

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
WITH
ROSS SPIELMAN

13 JUNE 1995

MURFREESBORO, TENNESSEE

INTERVIEWED BY REGINA FORSYTHE
FOR THE Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
INTERVIEW #QMS.006

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Albert Gore". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

ALBERT GORE RESEARCH CENTER

MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT



**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH
ROSS SPIELMAN**

Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW #QMS.006

FORSYTHE: This tape is part of the Q.M. Smith collection designated as QMS. 1995.6. This is Regina Forsythe. I am interviewing Mr. Ross Spielman. Today is Tuesday, June 20, 1995. This interview is being conducted in the Ned McWherter Learning Resource Center. How much were you paid an hour?

SPIELMAN: I wasn't paid by the hour. I just got my meals free. But, if they had banquets, we would wait on the tables, and we would be paid a couple of dollars a night.

FORSYTHE: What did you do on the weekend?

SPIELMAN: Occasionally, I'd go home, or I'd go to the home of some classmates. I lived 800 miles away, so I couldn't go home often. But other students would invite me to their homes for the weekend. A lot of times I'd just study, or go to the football game. On Sunday nights, when the students came back, it was kind of tradition for everyone to go to the movies downtown at the Princess Theatre. Kids would always go to church on Sundays - that was the big thing. The local churches would have carpools that would come out to campus, pick up students, and take them to church. That was something that was done with regularity. Most everybody went home, so you just tried to keep yourself occupied. We didn't have many cars on campus then, so you either had to walk to town or stand on the corner at the Baptist church and wait for someone in the town to pick you up. You'd only have to stand there a minute until someone would pick you up. The people in town were very considerate of students. And if they saw you and knew you needed a ride, they'd pick you up and take you out there. Murfreesboro was not as progressive then as it is today. There wasn't all the industry that is here today. It was a sleepy, southern college town. It was a good time to grow up and be in school. It was very pleasant.

FORSYTHE: What about in the summer? Did you go to school here?

SPIELMAN: I worked here one summer. I went to ROTC camp between my junior and senior years. Then, I worked on campus that summer, painting parking lines on the streets, and painting some of the buildings. Most of the summers I went back to Maryland and worked.

FORSYTHE: What was your salary?

SPIELMAN: I don't remember. It wasn't great, but it was good enough to be a job, and I appreciated that. I also got to stay in the dorms free.

FORSYTHE: Did the dormitories have a lot of rules?

SPIELMAN: Well, the men's dormitories didn't have many rules. Noise was probably the big thing. They didn't want you to make a lot of noise. They didn't want you to be destructive. The boys' dorms didn't have that many rules, but the girls' had a lot of rules. The women had to be in at 9:00 p.m. The library closed at 9:00 p.m., so you had to be back in your dorm when the library closed. Weekends, depending on your classification, would determine how late you could be out. On Friday and Saturday nights, seniors could be out until 11:00 p.m. On Sunday nights, you had to be in at 10:30 p.m. - when the movie was over. Freshmen, sophomores, and juniors had to be in earlier than seniors. The girls could not wear any jeans or shorts on campus. They had to wear a dress or skirt. If you were going to physical education class and you were wearing shorts, you had to wear a trench coat over it. You didn't see many girls smoking on campus. Some girls smoked, but not many. Murfreesboro was a dry city, within a dry county. They may have had one little beer place on the edge of town that the kids went to, but there wasn't a problem. Some kids would bring beer on campus, but not many. If they were caught, then they were punished in some way. It was a conservative time to grow up. During my senior year, one night a week in the cafeteria, we would have a candlelight dinner. If you ate in the cafeteria, you ate by candlelight, and you had to wear a coat and tie. We did that during my senior year, and it was pretty well received. We had fun night on Tuesday night. Everyone would come over to the James Union Building, where we had a dance. That was the big function during the week. A lot of kids enjoyed dancing together.

FORSYTHE: Who did you invite to homecoming?

SPIELMAN: Well, I invited the governor, but Mr. Smith wouldn't let him come. So, at that time, we didn't have a grand marshal.

FORSYTHE: I want to go over some buildings. Whatever comes to mind, tell me. The Administration building?

SPIELMAN: That was the biggest building on campus. It was an impressive building. It had the big columns and so forth, and it was called the Ad building. I think they call it Old Main now. It had wooden floors and wooden stairways, and it was a creaky type of building. The old gymnasium was in the back of the building. The building is in the shape of a T, as you probably know. The small part of the T was the gymnasium, and that was still in existence when I was in school. On weekends, if you were on campus, you could go and play basketball in the old gym. It had a lot of nostalgia about it - tradition. It was an older building, and it was big. That's where most of your classes were. It was just a neat building.

FORSYTHE: Health and Physical Education building?

SPIELMAN: That was called the Alumni Gym. We call it the Old Gym now. The ROTC was in the basement. Physical education was on the top floor. It was a nice gym. Then, it probably seated 4,000 people. There was a lot of spirit, because the school was smaller. There were some good memories there. The football dressing room was down in the basement. They had a stage that was open. Now, it's closed in. They had big drapes there, and they had classes on that stage, too.

FORSYTHE: The Industrial Arts building?

SPIELMAN: Back then, we had a lot of students that took industrial arts. They were going to be teachers. The Red Stone Arsenal in Huntsville, Alabama was down there, and they were hiring a lot of industrial arts people. Our university sent a lot of students there. It was a beehive of activity. There was a lot of woodworking and metalworking. You would always see kids walking around with their T-squares and so forth on campus. It was a popular course of study.

FORSYTHE: The old cafeteria?

SPIELMAN: The old cafeteria was the music department, then the math department, then the drafting department. It was not the cafeteria when I was on campus. They had closed it up and moved the cafeteria over to the James Union Building. It was the Music Department when I first came here.

FORSYTHE: The library?

SPIELMAN: The library was the little building where Peck Hall is now. It was very pretty. I went there some to study. It was pretty popular. Kids went there to study, and you were close to Old Main, the Union Building and the gym. There was a lot of activity.

FORSYTHE: The infirmary?

SPIELMAN: The infirmary, when I was here, was kind of a T-shaped building. It was located near where the baseball field is now. It used to be an army barrack type wooden building. Then, they moved it from there to the basement of Monohan Hall. When I was on campus, it was always in that wooden building. In later years, they moved it to the basement of Monohan Hall. Then, in the sixties or maybe the early seventies, we built the Jack MacFarland Health Center.

FORSYTHE: Why was it moved to Monohan?

SPIELMAN: The wooden building just got old. It wasn't an efficient building. That was probably the best place they could put it at the time.

FORSYTHE: Science Hall?

SPIELMAN: Of course, I spent a lot of time there. You were required to take science. And if you were a physical education major, you had a lot of science classes. Again, it was an older building. They've remodeled all these buildings now. I have a lot of memories of labs. And everything was so much closer than it is today. Students were probably more involved in the classrooms than they are today.

FORSYTHE: James Union?

SPIELMAN: They called it the Student Union building back then. They had not named it the James Union. The cafeteria, the post office, and the bookstore were in the basement. Then, on the third floor, you had the Sidelines and a recreation room with pool tables and ping pong tables. On the second floor, where the Tennessee Room is, there was a little coffee shop where you could get sandwiches, milkshakes, and coffee when the cafeteria wasn't open. So, that building was really popular. Students were always in it. It opened either the year before or the year I got here, in 1951 or 1952. It was a very popular and very impressive building. The Tennessee Room was a big room for dancing. All of the dances were held there. The ROTC ball, the homecoming dance, the Midlander ball, and fun night were all held there. Mr. Smith took a lot of pride in that building, he liked it. He was particular about the events that were held there. He was very careful to make sure it was taken care of well.

FORSYTHE: What about the new library, the Todd Library?

SPIELMAN: The Todd Library came after I left. It was named after Mr. A. L. Todd, who was responsible for putting this university in Murfreesboro. He was a member of the state legislature, and he lived here in Murfreesboro. He was a very, very wealthy businessman. When it came time to locate universities in the state, he was instrumental in getting the school here in Murfreesboro, and they named the library after him. His son was a lawyer and the mayor of Murfreesboro for ten years. He had two sons, one of them, Dr. Aaron Todd, is on the faculty here at MTSU, in the Science Department. His other son, Jack Todd, was named after the grandfather retired from State Farm. He was the Vice-President of State Farm. Both of them are living in Murfreesboro now.

FORSYTHE: The Memorial Gym?

SPIELMAN: The Memorial Gym was named for the veterans that fought in the war. It was one of the more modern gyms in this area at the time. When Murphy gym came along, it was really a big thing. From an athletic standpoint, it moved this university to a different level.

FORSYTHE: Was there a Veteran's Village here?

SPIELMAN: Yes, in fact, in my first semester I lived in one of the barracks on campus. It was back behind Smith Hall. They had a little wooden building that served as kind of a store. The people that lived in Vet Village could come and buy some things that they might need.

FORSYTHE: Were other students allowed to live there?

SPIELMAN: Yes. Housing became a little critical, so they started using some of the buildings to house students. There were about six of us that stayed in one of the buildings for a semester. Then, we moved into Smith Hall because the buildings were old and deteriorating. It was shortly after I left that they took them out.

FORSYTHE: What were the barracks like?

SPIELMAN: They were just wooden buildings. They each had a bathroom and a shower there. They were old, and they had metal cots, each with a mattress. They weren't much.

FORSYTHE: What was parking like on campus?

SPIELMAN: It wasn't bad. There weren't many cars. The only people who had cars were faculty members and the veterans. None of my friends had cars. I didn't have a car. My roommate didn't have one. I guess if we had 900 students, there were only about 100 cars on campus. The war was over and people were just coming back, and things were getting back to normal. There just wasn't a lot of money around. Consequently, people had to go home and work. If someone had a car, usually two or three people would ride with them. That's how you got back and forth, or you hitch-hiked most of the places you went.

FORSYTHE: What was the lighting like on campus?

SPIELMAN: There wasn't all that much lighting. There were a few light posts with lights, but there didn't seem to be any crime problems either. So, it was not a problem.

FORSYTHE: Did you have a telephone in the dorm room?

SPIELMAN: No, you had a pay phone on each floor where you could make a call.

FORSYTHE: What did you do after you left here?

SPIELMAN: When I left, I wanted to be a coach, and I went back to Maryland. I taught school and coached basketball. Then, I went into the service. I had an obligation, because of ROTC. I went in the military and then came back. In 1960, I came back to Tennessee, and went to work with the Department of Conservation for

eighteen months. I was offered a job with State Farm in 1962, and I retired in 1994.

FORSYTHE: What are you doing now?

SPIELMAN: Interviewing with you. Nothing really, just relaxing. My son graduated from college, and we've gone on a trip together. I've really just been enjoying myself.