

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
WITH
WILLIAM PATTERSON

21 JUNE 1995

MURFREESBORO, TENNESSEE

INTERVIEWED BY REGINA FORSYTHE
FOR THE Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
INTERVIEW #QMS.008

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
WILLIAM PATTERSON**

Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW #QMS.008

FORSYTHE: This tape is part of the Q. M. Smith Collection designated as QMS.1995.8. This is Regina Forsythe; I am interviewing Mr. William Patterson. Today is Wednesday, June 21, 1995. The interview is being conducted in the Conference Room of the Learning Lab, Room 101 of the Ned McWherter Learning Resource Center. Tell me about the dorms. Start with Jones Hall. What do you remember?

PATTERSON: It was just a typical boys' dormitory with concrete floors and old plaster walls. It was a cubbyhole with a bed on both sides and an open closet at the head of each bed on the hall side of the room. They might have had a couple desks in there, but that was it.

FORSYTHE: Do you remember the house rules?

PATTERSON: Forget the house rules. Everybody broke them. I can remember when they were having open house. We were getting everything cleaned up, and a lot of parents and friends were there. A lot of the friends and boys' dates were there also to see what the boys looked like all dressed up. They were all dressed up, the boys were, and they were trying to do everything. And of course, in a boys' dormitory there was quite a bit of foul language going on. They were all talking rough and everything. And finally Watson, one of the monitors, tried to keep things quiet. He said "Cut out the [foul language]. We got women coming in here!" He was cussing more than they were. Telling them to shut up! As I was telling you earlier, everybody shared everything, absolutely everything. It was a good time. They used to do what they called "stacking a room." They would go in there, and they would take all the furniture out. There would maybe seven or eight. A lot of times at Jones Hall they'd get the furniture and go through one of the rooms in there that had a window out on the porch. They'd carry it through that window, put the bed out there and everything else, then set them up together. Iron Mustang... They called him Mustang. He went to Isaac Litton School, and the school's nick-name was the Mustangs. [Iron Mustang] saw

"Mighty Mackey" walking up to the room and Mustang said, "We're stacking this room. Help us here." And so he went down to the end of the chain there and passed that stuff out and everything. And they all laughed and said, "Boy we all fixed him, didn't we?" and left. He[Mighty Mackey] went down there, and it was his room.

FORSYTHE: Did they talk to them?

PATTERSON: Every now and then. Frequently. They kind of frowned on it. The school did. But they were always pulling pranks on each other. Either Buford Turpin... He's dead now. He just died recently. Preston, or John Bragg had gone into one of the fellow's rooms and took a garbage can or something and put the fellow's shoes in that garbage can. It kind of messed them up. Another time Preston had done that and John Bragg had gotten in Preston's room with a big garbage can. Preston was always immaculately dressed with everything just nice, and he even wore a tie half of the time. Bragg got in there and filled that garbage can about two-thirds full of water and moved it up against the door. He was trying to get even with Preston. Preston opened his door, and that garbage can of water landed on him and just poured all over his clothes.

FORSYTHE: So it was on top of the door?

PATTERSON: No. It was just leaning against the door, but it was full of water. So when he opened the door, water just fell on him. But then it's a much better story than I told. You had to be there.

FORSYTHE: Does Jones Hall look the same now?

PATTERSON: The exterior. But it was just three stories with a hall down the middle and with rooms on both sides of the rest rooms and shower rooms. And they had three or four of them there.[They] were spaced out all along [the hall]. They were the open dormitory types. Then, the main floor had a lobby in the middle, but the rest of it was a hallway with rooms on both sides.

FORSYTHE: Were women allowed in the rooms?

PATTERSON: No. It's a new world. Everybody would have been living in dormitories.

FORSYTHE: What can you tell me about Rutledge Hall?

PATTERSON: Not too much about Rutledge Hall.

FORSYTHE: What was the dress code when you were here?

PATTERSON: There was no dress code. If there was I don't know about it, but I think all the girls wore bobby socks, skirts, and cardigans backwards.

FORSYTHE: Backwards? Why?

PATTERSON: I don't know why.

FORSYTHE: Okay.

PATTERSON: But that was typical, and they all looked so nice. It was just typical. My mother was a housemother over at Lyon Hall. This was a thousand years ago, after I'd been away. She was a housemother over there for about eight or nine years.

FORSYTHE: Did you go and see Lyon Hall?

PATTERSON: All I saw was the lobby, and then you had to be out of that lobby before 10:00 p.m. The girls had to be in. We tried to figure ways to get in, and it was kind of hard.

FORSYTHE: What did you do on the weekends?

PATTERSON: Well, there wasn't too much to do. The girls would get out sometimes, go to a movie, go to the Brown Jug and drink beer, and that was it.

FORSYTHE: Where was the Brown Jug?

PATTERSON: See Woodbury Pike here. Go on out past Northfield, where the light is, and it's about two blocks on down towards Woodbury. It's on the corner of Twin Oak, and there's still a tavern there now, I think.

FORSYTHE: That's pretty far away. How did students get there?

PATTERSON: With a car. A lot of them made arrangements and other people in town furnished transportation. But actually, there wasn't too much to do, except go to

the picture show. There wasn't too much activity on campus, either. The main thing most of them did is go home.

FORSYTHE: What organizations did you belong to?

PATTERSON: There wasn't any.

FORSYTHE: There wasn't? Let me go back to Q. M. Smith. How did the students relate to him?

PATTERSON: After the first year, he had quite a few problems here with the firing of Coach Floyd. [People would] write nasty letters and put them on the bulletin board. And you need to know it if you don't, he divorced his first wife when he was president up in Cookeville, and married his other wife. So the scuttlebutt, so to speak, was how can a man marry, divorce a wife, and marry another one, and then become president of a school? So there were notes like that and other things. Anytime there was a note like that up, by George, he'd call chapel. He'd been gassed during World War I, and he had problems talking. He couldn't enunciate. But he'd get up [in chapel], and man, he'd lay it out on them! Of other things, he was certainly a man of courage. He didn't back up on anything. He'd challenge all of them, right then. If they wanted to talk to him. And of course, those kinds of things finally died out. He won over the students pretty well, and they started judging him on that. But his wife, this last one, she was a lovely person. I knew her well.

FORSYTHE: Can you tell me about her?

PATTERSON: Well not too much because after Q. M. died she worked around at Batey's place to be busy more than anything. I had dealings with Batey's. She'd always be there, and we'd get a chance to talk. We'd be at some of the same parties sometimes. She'd always be there, and it was always such a pleasure to talk to her and be with her. I think he might have done a little bit better job with this one.

FORSYTHE: What did you do after you graduated?

PATTERSON: I graduated at Christmas and went to Brustson, Tennessee, which is over in West Tennessee. I taught school there starting in January. I taught five courses: freshman English, sophomore ancient history, junior modern history,

and senior American history and sociology. I also coached boys and girls basketball, and football- all for ninety dollars a month.

FORSYTHE: What was the name of school?

PATTERSON: Bruston High School. If you're familiar with it Camden is not too far from the river there. Bruston is not too far from Camden. Bruston and Hollow Rock shared a railroad junction. Planes were made up in there. Five different railroads came in there, and they shuttled the boxcars. They were all going in different directions. It's over close to Huntington. This was during the second year, and I [don't] think they had a gymnasium. They'd been playing on an outdoor court. I hadn't even watched a dozen girls games, and I was up there coaching the girls basketball team. It was right after Christmas, the second day of the year, which was Monday. I had a basketball game that night. I didn't even know whether I had a team or not. I had never been in the school before. So I had to start my classes and find out what I had to do there. Then the principal said, "Well, Bill, you got to go back there now and check on the game. We got a game tonight?" "Yes sir." I was living about a mile or half a mile away. Billy Birch's folks lived there. He came to school over here and graduated, and he's over in Lebanon now. I came back that night and started to go into the gym and [the attendant] said, "Wait a minute there. This costs a quarter." I said, "I'm the coach, man." "Oh naw, Tom Taylor's the coach." "I know, but he's gone now." About that time one of the teachers came by. I was fixing to have to pay to get in.

FORSYTHE: How long did you teach there?

PATTERSON: Six months.

FORSYTHE: What happened?

PATTERSON: I finished the school year. Are you familiar with girls' basketball?

FORSYTHE: No.

PATTERSON: Back in those days, there were six girls on a team. The court was divided up into three areas. Two forwards, two centers and two guards. They had to play in their own little area. They could dribble once. The girls' games were played first all the time. So they said "I'll just start, and get the game going." I said,

"You get out there and see what you can do." And they did, and everybody stood around the referee. [He] came up and said "Coach, we're about ready to start." I said, "My team is out there. Let them go." He said, "You need one more player." I said, "Get out of town." I started five girls in that six-girl game. After all, I had a lot of experience.

FORSYTHE: Well, where did you go after that?

PATTERSON: Back when I was probably a junior in high school, things were pretty bad. In about 1933-1934, things were pretty hard, so we were offered a civil service examination locally. And they were giving it at the old Central High School auditorium. Anybody who wanted to take it could take it. There were about 120 people in there. Everything from sophomores and juniors in high school to sixty and seventy-year-old men. [Everyone] wanted a job. I thought "Well, what have I got to lose?" So I took it when I was a junior. I reckon, maybe [I'll be] a senior in at least two years. I was down there at Bruston, and my father called me and said, "Son, your name has come up on the social security list, and William Worthan wants to talk to you about a job down here at the post office." That was the last week of school, so I finished out the school year, bid everybody goodbye, and hit the road!

FORSYTHE: You didn't like being a teacher?

PATTERSON: No, I didn't. I wasn't cut out for that. I don't think. Anyway, that was in June of 1941. So I went back and went to work at the Post Office. Then in November or December the war broke out, and I joined the Navy. I was in the Navy for almost four years. When I came back, I started working in the mill that the family owned.

FORSYTHE: When did you become a real estate agent?

PATTERSON: When we closed the mill down. I fooled around for a job or two, and then I finally got involved with the real estate business. That was in about 1950, 1951, or maybe 1952. I stayed there in real estate, and then I started doing some appraising. I've been appraising for about the last thirty-five or forty years.

FORSYTHE: I know you helped Lisa Nichols, our graduate student, last year. Did you help anybody else with their projects here at MTSU?

PATTERSON: Yes, another boy. David Rowe. I had some dealings with him, and he sent one. I helped [him] do quite a bit on the same thing about four, five, maybe six years before she came by. He wrote a real nice brochure, [It was] a history of the whole house, and I gave her a copy of it. I told her that she could keep it if it would help her with whatever. But he did a real good job on it.

FORSYTHE: Do you remember any more of the maintenance crew or administrative staff?

PATTERSON: I can't think of anyone right off hand. I think you covered them. That's about all of the professors that we had here then. I can't think of any names now. I think there was someone with the last name of Floyd that I think worked as maintenance for a long time. Of course Harriet, my wife, she was in the Music Department there with Neil and Margaret Wright. So we were with them a whole lot and all of the faculty of that time.

FORSYTHE: As a student from the 1940's, were you required to teach when you got your degree?

PATTERSON: No. I had to take practice teaching to get the degree.

FORSYTHE: Where did you practice teach?

PATTERSON: Right across the street.

FORSYTHE: At the Campus School?

PATTERSON: Yes.

FORSYTHE: What did you teach?

PATTERSON: Geography. That's a good story. See I had gone to school there. It was built when I was in the fifth grade. We were going to another school over there off of Main Street called East End. It was an old prep school. And it was already falling down. So that's the reason they built [Campus School]. But we called it training school. They finished the training school at Christmas, and we moved in, I was in the fifth grade at that time. What else did you ask me?

FORSYTHE: Who were some of your teachers at the campus school?

PATTERSON: Oh, I was fixing to tell you about practice teaching. Albert Gore, Sr. was over there practice teaching.

FORSYTHE: Tell me about him.

PATTERSON: He was wild. He was teaching history. He and an old friend of his had made a trip down through Florida, and he was trying to tie that into class or something. He got to talking like we are doing now, and he got off the subject and everything else. Then all of a sudden it dawned on us that he was making half of it up. And he was. But then he was just a typical. I don't think he had aspirations. He didn't even think he was going to wind up being a senator. Anyway, Miss Nell was a geography teacher. Miss Frances Nell. She was an old maid. She was a tough old girl, but a good teacher. I had had her in the fifth grade when I was going to school over there. I took geography over there under her and maybe another class too. Anyway, I walked in that door and she said "Oh God, Bill Patterson!" I said, "Miss Nell, I got to have a B in this course, and I'll do everything you tell me to do." She said, "If you do that you'll get a B." And she gave me everything you could think of [to do]. After the rest of them taking practice teaching were through, I was still over there after school doing this and doing that. But she gave me a B! Mr. James... That was one of the things. When he saw that I was running short on quality credits, and he saw my grade he said, "Bill, why in the heck. Here you've come up with around forty quality credits there." And I needed fifteen to graduate. He said, "What have you done, you've wasted your whole time here." You know, it's very unusual. So many of the students I had in that fifth grade are part of the community now. They're in all the businesses and everything you can think of. And every now and then I think, "You know that I taught you that, don't you?" I think we were caught in a bind there. Dr. Hutchinson at the University of Chicago, his idea was the unit system of teaching plus the fact that you learn things [naturally]. He gave you an example. "You see a car driving down the road, and you know it's a Ford or a Buick or what have you. And you learned grammar and things like that [the same way], because that's the way it is." He says, "That's all you've ever heard in your household." Well he hadn't ever been in some of these households. So I never learned too much about grammar, or about diagramming sentences and the parts of speech. It was always what you already knew, so I didn't learn too much along that line. But the rest of them, Miss Ann Ashley taught English over there and Miss Lowe was teaching history. They would make you get it. Mr. Simpson taught arithmetic.

FORSYTHE: What do you remember about Mr. Simpson?

PATTERSON: He was just an arithmetic teacher, and he was a church-going man. He was [friends] with the superintendent of the church and things like that, and he was a good asset.

FORSYTHE: What about Miss Lowe?

PATTERSON: Lowe? She was an old maid schoolteacher, and she had a sister. They both were [old maids]. They were really knowledgeable people. They knew the subject matter. I've often thought if you have the aptitude two of the best jobs in the world are teaching school and selling life insurance. If you have got the aptitude, you don't have to do anything. It's all in your mind. All you have to do is tell them.

END OF SIDE A

FORSYTHE: This is the continuation of the interview with Mr. William Patterson by Regina Forsythe, on Wednesday, June 21, 1995. Tell me about the first flight school.

PATTERSON: In the summer of 1939 or 1940... I have forgotten which. There was an opportunity to start a flying school here where individuals could get a private pilot's license. Mr. Smith was trying to get that organized. They put out some information about it being available. They had a date for a meeting [for persons] who were interested in that. Professor Horace Jones was helping in this. And he and Mr. Smith were both pretty instrumental in getting it started. There must have been thirty or forty people here interested in it. They told us what they planned on doing. Some people from AAA [American Aeronautical Association], a part of the government that was going to help teach us, were there. What they were going to do was teach us how to fly. There was ground school for learning about the engine of the airplane and another ground school for instruments and navigation. At the end of the discussion they said, "All of you that are interested in doing this, sign here." Well I told Mr. Smith when I went in there that I might have to leave a little early because I had an appointment. He said that would be all right, "Just nod at me, and I will let you go." I was getting tired of it anyway, so I kind of nodded at him. He said, "Do you want to sign this?" So I signed it. I was the first one to sign it because I was leaving. I came to find out later on, that they just took the top fifteen people, so he was instrumental in starting me in that. And so we went on and

took flight training then got our private pilot's license and flew around here. When the war broke out, I joined the Navy and took flight training with them and wound up flying in the Navy.

FORSYTHE: What was the airport like here?

PATTERSON: It wasn't.

FORSYTHE: There wasn't an airport?

PATTERSON: I don't know whether you've had the occasion to go out to the old Nashville Pike to where the plant is that makes a lot of boats- fishing boats?

FORSYTHE: Yes.

PATTERSON: Well, that was the airport originally. [It was] built there back in the early 1930's. "Sky Harbor" was the name of it. That runway was still there. It was the only place around here, and we started flying there. Then we flew down to Berry Field, and then the school bought this land right here where we are now. This used to be R. B. Womack's farm about where that blue building is. Seems like the runway was right along in there. There was a cornfield back there. We'd back up in that cornfield and take off. There was a 25,000 volt electric power line, and we had to get over that. I believe I could find it if we went out there. We wound up flying there, and then they flew out of here before the war and right after the war.

FORSYTHE: Wasn't "Sky Harbor" up in Florence?

PATTERSON: Actually, it was before you got to Florence. There were a bunch of subdivisions just on the other side of it. It's about six and one-half miles out of Murfreesboro. They have got those boats stacked up everywhere around there.

FORSYTHE: How did you get out there?

PATTERSON: The best way we could.

FORSYTHE: Really? The school didn't provide transportation?

PATTERSON: Oh, no. When we started flying down to Nashville, they bought us a package of bus tickets. We sold all of those and hitch hiked down there.

FORSYTHE: How many airplanes were there?

PATTERSON: This was a flying school out of Nashville. They furnished the training, so I don't know how many planes they had. They'd send maybe one or two up here to be used. They only had one instructor.

FORSYTHE: Tell me about the hangars.

PATTERSON: There were no hangars.

FORSYTHE: No place to store?

PATTERSON: No, we flew them down to Nashville on the weekend. They'd wash them and clean them up and do maintenance. After we got our licenses, we'd hitch-hike down there and fly them back up here just to get the flying time. Or we'd fly them down there and hitchhike home.

FORSYTHE: Thank you.