

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW
WITH
CLARA RUBENS GRIFFIN

25 OCTOBER 1995

MURFREESBORO, TENNESSEE

INTERVIEWED BY REGINA FORSYTHE
FOR THE Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
INTERVIEW #QMS.136

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "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. 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*, 15th 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
CLARA RUBENS GRIFFIN
Q. M. SMITH ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
INTERVIEW #QMS.136

FORSYTHE: This tape is part of the Q.M. Smith Collection designated as QMS.1995.136. This is Regina Forsythe. I am interviewing Mrs. Clara Rubens Griffin. Today is Wednesday October 25, 1995. The interview is being conducted in the home of Mrs. Griffin located at 802 Fairview, Murfreesboro, Tennessee. The tape of this interview along with the 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. Griffin?

GRIFFIN: Yes.

FORSYTHE: What is your full name?

GRIFFIN: Clara Luther Rubens Griffin.

FORSYTHE: What is your birth date and birth place?

GRIFFIN: July 17, 1921. Burns, Tennessee. That is in Dickson County.

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

GRIFFIN: Elbert Luther. He was a farmer.

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

GRIFFIN: Helen Ligon Luther. She was a homemaker. She had been a teacher as well. She taught first through eighth grade. She had 80 students in Hickman County before she married my father. It was in Centerville, Tennessee. It was a country school.

FORSYTHE: What was your first husband's name and occupation?

GRIFFIN: Frederick James Rubens. He was a teacher and an artist.

FORSYTHE: What was your second husband's name and occupation?

GRIFFIN: William Lindsey Griffin. He worked with the Union stockyards in Nashville. He also worked as a salesman for Taylor Supply Company.

FORSYTHE: How many children do you have?

GRIFFIN: I have five children: Cheryl Ann, Sandra Lea, Helen Carol, Frederick James, Jr., and Lisa Claire. Cheryl and Lisa are deceased.

FORSYTHE: Did any of them attend MTSU?

GRIFFIN: Both Cheryl and Sandy went there. Sandy finished her degree in sociology there, but Cheryl went on to the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

FORSYTHE: Did you attend MTSU?

GRIFFIN: No I did not.

FORSYTHE: What years did your husband, Fred Rubens, teach at MTSU?

GRIFFIN: We came here in Fall 1955. He taught until his death, January 10, 1968.

FORSYTHE: What were his duties as an MTSU faculty member?

GRIFFIN: When we came here, he was chairman of the Art division, a newly created division. Before that, they did not have an art department. I can not recall how many years that he was chairman. It was probably three years, and then he felt that he needed to get more instruction. He went back to Peabody College to get a doctorate degree while he continued to teach part-time at MTSU. He was working on the doctorate degree when he died. He had 100 hours toward the doctorate.

FORSYTHE: Tell me about Mr. Rubens painting Nathan Bedford Forrest?

GRIFFIN: The ROTC Department wanted it. The Blue Raiders were very popular for the football team. So, they commissioned him to do a painting of Nathan Bedford Forrest. As far as I know, it is still hanging in the ROTC department.

FORSYTHE: How much did they pay him for that?

GRIFFIN: The best that I can remember, they bought the paint, and he did the work. I don't think he was ever paid at all for doing that.

FORSYTHE: Tell me about the monument.

GRIFFIN: Mr. Rubens did the sketches for the monument at the entrance of the university located on Main Street. I cannot remember how he got involved. Evidently they were discussing a main entrance to the university and asked him to design the monument. I still have the original drawings.

FORSYTHE: Did your husband do any other paintings or monuments on the MTSU campus?

GRIFFIN: He evidently did the Nathan Bedford Forrest plaque because the drawings of it are in the sketch book.

FORSYTHE: Tell me about Mr. Rubens, what was he like?

GRIFFIN: He was just a wonderful man. He loved life. He painted for the people. He did not care too much about critics. He painted for the average person.

FORSYTHE: Did he have a favorite subject or medium?

GRIFFIN: He liked all media. He did one series of religious paintings, a series of nudes, he liked water color. He did quick sketches, oil painting, pastels, and sculpture. He felt that art was universal and for the common man. I do not know exactly how to express it. One of these articles here that I gave you has some really good ideas.

FORSYTHE: Tell me what you remember about Q.M. Smith's wife, Laura.

GRIFFIN: My children went to the Campus School and Laura was secretary there. Someone told me that years before, when they first came here, that Laura told her husband that she wanted that position. She became the secretary. She was a real fun loving person. I remember at the dance, they looked as though they were having a good time. It was really cute the way she called him "Q.M."--the letters sort of ran together and it sounded like "Kim." She was very pleasant, always smiling, very friendly.

FORSYTHE: Do you remember Q. M. Smith?

GRIFFIN: Yes I remember Mr. Smith. I told you the story about when my daughter was in the first grade at the Campus School. He was addressing the student body and he stood up there and said, "My name is Q. M. Smith, I want you all to call out your name now, what is your name?" My daughter called out her name, "Sheryl Rubens!" She was the only one who answered him. She was very embarrassed because no one else said their name, but she said hers. I do not remember a great deal about Mr. Smith.

FORSYTHE: Tell me about your job working on campus.

GRIFFIN: I worked as the secretary with the State Department of Education. The office was the supervisor of instruction. I worked from 1961 to 1975, on the campus here, then I was transferred to Cordell Hull in Nashville and worked until 1990. I retired then. In all, I worked 29 years for the state.

FORSYTHE: Tell me about your two part time jobs.

GRIFFIN: When I started to work, it was just a part time job. I worked for the supervisor of instruction, at that time it was Mr. Farley. It was a two person office. He was transferred and Mr. Hunter came in. He had been principal of the high school in Columbia, Tennessee. I worked just a half day. Mr. Gather came on board and was working for the state. I would work a half day in one room in the old Music department office and then in the afternoon I would go in the new classroom building and work.

FORSYTHE: Where was the old Music department office located?

GRIFFIN: It was in the Fine Arts building.

FORSYTHE: You told me about working in Old Main?

GRIFFIN: When I first started to work, I worked in the basement of Old Main. Dr. Pittard's office was on one side and Mr. Farley's was on the other. There was no air-conditioning. There were fans. In the winter, I guess they had steam heat in those radiators.

FORSYTHE: What memories do you have of working on the MTSU campus?

GRIFFIN: I really enjoyed the work. I even typed some letters for Dr. Pittard. It was very hard to read his writing. He wrote very well, the content, but his handwriting was hard to read. I enjoyed the work there.

FORSYTHE: Is there anything else you would like to discuss? What about the church?

GRIFFIN: When we came to Murfreesboro in 1955 there was no Lutheran Church. We had been members of the First Lutheran Church and we wanted our children to be brought up in the Lutheran Church. When we first came here, we attended the First Presbyterian Church. Then we started talking about organizing a Lutheran Church with a couple from Nashville, Helen and Bill Kehnle. We discussed how we could start a church. We organized Advent Lutheran Church in 1967 and it is still here.

FORSYTHE: Thank you for the interview.