

# Biographical Description for The HistoryMakers® Video Oral History with James Avery

PERSON

Avery, James, 1945-2013

**Alternative Names:** James Avery;

**Life Dates:** November 27, 1945-December 31, 2013

**Place of Birth:** Atlantic City, New Jersey, USA

**Residence:** Los Angeles, CA

**Occupations:** Television Actor

## Biographical Note

Born on November 27, 1945, in Atlantic City, New Jersey, James Avery left his hometown after high school to serve in the U.S. Navy in Vietnam from 1968 to 1969. Avery then settled in San Diego, where he wrote poetry and television scripts, winning an Emmy Award for his production of *Ameda Speaks: Poet James Avery*. Avery also received a scholarship from the University of California at San Diego, where he obtained his B.A. degree in drama and literature in 1978. Avery was awarded an honorary doctorate from Virginia State University in 1996.

Throughout his career, spanning over thirty years, as a writer working with a collective group in San Diego, Avery also worked as an actor in television, film, and theater productions. Avery's first acting part came in the role of God in the play *JB* in 1971 at San Diego Community College. After performing in his first acting role, Avery went on to star in the UPN comedy series *Sparks* from 1996 to 1998; and had recurring roles on *The Legend of Tarzan*, Showtime's *Soul Food*, and *The Division* on the Lifetime Network. Avery was best known for his role as the uncle of Will Smith's character on the popular sitcom, *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air*. Avery also played roles as judges on *L.A. Law*, *Night Court*, and *Murder One*. Avery's movie credits included *Dancing in September*; *Dr. Dolittle 2*; and *License to Drive*. Avery performed on stage at the Oregon Shakespeare Festival, playing the lead in *Othello*, among other roles; at the Back Alley and Met Theatres in Los Angeles; and in other productions across the country.

Avery, a seasoned traveler, indulged his passion acting as host of the critically acclaimed PBS series *Going Places*; the program, once public television's highest-rated series, enabled viewers to see different places in the world through Avery's eyes. As host of *Going Places*, Avery had the opportunity to visit such diverse locales as Turkey,

Bali, Madrid, and Yellowstone National Park.

Avery was interviewed by The HistoryMakers on June 24, 2003.

Avery passed away on December 31, 2013 at age 65.

## Related Entries

**Chelsea Junior High School** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Virginia State University** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**University of California, San Diego** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Chelsea Heights School** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Indiana Avenue Elementary School** [STUDENTOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Going Places** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Actor**

**Delete** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from ? to ?]

**Actor**

**Sparks** [EMPLOYEEOF]  
[from 1996 to 1998]

**Actor**