

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
WITH
MARIE KIRK

4 AUGUST 1995

MURFREESBORO, TENNESSEE

INTERVIEWED BY REGINA FORSYTHE
FOR THE Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW #QMS.052

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
MARIE KIRK**

Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW #QMS.052

Forsythe: This tape is part of the Q.M. Smith collection designated as QMS.1995.052. This is Regina Forsythe. I am continuing the interview with Marie Smith and it is being conducted in the Gore Research Center, Room 111 of the Ned McWherter Learning Resource Center. This is Friday, August 4, 1995. Edwin Howard?

Smith: I'll have to pass on Edwin Howard.

Forsythe: Katherine Clark?

Smith: Librarian. I remember Katherine Clark from the library. I didn't get to know her as much as I should. I didn't go to the library as often as I should, but yes I have an image of her behind the counter at the library.

Forsythe: Ellis Rucker?

Smith: He was chairman of the biology department. I never had classes under him, but when I got finished with the necessary required classes for my home economics degree, I went on and got a minor in science because I didn't need a lot more. I took genetics and physiology and some other classes. But I think my only contact with him was just as a student getting a minor in science, him signing documents for me.

Forsythe: John Patton?

Smith: Dr. Patton, yes, I had biology under him. I respected him very much. He was an excellent teacher. One thing that I remember about the microscopes that we used was that I always had difficulty getting them adjusted so that I could see exactly what I was supposed to be seeing under the microscope. Dr. Patton would always come by and say, "I think you need to adjust your mirror a little bit towards the light and I'll think you'll get a sharper image." Dr. Patton lived until just the last few years, and after I came back on campus in alumni relations, we had some time to reflect back on those student days. I liked him very much.. .good teacher.

Forsythe: Eldred Wiser?

Smith: Oh yes, chairman of the chemistry department. I had his chemistry class. There were other people who taught chemistry, and how I got into the class of the head

of the department, I don't know, but I did. I learned chemistry. I didn't have chemistry in high school, so it was not easy for me. I had a new chemistry book and wore it out. What I didn't wear out studying, the acid in the chemistry lab ate up, but it was a worn-looking old book when I got finished with it. Primarily, his class was made up of chemistry majors and pre-med students. There were six or eight home economics majors. He was a good teacher; I learned a lot and I recall him using standardized tests that were from the chemical association or some national chemistry testing source. He had a dairy somewhere on the outskirts of Murfreesboro, and I can remember going into a chemistry test at 1:00 and he would hand out those comprehensive chemistry exams and say, "You can work on it from now until milking time." I was one of those people who still worked on it close to milking time, but I did okay in his classes, but with my lack of a chemistry background from high school, it was not easy for me.

Forsythe: Dr. Parchment?

Smith: I never had Dr. Parchment in class. We've reflected on that in recent years. I missed him, but I told him that I knew all about him from in the home economics department when you were a bachelor up here teaching biology. I kept up with his social life through Mrs. Muncie. Ms. Stepp, who taught in the business administration department and he were was socializing in those days. They later got married and had a family. She died not too many years ago. I have current contact with Dr. Parchment since he is on the National Alumni Association Board of Directors and is very active in the Rutherford County alumni chapter. In the early 1940's, he was a student here during the war years. I think he was finishing his degree before he probably went away to service himself. I kid him sometimes looking in the 1944 yearbook, and there are all the pictures of female students and Gerald Parchment and maybe one or two other male students were there. I always kid him about how he must have enjoyed his student days here because he was so greatly outnumbered by the female students the during World War II years.

Forsythe: Coach Murphy?

Smith: Oh, yes. Coach is one of those rare, very special people. He was a student here in the played four sports, came back in the 40's as coach. He was football coach when I was here. We had winning football teams and then, of course, he continued his coaching career and then became athletic director, and Murphy Center is named for him. When I came to the Alumni Office, I immediately

started using Coach Murphy as a source of information. He has contributed untold numbers of hours to the Alumni Office in helping us to identify former athletes who we can identify former athletes in various sport on campus. He is always very willing to assist and give information. I am his number one fan. I have the highest regard and respect for Coach Murphy.

Forsythe: Buleah Davis?

Smith: Yes, Ms. Buleah Davis. Speaking of the original gym on campus, the reason I was in the old gym was because I had Ms. Davis for three phys. ed. classes. I had her square dancing class and folk dancing in the original gym. Over in the Alumni Memorial Gym, there was a stage with heavy curtains and up on the stage she conducted her modern dancing class. I was in that class there. I had her for those three phys. ed. classes. I see her currently. Occasionally, she's on campus for alumni events. Ms. Buleah is one of the people who are the early birds at the very earliest thing you schedule on homecoming morning. We have a continental breakfast on the front porch of the Alumni Center prior to the 9:00 schedule for the parade. We have juice, pastries, coffee out on the front porch. Ms. Buleah will probably be the first person there this year.

Forsythe: Joe Black Hayes?

Smith: He was on Coach Murphy's coaching staff when I was a student here. He also taught phys. ed. and I had softball class with him as my instructor. The thing that I remember most about the softball class was that other students in the class were students who played fast pitch ball in Nashville in the summer. They were good, and I could hardly catch the ball. I just mostly tried to stay out of the way of the real pros in the softball class. One day, I remember I was up to bat and got hit in the stomach with a ball that hit me pretty hard, so that speaks of my unathletic ability. But, Coach Hayes came over and suggested that I just go over and sit under a tree which pleased me okay. I see him most frequently at ballgames, football, basketball. He also comes to some alumni activities that we have from time to time. He lives here in Murfreesboro.

Forsythe: Francis Riel?

Smith: Coach Riel was head of the physical education department. I had a physical education class under him that was related to my minor in education, "Activities and Games for Secondary Education." It was over in the Alumni Memorial Gym. Coach Riel lives here in Murfreesboro out on Lillard Rd. Someone inquired about him to me just the other day. In the alumni office, a lot of times in contact with alumni, they want to know about professors they had and if they are still on faculty and if they're still living, if they're still in this area or if we ever see them. Just the other day I had an inquiry about him. It was physical education prior to it being HPER as we know that department today.

Forsythe: B.B. Gracy?

Smith: Mr. Gracy was an agriculture professor. I'm a little confused as to whether or not he was head of the department. I think that Dr. Clifford Stark was. Incidentally, I had Dr. Stark for bacteriology. He taught some classes over in the science department. I never had Mr. Gracy, but I knew who he was. He was always a very pleasant man who always seemed to be going somewhere in a hurry. That was one of my memories of him.

Forsythe: How did it happen that you started working here at MTSU?

Smith: I was living in Murfreesboro and heavily involved in volunteer activities out in the community and really missing being employed other than in voluntary capacities in community organizations. I was involved in on campus activities as a student. I was involved in student government, and once I went away from this school, I never really went away. I distanced myself geographically, but I was always connected back to the school through the alumni association and I was president of the Chattanooga area alumni chapter. I served on MTSU foundation board of trustees. I served a couple of years on the executive committee, and I think that it was probably at a foundation board meeting one day when I was first living in Murfreesboro and involved just in volunteer activities, that I expressed my desire to Dr. Sam Ingram to be involved in something at the University. I said, "Does MTSU have volunteers who come in and help stuff envelopes and do other things on campus?" I remember that Dr. Ingram said, "Well, we should have." I said, "Well, if I'm ever needed at the University, please let me know." Not too long after that, he called me and he said, "Could you come out to my office and talk to me?" I said, "Sure." He was proposing that I be employed as a temporary part-time person here at MTSU for two months to fill in for Dr. Joe Nunley who was then the alumni relations director, but Dr. Nunley was on long term sick leave. It was in mid-summer, and Dr. Ingram was concerned that some things needed to be put in place in planning for fall events and especially homecoming, and Dr. Ingram asked me if I would be interested. He told me to think about it and let him know the next week. I said, "I've already thought about it... yes, yes, yes." So, I was first employed that way and the two months, part time temporary extended into six months, and then he asked me if I would consider working another six months, full-time temporary. which I did. From day one, I was actually working full-time. When Dr. Nunley retired, the position was announced and I was one of the applicants. I was fortunate enough to be selected to fill the position permanently.

Forsythe: What year and month was all of that?

Smith: I came to work in July in 1986, and July 1, 1987, I became a full-time employee of the University.

Forsythe: I want to talk about the presidents. I want to start with Q.M. since you were a student here. What do you remember about him?

Smith: I remember President Smith as being a serious President. His door was open to students. I was in and out of his office frequently during my senior year because of my student government capacity. He always had time for students and was always very pleasant, but serious. I recall several years ago being out in Seattle and identifying the fact that one of his 1913 classmates lived in Seattle. She has since died following her 100th birthday. She was Francis Thomlinson as a student here. She invited me out to her home in Seattle and we had a comparable discussion to what we are having here. I asked her to remember Q.M. Smith as her 1913 classmate. He was president of her class. She said, "I knew Q.M. Smith. Q.M. Smith was a serious student. Actually, because he was such a serious student, I never really got to know him well." I have an idea that she balanced her academic and social schedule on campus more than he did, but he was a serious president and at the same time, he was very pleasant and had time for students.

Forsythe: Do you remember his wife?

Smith: Distant memory of her.. I can recall her being at campus events like receptions or some large gathering, but I never had any one-on-one contact with her.

Forsythe: What about Dr. Ingram?

Smith: Yes, Dr. Ingram, I met when he was still Commissioner of Education. He was on faculty here, and then he went to state government as Commissioner of Education. I was on the Foundation board of trustees. When he was first appointed as President, he came a foundation board meeting. I had driven over from Chattanooga for that meeting, and John Ellington, who was on the Foundation board at that time. He introduced me to Dr. Ingram. And, of course, I knew him through Foundation and university circles. He's the person who later gave me the job at MTSU.

Forsythe: What about Dr. Prescott?

Smith: Yes, Dr. Prescott came here in 1990 as an interim president. Dr. Ingram announced his retirement earlier in the year of 1989. The Chancellor of the Tennessee Board of Regents initiated a search for a new president. By the time Dr. Ingram retired at the end of December in 1989, the process of selecting a president had not really run its course. The Chancellor and his search committee needed more time to get a permanent president of this university in place. So, he appointed an interim president for a year, and it was Dr. Wallace Prescott. There were shock waves that ran all over this campus when it was announced that the interim president was Dr. Prescott who had his roots, most all of his higher education career at Tennessee Tech, of course MTSU's arch rival school. I have

never been so favorably impressed as I was of Dr. and Mrs. Prescott. I thought he'd probably commute, but the Prescott's moved down here for the year's duration. Mrs. Prescott was the gracious first lady. She involved herself in everything on campus just like they'd been here for years and would continue to be here for years. Dr. Prescott put a lot of things in motion during his year. He was really an asset to this university. He got computers for faculty, engaged a firm from Memphis to plan the long range Master plan and to create a long range vision plan for this university. He had an engineering background, so you might've expected that. He made himself very available to support the efforts of the Alumni Relations Office and the Alumni Association. Mrs. Prescott also went out of town to alumni chapter events in various places. Once, her father even went along with us. Dr. Prescott contributed immensely to this University during his year as interim president.

Forsythe: Dr. Walker?

Smith: Yes, Dr. Walker came here the first of February in 1991, and immediately expressed his support for my area of responsibility, Alumni Relations and the Alumni Association and has generally moved this university forward significantly in the years he has been here. He recognizes the importance of alumni relations efforts in the department, and he realizes the need this university has for alumni support. If his schedule does not have a conflict, whatever request comes to him for support of attendance at any alumni function, he is there and Mrs. Walker as well.

Forsythe: Did you know Dr. Cope?

Smith: I had a limited knowledge of Dr. Cope. I knew that he succeeded President Smith and had not really had contact with him. Maybe I was at an alumni banquet on campus when he spoke in the spring of some year, but after I had been over in Chattanooga for several years, I had a call one day at my office from Dr. Keathley. Dr. Keathley asked me if I liked my job, liked being in Chattanooga, and I said, "Oh, yes, yes I do." He said, "Well, I'd like to talk to you a little bit about a job here on this campus." When I graduated here, there was a position of dean of Students. Direction for women students was with the director of dormitories who was Mrs. Evelyn Felder. There's a dormitory named for her. Between the time of my departure and Dr. Keathley calling me in early April of 1961, a position of Dean of Women had been created, and Dr. Keathley was calling me to see if I'd be interested in this position. I agreed to come over and talk to Dr. Keathley and President Cope about the position of Dean of Women. I came on campus, and they proposed to me that I come here as the first Dean of Women. It would have meant making a move totally away from my training here, my degree, and my experience professionally. I spent the day here, and they made a proposal of what I would do and what my schedule would be. They already had a schedule mapped out for me to work on a master's degree at Peabody and also later at Florida State. They had my future mapped out for me, my duties and my

new responsibility. I was highly complimented by the offer. I told them both that I would like to go back to Chattanooga and think about. I wanted to do an evaluation of where I was and where I wanted to be. I told them I'd let them know. So, I wrote Dr. Cope a letter and expressed my appreciation to him for my being considered for the position, but told him that I thought I would stay where I was. He wrote a letter extending his best wishes for my continued success for the work I was doing. I can't recall how long after that he left MTSU to go to the University of Tennessee.

Forsythe: Did you know Dr. Scarlett?

Smith: Yes, I knew Dr. Scarlett through my being on the Foundation board of trustees. I would see Dr. Scarlett when I would come over in the spring and in the fall for board meetings. I had a limited acquaintance with him. It was strictly through the foundation board of trustees events and meetings. He left when Dr. Ingram came and went to Memphis State University. I have contacted him in times past when we would have an alumni event over in the Memphis area. I would invite him to participate in the event. Then, after he moved back to Murfreesboro, I have contact with him. I'm spoken to him on the phone several times this year. He regularly attends the alumni banquet.

Forsythe: What do you remember about Joe Nunley?

Smith: I didn't know Dr. Nunley very well before I came to the alumni office except through the alumni magazine, "The Midstater" which preceded the MTSU magazine as we know it today. I did know him from some Chattanooga area alumni chapter meetings, but I really got to know him once I came to the alumni office working on his behalf in his absence. I'd probably seen him three or four times and been in meetings with him prior to that. Dr. Nunley was in very poor health, but occasionally he would come in, and I could tell that it was taxing his physical capabilities to come over and get out of his car and get upstairs to the alumni office when we were at 209 Cope Building. He would come in, and I'd always have a little checklist of things I wanted to ask him and things that I wasn't sure about acting on until I got his direction on some certain things and getting a little background information. But, he came occasionally to the alumni office and more frequently, I would drive by his house taking a lot of his mail that was addressed specifically to him to his house. Dr. Nunley was not a person that you could drive into his driveway, leave your car running with the door open and just his ring bell and talk casually. He always had some stories to tell you. Honestly, there have been days when I would put my car in park, leave it running, jump out of the car, ring his doorbell, and before I could get away from Dr. Nunley and his stories, I'd think.. .If I run out of gas in his driveway, where could I get gas delivery from? He was a very engaging person. He always had a story to tell, and it was always a very colorful story. He could enhance stories that were pretty basic and make them so interesting and so entertaining. Also, he was informative. He had a great love for history and he always gave you a little bit of

the history of something which made it interesting. After he officially retired, I continued to use him for a source of reference and information because his history went back so far at this university. He came here as a student prior to the second world war, either in the late 30's or early 40's. He was an athlete. His years as a student were interrupted by a military period of several years. He came back after the war as a married student. I'm all but certain that he and Mrs. Nunley and their oldest son, Joe Nunley, Jr. as an infant lived in one of those Vet village facilities. He taught here for a lot of years before going to the alumni relations offices as director of alumni relations. He died shortly before Christmas in 1993. In the fall of that year, MTSU's football team opened its season with the University of Hawaii in Honolulu. A great delegation of us went from here, I think about 350 people including Dr. Nunley and his son and other friends and family members. Dr. Nunley wanted to go for so long to Pearl Harbor. I can remember being on that same tour, and I think mostly I remember being aware that Dr. Nunley was fulfilling such a long term dream of his to go there. Someone drove him to Punch Bowl Crater the next day and gave him a special tour. He was looking for the graves of some of his classmates from here at the University who he probably documented in his book, "The Raider's Forties." He thoroughly enjoyed that trip to Honolulu. My last memory of him was a few weeks later at homecoming. On homecoming weekend, we put up the large MTSU blue and white striped tent in front of the alumni center. We have class receptions there. That is sort of the gathering place for alumni on homecoming day. We have food there also. Dr. Nunley arrived early that morning. He was probably there soon after Ms. Buleah Davis arrived for the continental breakfast. It was a beautiful, brisk autumn day, a perfect homecoming morning. I was in the group that walked with him down to North Tennessee Boulevard to watch the parade go by with him. Then, Dr. Nunley said that he needed to go back over to the tent that other members of his family were gathering there under the tent and that a photographer was coming to make a family group photograph by the Lindon Tree. He mentions prominently the Lindon Tree in his "Raider's Forties" book, a memorial tree planted near Rutledge Hall where he used to court the future Mrs. Nunley. There's a memorial plaque under that tree and he was waiting on family members to come and there was a group photograph made by the Lindon tree. That is my last memory of Dr. Nunley because he died within a short period of time after that. I'd say four to six weeks.

Forsythe: What do you remember about Homer Pittard?

Smith: Dr. Pittard was another one of those men of all seasons and a wearer of many hats. Dr. Pittard was alumni director for a number of years prior to Dr. Nunley being there. Like Mr. Abernathy, he was one of those outstanding university representatives. When he came over to Chattanooga, he always called on some of the alumni. I'd see him occasionally. He stayed in touch with alumni. When he first came to the alumni office from the classroom to the administrative position, I think originally his title was Director of University Relations which encompassed what is now development or fundraising, public relations and alumni relations.

He contributed a very valuable service to this university in documenting the first 50 years. I pull Dr. Pittard's book off the shelf frequently and refer to it. He was a giant of a man. He was a student here in the early 30's. In looking in the old yearbooks, you don't have to read the caption to see Dr. Pittard. If its the football team, just look at the tops of everybody's head and then about half a head taller than everybody else, that's Dr. Pittard. There are two scholarships in creative writing that are memorial scholarships to Dr. Pittard that are given annually and the Director of Alumni Relations is the chairman of the selection committee. My responsibility annually is to alert both English and history departments, that's where the scholarship's given, for a junior or senior student with a certain grade point average who will probably go into education and who is interested in creative writing. Mrs. Pittard, his widow, serves on the selection committee. Mrs. Pittard is a petite lady, and I remember once soon after Dr. Pittard died, she came over to the meeting of the selection committee and she had bought herself a new car. It was a medium sized car, but she wanted me to see it. I walked out to the car with her as she was leaving. She got in it and said, "If Homer were alive, I couldn't have bought this car." I said, "Would he have not liked it?" She said, "Oh, yes, he would've loved it but he couldn't have gotten in it." He was very personable gentlemen.

Forsythe: Thank you very much for coming here.

Smith: It's my pleasure. Excuse me for talking so long.