

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
WITH
MILDRED DARK

29 SEPTEMBER 1995

MURFREESBORO, TENNESSEE

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

INTERVIEW #QMS.112

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
MILDRED DARK**

Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW #QMS.112

FORSYTHE: This tape is part of the Q.M. Smith Collection designated as QMS.1995.112. This is Regina Forsythe, I am interviewing Mrs. Mildred Dark. Today is Friday September 29, 1995. The interview is being conducted in the home of Mrs. Dark at 249 Cason Lane, Murfreesboro, Tennessee. The tape of this 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. Dark?

DARK: Yes.

FORSYTHE: What is your full name?

DARK: Mildred Lorraine Northcutt Dark.

FORSYTHE: What is your birth date and place?

DARK: May 20, 1908. Spencer, Tennessee at Buritt College. I was born in the girls dormitory. My grandfather bought the dormitory from the college and moved his family into the dormitory. Then when my father married, he brought his wife to the dormitory. When I was born, that is where they were living.

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

DARK: H.E. Northcutt. He taught school in Texas, New Mexico, Mississippi. . .He coached the basketball teams. Later he had a general store, and was the post master. He also had timber and land.

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

DARK: Loula Shelton Hutcheson Northcutt. She was a wife and home keeper. She also assisted my father in his mercantile business.

FORSYTHE: Do you have any siblings?

DARK: I had one brother, Hardin E. Northcutt, who was an electrician at Alcoy Aluminum Plant. I had a sister named Opal Northcutt and she married Clyde Guy. They were in the manufacturing of airplane and car parts in Ohio. My other sister was Mary Samantha Northcutt and she married Lloyd Quick. Their sons have graduated from MTSU recently.

FORSYTHE: What has your husband's name and occupation?

DARK: Harris J. Dark, he was head of the math department at David Lipscomb University and here at MTSU. He was also a minister, and we traveled all over the world. He worked at MTSU from 1957 until his death in 1984. He did not really work up until his death, he drew sick leave until he died. He was the chairman of the math department for 13 years at MTSU. He was the chairman of the math department at David Lipscomb University for 17 years.

FORSYTHE: Why did he change universities?

DARK: Part of it was the administration. Dr. Cope, the president, was a cousin of mine. Dr. Cope worshipped at our church, where my husband was the minister. It was quite natural for him to move to MTSU when Dr. Cope became president. My husband was a minister of the Church of Christ. He preached at the Madison and Temple Avenue Churches of Christ. He founded the Gallatin Road Church of Christ, the Franklin Road Church of Christ, and Perry Heights Church of Christ, one of the university churches down here.

FORSYTHE: What are your children's names?

DARK: I have three sons and one daughter. Joel H. Dark is an attorney in Nashville. He finished college at David Lipscomb University and received his law degree at a school in Kentucky. James O. Dark, is a flight instructor. He rents planes and teaches math also. My daughter, who lives next door, is Mildred Anne Underhill. Her husband is a minister for the Bethlehem Church over on Lascassass Road. She teaches at Northfield and enjoys working with special education students. John R. Dark teaches at Brainerd High School in Chattanooga. He lectures at the college there. He does math and accounting. He is earning his Certified Public Accountant degree and is also working on a second master's degree in accounting. He has four daughters who are all scholarship students in various Tennessee Universities. They all have to go to different schools.

FORSYTHE: What do you remember about attending MTSU?

DARK: I remember the difficulty in getting credit for music, so I took foreign languages. I had Dr. Bruner for Latin, and Mrs. Schardt for Spanish. I studied English with Miss Ordway. I took part in Drama Club and was a member of the Murphy Sorority. I lived in that new dormitory, Lyon Hall, which is right next to the James Union Building. I stayed there about a year and a half.

FORSYTHE: What years were you a student at MTSU?

DARK: 1928-1929

FORSYTHE: Why did you chose to attend MTSU?

DARK: The depression was beginning and my father told me that he could not keep me in private schools through my senior year. I left Peabody College and came to MTSU. I had also gone to Buritt College, where I was born. Mrs. Flora Myers Gillitin taught here, who was a family relative.

FORSYTHE: Tell me about chapel?

DARK: We had a devotional. I played music as the students came into the assembly. They entered in an orderly fashion. We had announcements, speakers, student performances, and it was very exhilarating. Everyone was required to go. They did not call a roll, but they knew if I was there because I had to play the music.

FORSYTHE: Did you have a job while you were a student?

DARK: No.

FORSYTHE: Did you student teach?

DARK: I student taught science over in the Pittard building. I did not get to teach my major. I was required to student teach, but they did not have an open class in high school of music or foreign languages. I had to teach whatever was available. I would walk over from Lyons Hall and teach. I had students that were older than I. They had been teachers, and came back to get their degree. I did not know that when I started in. I do not remember the age difference being a problem.

FORSYTHE: You were on the Sidelines school newspaper staff?

DARK: I was the society editor. At my junior college I was the editor-in-chief, I still have some of those newspapers. I did not realize the importance of doing such activities, they just came my way, and I did them.

FORSYTHE: Did you work with Baxter Hobgood on Sidelines?

DARK: I do not remember if he was involved in that, he probably was. Maybe in athletics.

FORSYTHE: How did you get to be a part of the newspaper staff?

DARK: They asked me to write. I suppose they had recommendations from the English department, telling who could write well. I had been Editor-in-chief of a school paper before.

FORSYTHE: What was the Murphy Society?

DARK: It was a girls' sorority. They did not call it a sorority, but there was no one but girls in it. We had programs and reports on different subjects. We promoted our interests. I do not remember that we were very politically minded, but we were conscious of women's position in society.

FORSYTHE: Tell me about being president of the music society.

DARK: I was president of the music club, and we had performances and reports on things of musical interest, history, composers, performers. I have heard Rachmaninov play as well as Tchaikovsky. We had guest performers come, but we also performed. We listened to recordings.

FORSYTHE: What was your major?

DARK: Foreign Language, which really consisted of Latin and Spanish.

FORSYTHE: What about your education classes?

DARK: I was required to get a certain number of hours in education, but I did not consider that as a major.

FORSYTHE: Were you on the basketball team?

DARK: I was in junior college, but not here. I did play in class tournaments. I still enjoy going to basketball games.

FORSYTHE: What do you remember about MTSU President Lyon?

DARK: I remember where he lived. His daughter married Horace Jones. He was very kind to me, and offered me a place to teach over here, when I finished college. I felt obligated to go back home and serve my people in the mountains for a time.

FORSYTHE: What do you remember about Dean Beasley?

DARK: He was a wonderful person. He advised me on my curriculum. I know that I made some "B"s and I was very unhappy about it. I went in to see Dean Beasley about it, and he would not let me drop anything. I felt I had made the "B"s because I was participating in so many things. I had been the valedictorian in high school and in junior college, so it hurt me when I did not make "A"s at MTSU. He persuaded me that I should be pleased with "B"s. He was also a friend of my uncle.

FORSYTHE: Dr. Bruner?

DARK: He was my Latin teacher and advisor. He was my major teacher. I remember his interest in culture and in other people. He also had an interest in the significance

of the Roman government to our government. You know, we copied Roman legislative bodies and assemblies. Now we have our Congress, with our Senators and Representatives. They had their Patricians and Plebeians. Dr. Bruner kept us well informed on the influence of the Roman culture, Julius Caesar, Virgule, the myths, Homer Iliad and the Odessey. . . It has added to my intense interest in my travels. I have been all over the world, even to Troy.

FORSYTHE: Rebecca Buchanan?

DARK: She was an English teacher, very efficient. She expected the students to speak to her when we saw her in the halls. She was interested in drama, and was a very delightful person. I found out that she liked for students to speak to her. We were having a meeting of the music club, and I had forgotten a record or tape that was part of the program. I ran into the other part of the building, where the lights were off. I knew someone was in the hall with me, but I did not see who it was. When I returned to our meeting place, she said, "Mildred, you are supposed to speak to me when you pass me." I did from then on. We learned courtesy from a lot of people. Now, if the teachers get knocked down, they get up and say thank you.

FORSYTHE: Coach Faulkinberry?

DARK: He was my physical education teacher. He would also be coaching the teams when I would go to the football games. We had to meet on an outdoor court for the football games. It was over across from where the administration building is now. I think Smith Hall is on the site of our football field.

FORSYTHE: Dr. Golightly?

DARK: He taught education. He was very interested in his students and he gave us advice. I still have some of the books that we studied. I have referred back to those books in research. A lot of the young people would throw them away, but I like to see from where we have come, and see where we are going. The retired faculty from the university is studying modern trends in education as one of the lecture series. We can refer back to the old books to compare former practices. I am lecturing on Africa. I am reading some of the letters I get, reporting on what is going on. I was there when [Nelson] Mandella was let out of prison. They were expecting anything to happen. Now, they are able to peacefully move into other cultures peacefully. They had discrimination in reverse, to what it has been over here. Their children may get a job if, other people are satisfied. They might allow the white people to come in and work.

FORSYTHE: Horace Jones?

DARK: He was still teaching when Dr. Dark went in as the chairman. I remember his complaints about his feet hurting, after a reception we gave him. I was in his

math classes. He would talk about when he got married, when he played ball, and many other things that happened at Middle Tennessee State College.

FORSYTHE: Miss Ollie Greene?

DARK: I studied South American geography under her. I have been very interested in it because most of the countries down there speak Spanish. She got me acquainted with the National Geographic magazine. I watch it on television now, and I am just delighted to see some of those things. It confirms things that she said about the countries.

FORSYTHE: Anne Ordway?

DARK: I had English with her. We did drama, poetry, fiction, non-fiction, and essays. She was a very delightful person.

FORSYTHE: Tommie Reynolds?

DARK: I just went over for physical education. That was not my main interest. It was required, so I took it. She had to be a little authoritative to give directions to everyone, but to me that was not offensive. I knew what she had to do.

FORSYTHE: Miss E. May Saunders?

DARK: She was my music teacher. I accompanied her singing groups. Sometimes I would be playing and she would comment, "Oh Mildred, you play like a pianist." In other words, I was trying to get it just exactly right. I did accompany the songs in her class. We studied music history and composers.

FORSYTHE: Elizabeth Schardt?

DARK: She was my Spanish teacher, a very inspirational person. You know, the Spanish and French languages came from Latin. Since I was a Latin major, it was very natural for me to study the modern languages. I enjoyed her classes very much.

FORSYTHE: What did you do after you graduated?

DARK: I graduated in 1930 and married in 1932. I went on to Peabody College and did my graduate work. I finished two degrees at Peabody College.

FORSYTHE: You were telling me you were involved in Women's suffrage?

DARK: Yes, that was before 1920. That article that they wrote in that women's paper told the truth, that I would not have voted if my father had told me not to. Since he was running for office, I persuaded him to let me vote. I do not remember the office he was running for, but he need my vote.

[She is making reference to "Senior Sister" in Women of Today, a magazine for women by women, Rutherford County and surrounding area, Volume 1, Number 3.]

FORSYTHE: You were telling me about getting a curriculum for music in 1939?

DARK: Yes, I created the curriculum. I was encouraged to do that, mainly by C.P. Ferguson, who was the principal. He knew that I could write it, but my students were not getting credit on their music. I wrote up the curriculum and became the president of the Music Teachers Association of Tennessee. I presented that and they accepted it.

FORSYTHE: `Did you live in Murfreesboro during World War II?

DARK: No, we did not come here until 1960. Dr. Dark came here in 1957, but he commuted from Nashville.

FORSYTHE: Is there anything else you would like to talk about?

DARK: My association with MTSU is a very happy one. The math department still invites me to their social functions. I have tickets to the athletics and programs. I think they do that because of my husband [a professor in the math department from 1957-1984], rather than my being an alumni.