

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
WITH
FRANCES CARTER GILL

20 JULY 1995

MURFREESBORO, TENNESSEE

INTERVIEWED BY REGINA FORSYTHE
FOR THE Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
INTERVIEW #QMS.031

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
FRANCES CARTER GILL**

Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW #QMS.031

FORSYTHE: This tape is part of the Q.M. Smith Collection designated as QMS. 1995.31. This is Regina Forsythe, I am interviewing Mrs. Frances Carter Gill. Today is Thursday July 20, 1995. The interview is being conducted in the Gore Research Center, Room 111 of the Ned McWherter Learning Resource Center. The tape of this interview along with a transcription of the interview will become part of the Quintin Miller Smith Collection and will be available to the public. Future researchers may include portions of this interview in their publications. Is that all right with you Mrs. Gill?

GILL: Fine.

FORSYTHE: What is your full name?

GILL: Frances Carter Gill.

FORSYTHE: What is your birth date?

GILL: February 3, 1934.

FORSYTHE: What is your birth place?

GILL: Lawrenceburg, Tennessee.

FORSYTHE: What was your father's name and occupation?

GILL: William Harris Carter. He was in law enforcement. He was old when I was born. So he has been deceased for quite some time now.

FORSYTHE: What was your mother's name and occupation?

GILL: Helen Carter. She was a housewife.

FORSYTHE: Do you have any siblings?

GILL: I only have one sister still living. Her name is Betty Rumbaugh.

FORSYTHE: What is your spouse's name and occupation?

GILL: James T. Gill, Jr. He is retired now, but he was a aerospace engineer for years.

FORSYTHE: Do you have any children?

GILL: We have two sons, James T. Gill III, and Charles H. Gill.

FORSYTHE: Did any of your family members go to MTSU?

GILL: No, just me.

FORSYTHE: Why did you choose to attend MTSU?

GILL: It was the least expensive!

FORSYTHE: What year did you attend MTSU?

GILL: I graduated with my bachelor's degree in 1954. I was here 1951-1954. I did graduate work in the summers and finished my Master's degree in 1957.

FORSYTHE: Did you do a thesis?

GILL: Yes, but I do not remember.

FORSYTHE: What were your majors?

GILL: For my bachelor's degree, I majored in elementary education and Home economics. I received my master's in curriculum and instruction.

FORSYTHE: What memories do you have of MTSU as a student?

GILL: One of the most fun things I have ever done was to come here in my shorts [referring to MTSU/Gore research Center]. This was definitely not allowed when I was here as a student. You could have on shorts to go to the tennis courts, but you had to wear a wrap-around-skirt over it until you got there. It was a strict dress code. You could not wear blue jeans on campus. It was not considered lady-like to wear blue jeans at all. There were certain places you were allowed to go and to wear them. Not on campus though! I remember the staff. The staff was wonderful and the student body was small--I think 2,000 students. It was probably like being in high school for most people. I do not know around here, but where we live, most high schools are bigger than that.

FORSYTHE: Why did you choose the degrees that you did?

GILL: I choose the degree in elementary education because I did not know if I could finish the degree financially. At that time, with two years of college, you could get an elementary education certification. My plan was that I could go for two years and get the degree. If I had to teach a while and save money again, I could.

I had worked before; I did not come here straight from high school. Fortunately, I was able to go ahead and finish my degree without stopping to work full time. My real love was home economics and I wanted to also major in that. I did the elementary education as a back up.

FORSYTHE: What was registration like?

GILL: It was easy. The registration fee was about \$40 a quarter. I do know that it cost me only \$3,600 to get a four year degree and that included food, toothpaste-- everything! I was not living elegantly, but I got through. Registration was easy. You filled out a form and the courses you registered for had to be approved by Dean Beasley. During the years that Jean Hudgins Moser worked for Dean Beasley as his secretary, we approved most of the student registration forms. We just put his signature on there, with our initials. Only if there was a problem or a question, did they see Dean Beasley. I have not been in Old Main for years, but at that time Dean Beasley's office was at the top of the steps on the right. On the left was the president's office. Jean and I would sit in the hallway behind a table and students would come and get their registration forms approved. Then they went to the registrar's office and paid. Each student had to go see each instructor of every course he or she wanted to take and get approved. It was a small campus-- Old Main on the North, the science building on the East; those two buildings contained most of the class rooms on campus.

FORSYTHE: Did you live on campus?

GILL: Yes. As a freshman I lived in Jones Hall. That had been a boys dorm, but Smith Hall opened that year and they converted Jones Hall to a girls dorm. I remember some of the girls did not take a shower for several weeks because as a former boys dorm it did not have shower curtains. At that time, there were three girls dorms: Jones, Rutledge, and Lyon. Students were separated by class levels in the dorms. Jones was the freshman dorm. I lived in Rutledge the next year, briefly in Lyon Hall, and eventually in Monohan Hall. Monohan was opened my senior year, but it was not quite finished. We tripled up in the rooms of Lyon Hall until Monohan was finished.

FORSYTHE: What condition was Jones Hall in when you moved in?

GILL: It was fine. I do not remember it being beat up or horrible due to boys living there. We did not have problems in the 1950s with graffiti and things like that. I do not remember the walls being in need of painting or anything like that. I do recall moving into Monohan and all of us thought it was gorgeous! I think that was mainly because it was all new furniture--no scratches.

FORSYTHE: Who were your roommates?

GILL: My roommate in Jones Hall was Sarah Ketrine Wright. She married at the end of our freshman year. Her husband was a student here.

FORSYTHE: Could you describe what the dorm rooms were like?

GILL: In Jones Hall, my room was on the third floor in the Northwest corner. The rooms were simple. The entrance door was in the middle of the wall facing into the hallway. On either side of the room was a closet. The furniture consisted of two single beds, one desk, and maybe a night table. Students could arrange the furniture how they wanted.

FORSYTHE: What about Rutledge Hall?

GILL: It was pretty much the same as Jones Hall. The rooms might have been a little bit bigger. The rooms in Jones were small. When I was a student there, Mrs. Pitts was the dorm mother. She was a sweetheart. We pulled lots of stuff over on her, but I think she knew more than we thought she did.

FORSYTHE: What kinds of things did you do?

GILL: Oh, nothing horrible. Little things like sneaking out in jeans when it was not allowed. You had to have permission to wear jeans, even when you were going off campus. They said we represented the campus, no matter where we were. You had to sneak out the back door--the side that faces Tennessee Boulevard and into the parking lot.

FORSYTHE: What do you remember about Lyon Hall?

GILL: I only lived there briefly. We had bunk beds [and] three students per room. The only big thing I remember about Lyon Hall was while we lived there we had a panty raid. This was a big bad thing to have happen in the 1950s. So far as I know, it was the only time it happened on this campus. I am surprised no one got expelled, but no big deal was made of it. The boys were at all the dorms, outside, yelling to the girls looking out the windows, "Throw down the panties!" A few people did. They marched down the halls. In those days, it was not allowed for a member of the opposite sex to be in the girls dormitory, except in the lobby. In certain circumstances, we could have a gentleman carry our luggage up to our rooms. [However], you had to yell as you go to each floor, "man on the floor." Normally the boys were not allowed inside the girls dorm, outside the lobby. That night they just went marching up and down the halls and then they left. We thought that was terribly exciting.

FORSYTHE: What do you remember about Monohan Hall?

GILL: I remember it being so new and pretty. We had built in furniture, which we thought was wonderful. I do not think I had ever seen built in furniture before

then. About ten years ago, I stopped off at Monohan to drop off a care package from the mother of a student who lived near us. I found it interesting to see that the same furniture was still in Monohan Hall!

FORSYTHE: Did you have a campus job?

GILL: When I first got here I worked in the library for the first quarter. It was very low paying--I think about 40 cent per hour. I went to Bob Abernathy, who was in charge of student employment, and cried a bit on his shoulder. I said that my goal was to get the teacher's certification in two years. I could see that what I had saved, combined with how little I was earning at the library, would not be enough. I needed a better paying student job. I worked for him the rest of my freshman year with Jean Hutchins Moser. This was better. I had visions that I could make it for two years because the pay was better. Mostly we typed. This was before copy machines, printers and computers. We sent letters to graduating high school seniors , [from]all over the state of Tennessee, to encourage them to go to school at MTSU. All of these had to be hand typed on a manual typewriter! It paid well. At the beginning of our sophomore year, Dean Beasley's secretary, named Rosalyn, was transferred. She had been his secretary for a long time and had not been able to find a replacement. He asked Mr. Abernathy to get him some student workers. Dean Beasley was tremendously respected by everyone. Mr. Abernathy called Jean and me into his office and told us that he was going to have to fire us. I started crying and he said that he was just using that expression to tell us I'm moving you somewhere else temporarily. He said that he thought he should give Dean Beasley the best student-workers at MTSU and he sent the two of us over to work for Dean Beasley. We worked for the Dean until he could find a replacement. We arranged our schedules so that one of us was there in the morning and one of us in the afternoon. After a while, he decided that we were good replacements. We had a good team going. He did a lot of letter writing. Again, before use of tape recorders, people like him would sit down and dictate letters to a secretary. I would usually work whole mornings and Jean would work in the afternoon. I would spend as much as two to three hours taking down his letters in short-hand. Jean accidentally discovered, one afternoon, that she was able to read my short-hand and she was a able to transcribe what I was not able to finish. Dean Beasley decided that he would be happy with both of us working as a team, as long as we were on the campus. That is what got me the four year college degree, without having to stop and work full time to save money. I finished my two year certificate the last year that MTSU offered it.

FORSYTHE: What did you do on the week-ends?

GILL: I usually had classes on Saturday mornings. I had to get my course work in the afternoon classes or on Saturdays. The Saturday classes at that time were primarily for teachers out in various parts of the state who had two year degrees and were trying to earn an advanced degree—a bachelor's degree. As students, we used to laugh and call these course "crib courses," because some of these

people were not top students. I remember as a teacher, when I first went back to take some courses, I thought, "Oh, I'm one of them now." Week-ends were quiet on campus. The majority of students would go home. I usually did not because I did not have enough time to get home and get back. I did not have a car. In fact, when I was here as a student, there were no females who had cars. There were a few boys who did.

FORSYTHE: What did you do for fun?

GILL: I dated. Everyone had an active social life. We had Fun Night every Tuesday night in the old gym behind Old Main. What is called the "old gym" now was actually the new gym when I was there. Everyone went to Fun Night. We just danced and played records. There was one movie theater in down town Murfreesboro; on dates we went to movies a lot. There was a little hamburger place that was a popular place to go to dinner when you had a date. It was down on the North end of town. We had a lot of things going on campus. There were a lot of different clubs sponsoring events.

FORSYTHE: Did you belong to any of those groups?

GILL: Yes, I cannot even remember. I was not really active in a lot of clubs because work and school was hard. I never took less than a full load when I was going to school. As a matter of fact, I almost always took an overload. I did it because it did not take any more money to take more courses, rather than the standard. Dean Beasley would let me do it.

FORSYTHE: I am going to ask you about some people and if you have a memory or story about them, I would like to hear it. Mrs. Virginia Muncie?

GILL: Of course, I remember her. She was such a sweet lady and was the head of the Home Economics department. The Home Economics Department, at that time, consisted of only two people. Mrs. Muncie taught the foods section, while Miss Agnes Nelson taught the clothing course. She insisted that I wear a thimble to do hand sewing which I was not accustomed to doing. I fought her about it, but today, I cannot sew with out a thimble. She was a dear. They were both excellent teachers. One of the things I remember about Mrs. Muncie is that I probably owe her my whole life education and career. Of course there were rules about cheating on tests. Usually, if you were caught cheating, that was an automatic "F" for the course; horrible things would happen. I was taking a test in one of Mrs. Muncie's course. Someone else was in the class with me, who was struggling with the test, and who was sitting near me. Mrs. Muncie had left the room, as was common in those days. If someone had that much confidence and faith in you, of course, you would not even think of cheating. The other student kept asking me for help, and I kept shaking my head no. This person just kept asking me, and finally I decided to verbally say something to end this annoyance. Just as I spoke, Mrs. Muncie walked into the room. Normally what would happen is that

we would have both been given an "F" for the course, but she called us into her office. The other person said that it was not her fault. I do not know what she did to the other person, but she did nothing in the form of punishment to me. I was so relieved. She was more than fair about that.

FORSYTHE: Dean Beasley?

GILL: I remember how frightening it was when Mr. Abernathy called us over to work for Dean Beasley. Dean Beasley was next to God on this campus--God being Dr. Smith. You could be by the location of offices, if by nothing else, who was important. President Smith's office was on the left of the main entrance to Old Main. Dean Beasley's office was on the right. Students did not enter either office very frequently, certainly, not one on one. Dean Beasley had a reputation of being a very gruff man. This was probably an undeserved reputation because there is always more fear of the unknown. I found that he was just a dear, a very kind caring person. He was wonderful to work with.

FORSYTHE: Dean Kirksey?

GILL: He was a wonderful person and a fantastic teacher. I took philosophy courses from him when he was teaching at the undergraduate level, before the graduate school was even open. So many of the people in administrative positions had been teachers here or still taught part time. I only remember those who taught my classes before moving into administration.

FORSYTHE: Dean James?

GILL: I was never in his office but one time. I do not know whether to classify him as a gullible man, probably it was more accurate to say that he was a sweet person who did not want to have students in trouble-- if he could avoid it. A friend of mine got caught in his office one time. She was on the verge of being kicked out of school. In the early 1950s, if you got caught smoking somewhere, where you were not allowed to smoke, you got kicked out of school. I do not remember if this rule just applied to girls and boys or just girls. We had girls who would come to school here who had been kicked out of schools like David Lipscomb University for smoking.

End of Side A, QMS.1995.31 FGill

This is a continuation of the interview with Mrs. Frances Carter Gill by Regina Forsythe on Thursday July 20, 1995.

FORSYTHE: You were talking about smoking on campus before the tape stopped?

GILL: I was mentioning all the strict rules. Of course, students were not allowed to drink. There was a place, on the side of the road out towards McMinnville, that students used to sometimes go on dates. The place sold alcoholic beverages--I think primarily beer. A friend of mine got called to Dean James' office and was in big trouble because she had been reported to him as seen drinking at this establishment. The day that she was supposedly seen, she was there on a date. I was there with her, with my date. I was extremely naive in those days. She came to the dorm in tears and all upset that she was about to get thrown out of school and sent home. So, I went marching over to Dean James office. The secretary asked if I had an appointment and I said, "No, I'll just wait." I was prepared to wait two weeks if I needed to. I assured him that my friend had not been drinking that night because I had been there with her. I realized later how stupid it was because I did not if we were really allowed to be at that place. She was off the hook. I was very lucky, I suppose, for not getting in trouble either.

FORSYTHE: William Judd?

GILL: He was the registrar and was a very quiet man. Students did not have a lot of contact with him.

FORSYTHE: Jean Hutchinson Moser?

GILL: Jean was one of my good friends. She still lives here in Murfreesboro and was on the staff of MTSU before she retired about a year ago.

FORSYTHE: Robert Abernathy?

GILL: He was a sweet man. He was truly responsible for my being able to get an education here.

FORSYTHE: Bonnie McHenry?

GILL: She was President's Smith secretary. She was a very proper, classy lady, and she had the reputation of being a wonderful secretary. I did not know her personally. She was a real secretary. Jean and I were just student workers. We certainly did not try to be chummy with her.

FORSYTHE: Catherine Clark?

GILL: She was the librarian I worked for when I was in the library my first quarter. She was nice.

FORSYTHE: Sarah Wright?

GILL: She was always happy-- a really sweet girl. She and I had been assigned as roommates to each other because we were both older. We had worked a few years after graduating from high school.

FORSYTHE: Jane Ketring Warner?

GILL: She was Sarah's older sister.

FORSYTHE: Evelyn Turney?

GILL: A Sweet lady. Most of these ladies were older. When you are in college, anyone who is thirty seems old. They were, for the most part, very gracious to Jean and me, even though we were young.

FORSYTHE: Carolyn Holloway?

GILL: I remember her name and how gorgeous she was.

FORSYTHE: Emily Calcott?

GILL: She was the lady who always wore a glove. The students' all said that she had an artificial hand. She taught Children's Literature.

FORSYTHE: Buleah Davis?

GILL: Everyone remembers Miss Davis. At the time I was here, she was the only female Physical education teacher. She was single and the students used to think that she was a tough teacher. She was the sponsor of the cheerleaders.

FORSYTHE: Mary Hall?

GILL: Everyone knew Miss Mary. She taught a lot of the elementary education courses and she did a wonderful job.

FORSYTHE: Joe Black Haynes?

GILL: I knew him mainly because his younger brother was a student here. Mr. Haynes was one of the coaches and I really did not have a lot of interaction with him.

FORSYTHE: Dr. C.C. Sims?

GILL: He was one of my favorite people. He was just a wonderful teacher and he really knew his stuff. One of the things that I remember about him was his response to the inquiry of the length of an assigned paper. He would say in his high pitched voice, "Just like a woman's skirt. . . short enough to keep up interest and long enough to cover the subject."

FORSYTHE: Richard Peck?

GILL: I never had a class under him. All the girls on campus thought that he was the most handsome man that they had ever seen. He and Fran Real, in the physical education department were both good looking. I did not know Virginia Peck.

FORSYTHE: Dr. John Parchment?

GILL: I remember Dr. John Parchment and Dr. John Patten. The two of them were the male single staff on the campus at that time and they dated students sometimes.

FORSYTHE: Dr. J. Eldred Wiser?

GILL: He put a hex on me. He was head of the science department. He called me into his office one day to discuss my lack of good work in his chemistry class. He had checked up on me. He knew that I was a good student and yet I was doing poorly in his chemistry class. He asked what the problem was and I explained to him that I did not understand why I needed chemistry if I was a home economics major. He said, "Young lady, How do you expect to ever bake a decent biscuit if you do not understand the chemical reaction that causes it to rise in the oven." I replied, "My daddy has been making the most delicious biscuits that I have ever eaten, all of my life, and he never went to high school." I think he put a hex on me because I do not make decent biscuits to this day!

FORSYTHE: What memories do you have of Q.M. Smith?

GILL: What I remember about him most was his dignity. He was so dignified and proper. I do not think students had interaction with him as individuals. We used to have student assemblies in that auditorium that once was in the back end of Old Main. Something that amazed me was that he would stand up and talk to students in an assembly despite his speech impediment. He acted as if there was nothing unusual or different about his voice. The story was that he had been gassed during World War I. I remember the first time I heard him speak. I thought, 'What is wrong with this man?' After the first time you heard him talk, you never really noticed that there was anything different about his speech. We listened intently. In retrospect, I think that the speech impediment was probably an asset for him. Whether he thought of it that way, I do not know, but he never behaved as if it was detrimental to him. He was a wonderful president. I say that because the staff here was such a team. They were all so professional and worked together. They all cared about students. You have to assume that since he was running the school that he was the person responsible for that.

FORSYTHE: Let me ask you about some of the buildings. What was that T building?

GILL: It was a little bit North and slightly West of Jones Hall. It was between Jones Hall and where the Old Gym was; that is not there any longer, behind Old Main. It was a place for the T club. While I was a student here, it became a school infirmary.

FORSYTHE: What was the "T Club?"

GILL: It was the people who earned letters through athletic activities.

FORSYTHE: Was Vets Village here?

GILL: Yes, that was where the married students on campus lived. When my roommate, Sarah, and Knox Wright got married, they lived there for the rest of the time that he was in school here. At that time, there were a lot of veterans who had been in service during World War II, who were coming back to school. That was why it was called vet village. With most of the married couples, the husband had been in the service. By the standards of the campus today, it was not very big. There was an old airport there, but it was not used very much because a new airport out towards Lebanon opened up while I was in school. The science building was where the Science and Home Economics Departments were. The library was out in the middle of campus and was much smaller than what you have today. The old gym had bleachers on both sides; it was on the second floor.

FORSYTHE: After you graduated from MTSU, what did you do?

GILL: I taught high school. First, at Donelson High School in Nashville. I taught a few years in Nashville, then we moved to Connecticut. I taught until I became pregnant and had to stop. There was a rule that pregnant teachers could not teach beyond a certain point. I stayed home with my children while they were preschoolers. I taught and then went into administration.