

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW  
WITH  
JOSEPH SMITH

9 AUGUST 1995

MURFREESBORO, TENNESSEE

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

INTERVIEW #QMS.054

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

ALBERT GORE RESEARCH CENTER

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MIDDLE TENNESSEE STATE UNIVERSITY

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# ABSTRACT



**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH**  
**JOE SMITH**  
Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT  
INTERVIEW #QMS.054

FORSYTHE: This is Regina Forsythe. I am interviewing Mr. Joseph Smith. Today is Wednesday, August 9, 1995. The interview is being conducted in the home of Mr. Smith located at 707 Greenbriar Street, Murfreesboro, Tennessee. 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?

SMITH: Yes.

FORSYTHE: What is your full name?

SMITH: Joseph T. Smith

FORSYTHE: Birth place and date?

SMITH: Tullahoma, January 9, 1928.

FORSYTHE: Your father's name?

SMITH: Martin Benjamin

FORSYTHE: Your mother's?

SMITH: Lela

FORSYTHE: Your children's names?

SMITH: William Clanton, Cynthia Joe, and Jeffrey.

FORSYTHE: What is your wife's name?

SMITH: Billie Odom. She is a retired teacher from MTSU.

FORSYTHE: Where are your degrees from?

SMITH: MTSU, bachelor's and master's.

FORSYTHE: Why did you choose to go to MTSU?

SMITH: At the encouragement of a friend, who had been in school one year prior to my release from the Marine Corps. After World War II, I met him in the streets of Tullahoma and like most GI's I didn't have a lot of direction in my life. He said, "Get your things together," which were not plentiful, "you are going to Middle Tennessee State." So that is how I ended up here.

FORSYTHE: Tell me about being a student here at MTSU?

SMITH: I met my wife, and a lot of life long friends. It was a very pleasant place to go to school. There were a number of professors who were also veterans, and there was a camaraderie that was there that you just can't recapture.

FORSYTHE: Why did you choose to work at MTSU?

SMITH: Because of Neal Wright, the department head. I had been out teaching for six years. I had taught four years in Tennessee and moved to Georgia and I finished two years there. Their band program had gone down. It had been the largest band in the state of Tennessee. It had over one hundred members when he began the program and became the department head and choir director. They had about three unsuccessful directors, so Neal called and offered the job to me. I refused, and I refused on the second call, but on the third one I agreed to come up and talk with Mr. Smith who was president at the time. He had been president of the University when I was in school, but he is very impressive on the one-to-one. I decided that I would accept the position, which I am very pleased that I did.

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

SMITH: Very fond memories. He was one of the most straightforward individuals that I have ever known. He was very concise in his speech and I think this was because he was gassed in World War I. It was a real effort for Mr. Smith to speak, and he condensed all of his statements, very brief, straightforward, and very easily understood. One of the things I was impressed with, he offered me the job and there wasn't a review committee. I had a recommendation from the department head, so he offered the job. He said, "Mr. Smith you solve our problems and you take care of building that band and I will take care of you. If you don't I am gong to fire you." He was just that straight. He didn't mince any words, and he did take care of me. I think I may have the record for being promoted from instructor to assistant professor and given tenure within six months after arriving on campus. I really didn't know that was a great accomplishment until four or five years later when I talked with some people who came the same year and still did not have tenure and did not have a promotion. We were very fortunate with the band program that first year. He was impressed, obviously. We had a very good

relationship and I appreciate very much that promotion. Things changed following Mr. Smith, and probably for the better in that you had to jump through an awfully lot of rings and committees before you could even be considered for one of those promotions. He had a phenomenal memory. Of course the school was not that large when I was a student here but I never heard him stutter in pronouncing a student's name or recognizing a student who may have graduated years earlier. That was one of the things that all of my acquaintances who had known Mr. Smith, always remarked, how he could remember not only names but he could remember stories. As you can tell, I have a lot of admiration for the man.

FORSYTHE: What years did you work at MTSU?

SMITH: 1957 till '93.

FORSYTHE: How had the music department changed in that time period?

SMITH: From about five faculty members to about twenty-five. There had been phenomenal change, certainly too many things have changed to go into in this interview. There is a history of the music department, and that would be interesting for you to locate. I don't have a copy. I think Mrs. Wright may have a copy.

FORSYTHE: Yes she found the copy for me, the one written by Mr. Wright?

SMITH: Yes. Of course it was written many years ago and the memories were fresh at that time. I think that would be a good basis, and then I'd have a couple of the retired faculty members extend it, bring it up to date.

FORSYTHE: Where was your office?

SMITH: It was on the first floor. It adjoined the instrumental music hall. That was where my final office was. My first office was in the corner of a classroom, in the old, well it is now the Alumni Center. I had to listen, to classm work.

FORSYTHE: Let me ask you about some of the people in the department. Tell me any anecdotes or memories you have about them. Philip Howard.

SMITH: I admired him. He was a phenomenal professor wonderful historian and a unique personality.

FORSYTHE: Margaret Wright?

SMITH: Margaret was probably my first love. No, she was a GI, she was with the Red Cross, and Neal, her husband, was in the Navy. They pretty well adopted all of the vets. We had a lot to talk about. We used to play tennis, we used to make ice

cream together, and of course Margaret still visits. She lives about three or four houses away. She is one of the most talented individuals I have ever known, musically, vocally, instrumentally, and from her activities, it is amazing. She still jumps horses, she is just one of the most vibrant individuals that loves life and a wonderful friend.

FORSYTHE: What about Neal Wright?

SMITH: Well Neal, as I have already said, is the one responsible for not only my training, he was my band and choir director. He is responsible for my having accepted this job, he and Q.M. He was a wonderful department head and friend. He built a music department in very difficult times. He was well respected professionally as a singer and of course he was a professional trumpet player when he was fifteen years old. Both Margaret and Neal were extremely talented in music and wonderful individuals.

FORSYTHE: E. May Saunders?

SMITH: E. May was one of my teachers and I think of her quite often. She was always talking to the youngsters, about, "You have to start investments." It was well known that she was quite a wealthy lady and I think she ended up giving in her will, five hundred thousand dollars to the school. She didn't give it particularly to the music department. As I matured and I was not investing, I kept thinking how did she ever get enough money to start investing. She owned a lot of AT&T and Coca Cola from the time those companies started I think. So eventually I did get an investment program. Later in my class about administration, that I taught, I would teach the youngsters about starting a program of investment. No matter how early, prepare a portfolio that will maybe give them a little nicer lifestyle upon retirement. She was a very impressive teacher.

FORSYTHE: Miss Ruby Sanders?

SMITH: I played in the orchestra for Miss Sanders and I took string familiarization from her. She was a vivacious individual, just a pleasure to be around.

FORSYTHE: Kenneth Pace?

SMITH: I studied clarinet with Ken, not as a student here at the university. He was an extremely knowledgeable person in clarinet, all the woodwinds. I was teaching in Winchester and I drove over every Saturday for a couple of years and studied anywhere from thirty minutes to two or three hours, depending on his time and what we were involved in. He was a very dedicated teacher and a very knowledgeable person. I enjoyed studying with him.

FORSYTHE: Earl Hinton?

SMITH: I invited him to conduct the band. I admire his musicianship. I know he was in an awful lot of vocal related activities. I had known Earl prior to his coming to school here, when he was in Nashville. He is still a very influential person in music education. And he is a joy to work with.

FORSYTHE: Horace Beasley?

SMITH: Horace and I came here at the same time, he was the director of the concert band and I was director of the marching band. We had a wonderful working relationship for about 33 or 34 years. Very pleasant.

FORSYTHE: John Colbert?

SMITH: I didn't know John, I replace John. John went to Jordan School of Music in Indiana when he left here. Year's later we both wound up as members of American Bandmasters Association, so we see each other once a year.

FORSYTHE: Harriet Patterson?

SMITH: Harriet is a doll. She is full of life and has a wonderful outlook on life and is a very impressive singer. The students who studied with her just thought she was marvelous. I see Harriet about once a year and her husband. Those are all pleasant memories working with those people.

FORSYTHE: Mary Scott?

SMITH: Mary, bless her heart, she tried to teach me piano. It just didn't take. I did just well enough on piano that I did pass her course, but I certainly was not an outstanding student. That is my fault, not hers. She was very patient and she lived only a block away. She was a good neighbor.

FORSYTHE: Michael Gatozzi?

SMITH: One of the most fantastic fiddle players I have ever known and individual. He made me like fiddle. He just played with such exuberance and he loved life. I used to ask him, "How many hours did you have to practice to do this?" He said, "Hell, Joe, I never practice, I always perform. I practiced baseball, I had to work to stay on the baseball team, I didn't have to work to play fiddle." He left here and he ended up as the fiddle player with the Alabama string quartet, which at that time was probably the best university string quartet in the country. Mike is still at Alabama. He had to stop playing because of bursitis in his shoulders which is something that conductors and fiddle players get. He has bone spurs. He is still at the University. In fact, I was there in February or March and he was out of town so I didn't get to see him. He is one of those people that you just don't forget. I really hated to see him leave the university even though I was happy for him to get that job at Alabama, a very prestigious position.

FORSYTHE: Jean Bills?

SMITH: I have worked with Jean, she is a cellist part time. I made their photographs. I must say it was a beautiful photograph that I made for them when they first came here. Ray, her husband, his office is just down the hallway, and we see one another and have coffee or chat a while. Both of them are very congenial individuals. Ray is a good pianist, and a hard worker.

FORSYTHE: Tom Naylor

SMITH: Tom was the trumpet instructor for several years prior to becoming department head. Over the ten years that he was department head, we developed a good relationship. I think he did an outstanding job with the department in increasing the size of it. One of the major things Tom had done, he has taken over the Governors School for the Arts and has been very successful in administering the Governor's School for the Arts program for about eight or nine years. Tom is a very nice individual, it was a pleasure working with him.

FORSYTHE: Tell me about Dean Beasley?

SMITH: Dean was a very congenial fellow and would help you. I know as a young faculty member here, I didn't know anything about requisitions and so forth. I always felt welcome in Dean's office. He would say, "OK, here is what you do." He would set you straight in a nice way.

FORSYTHE: Dean Kirksey

SMITH: Kirksey was a very well known educator. I had many classes with him, he was very effective.

FORSYTHE: Dean Keathley

SMITH: I knew his son extremely well, Bob, his wife worked there also. He had an extremely fine family. I always had a good working relationship with the Dean and enjoyed all of them. They were just very nice friends.

FORSYTHE: Robert Abernathy?

SMITH: Yes, I worked a lot with Bob. He was a very impressive person from the standpoint of being a speaker. As far as advertising Middle Tennessee, he was to many people not only in the state but in the nation, he was the ambassador for Middle Tennessee State. He could give some of the most delightful speeches. They could be serious, but they always had many jokes to make the important points. He was one of the better representatives for the university.

FORSYTHE: Eugene Sloan?

SMITH: Gene was, I guess outside of Neal Wright, I had as much or more respect for Gene than anyone else. He was an extremely hard worker. He was over worked. He was the publicity person. He was the entire staff, he did his own typing. I think he had some part time help, but he was another big promoter of Middle Tennessee. I know that when we were developing this Contest of Champions, I talked to Gene. I said, "Is it possible for you to get me an appointment with the governor?" I knew he and Mr. Ellington had worked an awful lot together. He said, "I don't think it will be a problem at all. When do you want to go and how much time do you need, and what are you talking about?" I said "Well Gene, I am talking about the Contest of Champions. I would like the governor to recognize that as the state marching band contest, and supply us with a trophy. His name would stay on that trophy until the demise of the contest, or forever, whichever." So I wrote it up and took it to Gene and he said, "Okay." We were very successful. The governor was enthusiastic about it, and we still have that trophy. I went back to him on another occasion and was very successful in getting his support again, for that contest. The governor and Gene were instrumental in giving it the position that it holds right now. We still have a two hour program annually on WDCN. We have had that two hour program, I believe last year was the fifteenth year. It goes not only in this country, it is broadcast by satellite to any station in the world that wants to pick it up. We know it is picked up in Malta, we have a post card from Malta and also from Guam. I know that it goes into Canada.

FORSYTHE: Joe Nunley?

SMITH: I worked with Joe for many years. He came up with the idea for the Veteran's Salute. He came to me and was talking about it and I said, "You just thought up an awful lot of work for me." So we did the Veteran's Salute together for ten years. He was a good representative for Middle Tennessee State.

FORSYTHE: Bonnie McHenry

SMITH: She was the secretary for Q. M. and she ran the office. She was a very nice lady but she was all business, or she was to me, which I appreciated. I say that in a very nice way not that she ever mistreated anyone, she ran the office and took care of Q. M.

FORSYTHE: Harold Jewel?

SMITH: Harold was a very good friend. He was head of the maintenance department at that time. He was always cooperative in some of the things that I asked for, unique with the music department in having hundreds of instruments, and having to have storage compartments. He was always very cooperative and we had a very good working relationship.

FORSYTHE: Charles Phillips

SMITH: Witcher, we had a good relationship and worked very closely with him. When he opened his new bookstore, which is the Phillips Bookstore, I did the photography for him. Because of his foresight in the design of that bookstore and because of the photographs, he was widely acclaimed in the bookstore business, as being quite an innovator. He was a good friend.

FORSYTHE: Wink Midgett?

SMITH: Mr. Midgett was a neighbor. He lived about one half block away. He was very knowledgeable and he also was a big supporter of Middle Tennessee State. He was a coach. He did so many things outside of his teaching. He wrote books and manuals that have been adopted, so he was very professionally accepted. I was on a couple of committees with him and it was always a joy to work with him on a committee because he was a very straightforward individual and didn't mince an awfully lot of words. He was chairman and had it organized and we always managed to accomplish things. Sometimes that doesn't happen, you know, but he was very business like, and committee meetings were always very productive.

FORSYTHE: Joe Black Hayes?

SMITH: I knew Joe. In fact the day that he moved into Murfreesboro from UT he parked a truck on a hill and let it roll back into my new car. He just lives down the road, so that started our relationship. He is a great fellow. He was very successful with Bubber Murphy in the athletic program there, just a fine acquaintance.

FORSYTHE: Coach Murphy?

SMITH: Well I am sure you are going to get a lot of glowing remarks on that gentleman. He is a gentleman. I always admired his coaching ability, how he worked with the young people, his coaches, and being such a nice fellow, winning so many games. He had a technique to work with people that he got the best out of them. That is very rare talent. Obviously he had a long successful tenure here. He was recognized, I think he was national coach of the year one year, along about the last couple of years that he coached. Middle Tennessee was lucky to have that man.

FORSYTHE: Homer Pittard?

SMITH: I am saying glowing remarks about everybody, but I tell you we had a marvelous staff. Homer was a hard-working publicity oriented individual. He helped in many ways with the band program, not so much hands-on but things that he would write up. Of course basically he was a teacher but many times teachers had to double their number of activities. He had been an outstanding principal, I think

maybe superintendent. Educationally he was very sound. He was well thought of in the profession. Our relationship was very good. He sponsored, or was in charge of the yearbook for several years. I did an awful lot of photography for them. We had a lot of fun together, we worked hard. I go back and look at some of those annuals, and the students, and Homer, they put out a good product.

FORSYTHE: Richard Peck

SMITH: I had a class with Richard and he was one of those GI's who was very effervescent. His classes were just really phenomenal. I didn't make A's or B's in his classes, but I sure enjoyed them and learned an awfully lot. One thing I remember about him. There used to be some tulip beds in front of the administration building, between the administration building and the old library, which is now the square. I mentioned photography, I was an amateur photographer and I was walking by there one day and said I am going to get over here and photograph those tulips in the morning when the moisture is still on them. I set the clock and I was a little late getting out of the house, also I didn't change. It was like 5:30 in the morning so I just left my pajamas on and threw on a house coat and grabbed my camera bag and came over. I got set up, and sure enough there was no one on campus. I was down on my hands and knees and I was shooting up through the tulip bed and I heard this car coming around the drive. I thought I'll just stay real low and nobody will notice. He was coming pretty fast and I heard the brakes slam on. The car obviously pulled in, and I heard these steps. He walked with a lope and I thought it's Dick Peck. Just as I started to turn around he said, "Joe Smith, what in the hell are you doing in the flower bed at ten till six?" I said, "I am making photographs. " He said, "Photographers don't dress in pajamas," so we had a conversation. But he always arrived, I found out, anywhere from five thirty to six fifteen. He did basically all of his work at that time of the day so that he had classes and he could work with students. But he was just about the first one on the job every morning.

FORSYTHE: Did you live on campus when you were a student?

SMITH: Yes, for about two quarters, I lived in Jones Hall, room 200. I had three roommates. That was a single room with three GIs and a civilian. It had two bunk beds in there and one desk, that was about it. It was amazing. But we didn't stay there very long.

FORSYTHE: Did you have a job when you were going to school?

SMITH: Yes, I played for dances, played in bars, I was a drummer. I played with any piece, three piece, seven piece, and played with the university stage band. The stage band didn't go out and play as such. We played for various things on campus, but it was student oriented activity. Then various groups pulled out, you couldn't book a fifteen or eighteen piece band but you could book a three or five or seven or so. We worked on Friday and Saturday nights, ten dollars a job.

FORSYTHE: What did students do for fun?

SMITH: Well I can't tell you what some of them did because they all got caught, and it would be embarrassing now. I mentioned some of us in the music department would go over to the city tennis courts and play. A number of the students would get together in the summer and make ice cream. Musicians, which obviously are people that I associated with, their hours are long. You start early in the morning practicing. We only had about four practice rooms, as I recall, about fifty people, and you had to stay in that music department most of the time and try to get into a practice room. This was in the basement of the Old Main underneath what used to be the auditorium. They left that open, and it wasn't unusual for people to stay there till' one o'clock in the morning. So there wasn't an awfully lot of entertainment short of what you made for yourself. Wintertime I don't remember anything, I don't know what we did. Of course there was basketball, and we did have more dances then. I guess once or twice a month we would have dances, either the departments or a club would have a dance. Quite often the ROTC used to sponsor one of the bigger dances of the year. We did a lot of dancing.

FORSYTHE: Is there anything else you would like to tell me?

SMITH: I have written some notes down...I don't think...No, I think we have covered it all. Of course there is a lot of other memories but trying to come up with them, maybe if I think of them I will write them down and send them to you. I only worked with Q. M. for one year. That was all this was supposed to be about so I didn't think of too many of the other activities that went on. He was I think one the best presidents that I ever worked for, and there have been some good presidents. I don't mean to say there hasn't been, but he was the most impressive I have had, and the most honest. All the presidents have not been honest, so that can go on record. But if you think of something else give me a call and I will be glad to speak with you about it.

FORSYTHE: Thank you very much.