

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW  
WITH  
JAMES DEJARNATT

17 OCTOBER 1995

MURFREESBORO, TENNESSEE

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

INTERVIEW #QMS.129

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

## **EDITORIAL NOTICE**

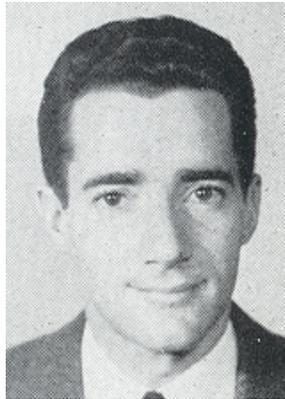
This is a transcript of a tape-recorded interview conducted by the Albert Gore Research Center at Middle Tennessee State University. The original recording and associated materials are archived at the center, whose collections may be accessed in person or via the web site [gorecenter.mtsu.edu](http://gorecenter.mtsu.edu). After a draft of this transcript was made, the interviewer, or in some cases another qualified staff member, reviewed the draft and compared it to the tape recordings. In a few cases, the interviewee also contributed editorial corrections. This final transcript incorporates the corrections and other changes suggested by the interviewee and interviewer. The transcript follows as closely as possible the recorded interview, including the usual starts, stops, and other rough spots in typical conversation. The reader should remember that this is essentially a transcript of the spoken, rather than the written, word. Stylistic matters, such as punctuation and capitalization, follow the *Chicago Manual of Style*, 15<sup>th</sup> edition. The transcript includes bracketed notices at the end of one tape and the beginning of the next so that, if desired, the reader can find a section of tape more easily by using this transcript.

## **RESTRICTION**

The interviewee has donated her or his copyright in this interview to the state of Tennessee through Middle Tennessee State University and has agreed that use of the recorded interview and transcript shall be governed by the director of the Albert Gore Research Center.

Researchers may read, quote from, cite, photocopy, and download this transcript without permission for purposes of research only. Publication is prohibited, however, without permission from the director of the Albert Gore Research Center.

# ABSTRACT



**ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW WITH  
JAMES DEJARNATT**

Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

INTERVIEW #QMS.129

Forsythe: This is Regina Forsythe I am interviewing Mr. James DeJarnatt. Today is Tuesday, October 17, 1995. This 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 a 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 Mr. DeJarnatt? What is your full name?

DEJARNATT: James William DeJarnatt

FORSYTHE: Your birth date?

DEJARNATT: January 13, 1920.

FORSYTHE: Your birthplace.

DEJARNATT: Rutherford county, the community of Barfield.

FORSYTHE: Your father' name?

DEJARNATT: John Nance DeJarnatt.

FORSYTHE: His occupation?

DEJARNATT: His occupation was farmer.

FORSYTHE: Your mother's name?

DEJARNATT: My mother's name was Ethel Carter DEJARNATT:.

FORSYTHE: Her occupation?

DEJARNATT: Housewife.

FORSYTHE: Do you have any brothers or sisters?

DEJARNATT: I have one sister, Betty, and three brothers, Austin, John and Robert.

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

DEJARNATT: Juanita Sanders, she is a housewife.

FORSYTHE: Do you have any children?

DEJARNATT: I have one, her name is Ann Pearce.

FORSYTHE: Did anyone else in your family go to MTSU?

DEJARNATT: Robert and Betty and Austin all graduated from Middle Tennessee.

FORSYTHE: Why did you choose to go to MTSU?

DEJARNATT: Because it was close to the farm. Because without Middle I am sure I would not have been able to go to college. The location, of course I lived on campus. Tuition at that time including activity fees was \$28 a quarter. It changed quite a bit when I came back out of the service..

FORSYTHE: What years did you go to MTSU?

DEJARNATT: I started in 1938 and I stayed until '41. I was sick with the flu or something and did not get to go to the second quarter of that year. Then in the interim I went into the service.

FORSYTHE: When you came back what years did you go?

DEJARNATT: I came back in 1946, and I stayed for a quarter and I went to law school at Lebanon. I came back in '48 and I graduated in August of '48.

FORSYTHE: Can you tell me again how you got to law school.

DEJARNATT: After I returned from the service I was talking with Dr. Sims, and told him of my plans that I planned to finish here and get my degree and go to law school. He said, "If you want to you can go to law school now and come back, and we will give you a year. You can finish in three years." So I did that and I finished at Cumberland University in Lebanon, came back, took the bar exam, passed the bar, and finished school.

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

DEJARNATT: It was a good experience. I enjoyed my years that I was here very much, both before the war and after. I knew that I needed to do that very thing if I wanted to get off that farm out there in Barfield. I enjoyed it and I did think about going to law school and figured I never would, because of the cost involved. But these people coming out of the service when they came back they were the most

dedicated students that I have ever run into. Their only thought was law books, and then to get out into the real world so to speak.

FORSYTHE: The war made them into serious students, is that what you are saying?

DEJARNATT: I think the experience certainly helped, so many was in a leadership role. The fact that they did well, they knew they could do it and they knew what they wanted to do. They came back and they would go very dedicated. They did it, they worked hard.

FORSYTHE: You said you lived off campus, how far away was the farm?

DEJARNATT: The farm was about four and a half miles away. I got different people that I could ride with.

FORSYTHE: Do you remember going to chapel?

DEJARNATT: Yes. Well, I remember that we usually had a scripture that was read, and there was a prayer given by a faculty member. Then there was a various and sundry projects or topics, some of them were in the form of a debate, some in the form of discussion. A lot of the speakers that we had turned out very nice. I cannot remember any specifics though.

FORSYTHE: What do you remember about Q.M. Smith?

DEJARNATT: I checked with him only two or three times and they were about certain subjects, my father wanted me to be a farmer, so naturally they were geared in that fashion. I knew that that wasn't what I wanted so I was turning it around, but that was about the extent of it.

FORSYTHE: What was your major?

DEJARNATT: Social sciences.

FORSYTHE: Did you have to practice teach?

DEJARNATT: No.

FORSYTHE: Let me see if you have to remember some other faculty or staff members. How about Sean Beasley?

DEJARNATT: I knew Dean Beasley very well. He and my father were friends.

FORSYTHE: Did you know Dr. Golightly?

DEJARNATT: Yes. He was very good I thought. I enjoyed some of his classes. Dr. James, I had a number of classes under Dr. James. He was very good at covering the materials that needed to be covered. He was easy to follow. I guess Dr. Sims, I had more classes with Dr. Sims than any body else. He could take a very dry subject matter and make it very interesting. He did a good job. Neal Frazier, I had a lot of classes with him. I had a lot of classes under B.B. Gracy. They were the main ones. Mr. Davis was the science teacher. He was a good teacher. He taught in such a fashion that he was giving you all these pop quizzes all the time, so he knew that you had better be prepared for him. But he covered his material very well.

FORSYTHE: How did the campus change from the time before the war and when you came back?

DEJARNATT: It had not changed to much well you had the gym, that was different, the library was still out where you could see it. They had a fairly new science building, I believe. The veterans came back and had gardens up behind the science building, and all of that is filled up. I don't remember just how many students there were but, if memory serves me there were about fifteen hundred during this period and the period when I came back out of the service.

FORSYTHE: Were the GI's treated differently?

DEJARNATT: Yes I think there was a difference? I think there was a certain dedication that you didn't see with the other students, I don't mean that they stood out, but every assignment was prepared and they were there and they made every single class, that sort of thing.

FORSYTHE: Did the other students treat them different?

DEJARNATT: I don't think so, at least I didn't notice it.

FORSYTHE: What about the professors?

DEJARNATT: The professors were very fair, on that score.

FORSYTHE: Did you have a job?

DEJARNATT: I had a job at the grocery store, but other than that all my work was on the farm.

FORSYTHE: Where was the grocery store?

DEJARNATT: It was MT Brothers, it was on the square and I worked part time.

FORSYTHE: Tell me about growing up on the farm.

DEJARNATT: It was a good life from the stand point of having lots to eat. We were very limited as to clothing and that sort of thing, these items you would buy them in the fall and try to make them last to the next fall because your income came in primarily in the fall, unless you had a dairy, we later established a dairy and we were paid twice a month, for the milk.

FORSYTHE: Where was the farm and how big was it?

DEJARNATT: The farm consisted of approximately seventy seven acres and was located along Stone's river from the bridge down to Ms. McKey's place which was about a mile as the crow flies. It joined a farm uncle and his farm was owned by another uncle on the other side so a lot of that we were farming the other land just by renting or splitting the crops, so we had approximately one hundred and fifty acres that we could use because neither one of the uncles lived here they lived away.

FORSYTHE: Tell me how the share cropping system worked?

DEJARNATT: Well the sharecroppers in those days, they would come to the owner of the farm and make a contract and pay money or have an agreement where they would get part or the proceeds of whatever they were planning as I recall, the owner got a third and the other person got two thirds and sometimes they were furnishing housing they lived right there on the farm, in our case we had some workers that would come in and would chop and pick cotton just by paying so much a pound so much a day for chopping cotton, that was about what we did.

FORSYTHE: Is there a difference between tenant and share cropping?

DEJARNATT: Sharecropping is sharing the crop and the tenant farming is where he moves on and operated his own farm, that was what we were doing primarily when we were renting these plots of land from my uncle.

FORSYTHE: So the owner would be absent in the tenant farmer's case.

DEJARNATT: Well not always, it is a close mix.

FORSYTHE: Can you tell me more about growing up here in Rutherford county? What did you do for entertainment?

DEJARNATT: Milk cows. Most entertainment we had was on Sundays, Sunday afternoon, my cousins and I we would gather and play football, baseball and that sort of thing. We just didn't have time to do a lot of playing other than on Sundays.

FORSYTHE: Tell me what Central High was like.

DEJARNATT: I came out of a school that had eight graduates and two teachers, so that was a big shock. That was the Barfield grammar school, it is not in existence any more. You know the heart of Barfield was where the stores are located of course there are no stores there now. They burned down or something happened to it. But it was real close, I guess the Nelly Parsley home is there on the old school ground and she was one of my teachers.

FORSYTHE: How did that work all those kids different ages in the same room.

DEJARNATT: Well we learned quite a bit by listening to the other classes and there was a room where we could study and a small library, and that was about it and the class that was called would be called up on the front row and the next class would start.

FORSYTHE: Didn't the big classes get bored by listening to the little kids classes.

DEJARNATT: Probably so, I don't remember that as a problem.

FORSYTHE: Is there anything else you want to talk about?

DEJARNATT: I was away so long, I left Rutherford county in 1948 and did not return until 1982, so I lived in Hartford Connecticut and was there for fifteen years, so I do not know much of the development, I thought I was coming back to retire in a town that was small and I retired to a town that is booming.

FORSYTHE: Thank you very much.