. He says, "Well, since you were yesterday, I guess he's got it."

([15:16](#)):

Now it's like every year I make sure that at least 90 days before the license was renewed, I go and renew my license because it took me actually about five years to obtain a license in St. Mary's County.

Alma Jordon ([15:26](#)):

My goodness. That was a challenge.

Carlton Dyson ([15:31](#)):

Yeah, it was.

Alma Jordon ([15:33](#)):

Any other major challenges that you would like to share as far as being a minority business owner?

Carlton Dyson ([15:42](#)):

Well, even when I worked three or four years after I came out of high school, I went to work for the cable company when I was trying to get a position from Maryland State Police and it didn't go through. I would go on calls to do a call and it would be something that was technical, real major trouble they had to be take troubleshooting for. I can recall a few times when individuals said, "Well, I thought they going to send somebody that knew how to fix this." "Well, they sent me." "Yeah, but they said they were going

to send one of the best technicians." "Yeah, that's why I'm here." "No, you can't be." "Why not?" "Well, I just thought they would be sending someone else."

(16:27):

It would get to the point I would just say, "You were not expecting them to send someone who's Afro-American, were you?" They would say, "Well, I got to be honest with you. Yeah, that's what it was." After they get finished, they would be like, "Well, I got friends that need this done, so I'll make sure when they call to come the company, next time they have you come out to do it." I knew that I had to be really good at what I was doing because at the time there was not a lot of minorities doing the electronic repair work in the area.

Alma Jordon (16:55):

Mm-hmm. That is very interesting and thanks for sharing all of that. As a business owner, what legacy would you like to leave for other younger minority business people?

Carlton Dyson (17:12):

I want them to see that though I had challenges, never give up. I did not give up. I want them to know that while work for finances are important, but contributing to the community by helping in assisting individuals with the skills you have, that's the important thing. I tell individuals that I hire temporary to work for me all the time or others that I might give work to, don't be concerned about the finances. If you do the job really good and you give them a little more than what they're supposed to get, don't worry about it. The financial part will take care of itself. Never be anxious or excited about the finances. It's important, but be concerned about giving the customer a good product, something that when you're finished, they can smile about and you can smile about also.

Alma Jordon (18:04):

Well thank you because that sort of covers my next question is your responsibility toward the community. I think you've basically shared that, that the community is of primary importance in most businesses and all businesses, but everybody doesn't, I guess, see it that way.

Carlton Dyson (18:26):

No, no, they don't.

Alma Jordon (18:31):

Well, how do you feel your business, well, you basically shared that too, that your business have given back? You basically have stated that, but if you would like to elaborate.

Carlton Dyson (18:44):

Well, my grandfather taught me a lot of skills and then even through our religious organization, we used to have what we call a quick build, where we would build out actual places of worship. You could come on those sites and they would train you in different building skills. Now it's called a local design committee, so it's different. I learned a lot through them and I volunteered on a lot of those projects and learned additional skills I didn't have along with what my grandfather taught me. Even though I had the business, I spent a greater amount of time in doing volunteer work in the service, whether it was with Habitat for Humanity, Christmas in April, or just finding an individual in the neighborhood that need help, elderly individual who needed a handicap ramp, things such as that.

[\(19:28\)](#):

My wife was my partner in those projects. Her parents, her father died at an early age. Individuals helped them along so their mother told her, "You never, never not help someone who's in need." If I call her and say, "Hey, I had a customer that's elderly and they need a handicap ramp, they can't really afford it. Let's see what we can do." We might go to the lumber yard and say, "Do you have some lumber that you can contribute at a low price," or the family can come together to get material with additional material they might have left over. My wife and I would go build them a handicap ramp.

[\(20:04\)](#):

We might do repairs in their homes. Some projects at Christmas in April just couldn't get to get to those projects, we would help with that, as well as actually help them with Christmas in April when they would have projects. I actually would work as a floater when they would have that. I wouldn't work one particular project. I would float from project to project to see where they need assistance with to help them out. It is just that my father was that way, my wife's mother told her to be that way, I've been that way, so it's important to me to be able to give back and help the community any way you can.

Alma Jordon [\(20:38\)](#):

It sounds like your wife is definitely your partner a lot of times in your business. Did you teach her?

Carlton Dyson [\(20:49\)](#):

I remember recall one time going to one of the places of worship to cut grass, and I brought my wife with me. Older gentleman, he was about 90, he normally cut the grass and he says, "Why do you bring her with you?" I said, "Because she's going to help us cut grass." He says, "Why do you bring her? She's a woman." My wife says, "Can I see your tractor for a minute?" She jumped on the tractor and she started cutting the grass and she's whipping around it, throwing in hydrostatic reverse and trimming close to the hedges. She gets off, she says, "Okay, you can have your tractor back now, but you don't have to do the trimming. I've already cut it close enough." He looks at her, he says, "Sis, I'm not going to ever mess with you again."

[\(21:18\)](#):

The thing is she helped me with a lot of things. She's helped me with my electronic work. She helped me with volunteer and commercial work. She worked officially in food services as a caterer. Many times she'd volunteered to provide the meals and setting up locations for funeral repasts. Since she's helped me, I help her. Most the time we have family gatherings, when all the guys are watching the games, I'm in the kitchen with my wife and the other women preparing the food and getting everything set up. We've always worked hand in hand to be able to help in the community.

Alma Jordon [\(21:54\)](#):

Good. That's very positive. Well, do you feel that community relations has changed over the years, positively or negatively?

Carlton Dyson [\(22:04\)](#):

It's hard to say. In some ways it's positive because we do have organizations like yourself, that you all have here to get the word out. At the same time, our younger individuals don't really see the great importance of community because even when we came up, like I said, it was maybe a mile and a half, two mile stretch, the whole street, the whole road was all family. Families were tighter together and

that was that community. You might extend it out on an older neighborhood, four or five miles away, and there was another community and they work together.

[\(22:36\)](#):

Whereas now families don't grow up and on the same street anymore. They don't see that bond that communities should have. They just don't see that anymore because they never saw it really as the extension and the extensions of their family and then stretching out. Families are spread everywhere now, so you don't see as much community involvement. However, you do have organizations like I was saying, like the one you're with, that's trying to help individuals to see the importance of sharing and community activities. Even if it's no longer that they can't do any work to assist, but at least get the word out. It is difficult to do it now. You would think in a time of greater communications it would be easier, but actually it's harder.

Alma Jordon [\(23:21\)](#):

I can understand where you're coming from.

Carlton Dyson [\(23:22\)](#):

Mm-hmm.

Alma Jordon [\(23:25\)](#):

Yes. Well, what advice would you give someone who's planning to start a business nowadays?

Carlton Dyson [\(23:31\)](#):

Well, my words simple, work hard for the money, but don't let the money be the important thing. I know in speaking with two or three of the professors who are customers or clients, and two of them told me the same thing about three years ago when they go back for their seminars before college would start, and they say they tell individuals straight out, parents straight out, if you have a child that's not really focused on wanting to go to a four-year college, get them involved in the trades.

[\(24:04\)](#):

I'm seeing that. One young man that worked for me through the years. When his son got in his junior year, he said to his, "What do you want to do? What do you want to go to college full-time or get involved in the trades?" I said "Look, go and have him go do like I did, go to the community technical center, take the course in residential house wiring and his senior year, go back before he's about to start his senior year and let the electrical companies and the unions in the Maryland D.C. area know that he's interested. They'll tag him to hold onto him as soon as they get out," and they did. That young man in his first year out of high school and his salary, \$108,000. I say, yes, go for yourself if you even want to work for someone else, but start your own little business on the side. It would never hurt. Have something to fall back on.

[\(24:50\)](#):

That's what I would tell young ones, never be afraid to venture out to on your own business. Even if you have to work with someone else and have that business as something additional, but still never be afraid to start your own business.

Alma Jordon [\(25:03\)](#):

Mm-hmm. Well, is there anything else that you would like to share with us today?

Carlton Dyson ([25:11](#)):

I guess that's about it. As you can tell, I don't talk a lot, I'm shy. [laughs]

Alma Jordon ([25:20](#)):

Well, let me ask the other ladies if they have any questions they'd like to ask.

Merideth Taylor ([25:26](#)):

I don't think so.

Carlton Dyson ([25:33](#)):

Okay.

Alma Jordon ([25:34](#)):

Well, thank you very much Mr. Dyson for sharing with us. I just want to say that I know that you are excellent in electronics, but you're like your grandfather, jack of all trades, and I'm sure that many, many communities appreciate your work. I thank you so much for sharing with us today.

Carlton Dyson ([25:59](#)):

Well, we thank you, I thank you for the interview. I always say we, because there's nothing I do without my wife, that why I always say we. I certainly do it. Thank you all for inviting me today for this interview.

Alma Jordon ([26:11](#)):

Thank you.