

Interviewee: Smith, Jovel
Interviewer: Sellers, Robin
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Sellers: Tell me where you were born and where you grew up.

Smith: I was born in Taylor County, in a lumber camp called Clara; it was right out from Perry. At the age of two I moved to Live Oak and was reared there.

Sellers: What business was you family in? Were they in lumber?

Smith: My father was in the lumber business until 1929 and in 1929 he bought an automobile agency and from then on he was a General Motors dealer. In fact when he died he was one of the two oldest General Motors dealers in Florida.

Sellers: Wow, I'll bet that was interesting through World War II.

Smith: Oh, it was.

Sellers: I want to go through that, too. Where did you go to school?

Smith: My freshman year I went to the University of Alabama. Then I transferred to FSCW. Landis Hall was being built at that time and was supposed to be finished, but it wasn't. So the first semester I was at FSCW I lived on what they called "off-campus". They had a house on Jefferson Street, right across from FSCW, run by Mrs. Bell. She had – I don't know – there must have been ten or twelve girls there.

Sellers: Was that one of the places they called Hillside or —

Smith: No.

Sellers: No, okay. There were a couple of places that were on Jefferson like that. When you were growing up in Live Oak, — would you mind telling me when you were born?

Smith: No, August the 15, 1919.

Sellers: So you were ten years old when the stock market crashed.

Smith: Yes.

Sellers: And your dad moved into the automotive business.

Smith: He had just bought it. And he hired a manager for the first year and the manager didn't work out. So he left the lumber business and went to run an automobile business that he knew nothing about. [chuckles] At the beginning of the Depression!

Sellers: Did that affect your life at all?

Smith: No. I was very conscious of the Depression, because there were people coming to the back door, knocking, begging for food. Also, friends were doubling up, living two and three families, you know, together.

Sellers: Did you have brothers and sisters?

Smith: Oh yes, I am the oldest of five children.

Sellers: You did have brothers and sisters!

Smith: There were four girls and one boy. We were really almost like two families. I am fifteen years older than my brother and eighteen years older than my baby sister. In fact she was born about ten days after I went to college. [chuckles]

Sellers: But you had the same mother and father —

Smith: Oh yes, same mother and father, oh yes. Well, There were three girls born two years apart and then there was an eleven year skip and then there was — she had the boy and then three years and she had the baby girl.

Sellers: So you went off to college about what?

Smith: 1937.

Sellers: 1937, okay, we were still in the Depression then.

Smith: Yes.

Sellers: Going to Florida State College for Women would have been much more economical. Why did you go to Alabama?

Smith: I had a teacher that had graduated from the University of Alabama and she wanted me to go.

Sellers: Your family was able to afford it?

Smith: Oh yes.

Sellers: You went for a year?

Smith: Yes, I went for a year, and planned to go back – and had a very dear friend that begged me all summer to please change and go to FSCW. I relented and we were going to be roommates. And guess what? About two weeks before school started, she ran away and got married. [chuckles] So I was already enrolled then, so I went to FSCW.

Sellers: And you lived off-campus that first —

Smith: First semester. I was one of the first – we were the first to move into Landis Hall when it opened.

Sellers: What do you remember about your teachers?

Smith: [Sighs] Oh, I think I remember Professor Dodd more than anybody else because I was majoring in Literature and English. He was a very dramatic teacher.

Sellers: Do you remember Arthur Williams?

Smith: No, I don't.

Sellers: He might have left just about the time that you arrived. What about the President, Dr. Conradi?

Smith: Oh, we all loved Dr. Conradi.

Sellers: Did you have the same living restrictions?

Smith: Oh, when I think of the living restrictions now and what we went through!

Sellers: So you did have to be in at a certain time —

Smith: Listen, the off-campus house was right across the street, right near the Omega house, and Mrs. Bell was very strict. We had to be in, we had to sign-out, just the same restrictions as if we had been in the dormitory. And then when we were in the dormitory, we had the restrictions; you had to sign out every time you left the dormitory at night. You had to introduce your date to the housemother, and at ten o'clock at night the monitor came and checked that you were in your room. We could not wear pants on campus; if we went to the gym we had to wear a raincoat if we had on pants. No cars were allowed and students were not allowed to have cars.

Sellers: Were you allowed to ride in cars?

Smith: Yes, we were. The only rules I ever broke – I was a very model student, I was never a problem. In fact, it wasn't the school I was so afraid of, it was my father. [laughs] I knew better than to misbehave! The only rule I ever broke was driving a car. My father at that time also owned the Oldsmobile place here in Tallahassee, and my father loved for us to come home. My sister was also at FSU at that time; she was a year behind me. So he would let the manager of the automobile place bring the demonstrator down and park it down the street from the dormitory and we would get up at six o'clock in the morning and pile just as many girls in there as we could and head for Madison and Live Oak. And we would come back, but we would try to be – in fact, we were back always before dark. But we would go home for the day on Sunday. That was the only restrictions I could ever remember breaking.

Sellers: How did it happen that your father owned a dealership here in Tallahassee and in Live Oak?

Smith: Well, at different times he owned different dealerships. He owned one in Madison, Gainesville, Jasper – in fact when he died he still owned the Jasper –

Sellers: So he was just an entrepreneur for General Motors?

Smith: Well, one would come available and they would ask him to buy it. I think it was really just until they could find another one. He never owned them but for three or four or five years and then he would sell them. Except the one in Live Oak - now he had that for 37 years, yes.

Sellers: Do you remember Daisy Parker?

Smith: Mm-mmm.

Sellers: How about Lynette Thompson?

Smith: No, the only two classmates I really remember were Mart Hill and Helen Ausley.

Sellers: What kind of activities did you participate in?

Smith: I was not really too active in different things, really, extracurricular activities.

Sellers: No athletics?

Smith: No, uh-uh. We didn't have many girl athletic —

Sellers: Well, they had the Odds and the Evens and that. Now coming in, you were an Odd?

Smith: Let's see — if I started in '37, I would have been an Odd even though I went there in '38.

Sellers: Right, so then it was trying to decide like were you going to be an Odd or an Even. When did you graduate?

Smith: I didn't. Biggest mistake I ever made in my life. I left my junior year, the second semester of my junior year, and married in June. I left off in January and married in June. I thought I didn't need to finish. We'd already decided to get married, and so I quit, but that was a very big mistake.

Sellers: Did you meet your husband-to-be in Tallahassee?

Smith: Yes, I did.

Sellers: Tell me a little bit about dating him while you were on campus.

Smith: Well, you know we had to walk to town. One Sunday afternoon my roommate and I were on our way to the movies, with high heels (which we wore back then). Two nice young men stopped and asked us if we'd like a ride to town, and we said, "yes". Can you imagine doing that today?

Sellers: You're weren't supposed to do that!

Smith: But it was very common, though, for people to stop and pick the students up. So they went to the movies with us and then they asked us for dates.

Sellers: When your husband-to-be would come to pick you up —

Smith: Oh he had to come in and then I had to sign out on every date.

Sellers: What kind of things could you do on a date?

Smith: Mostly we went to movies and things like that. The big thing we looked forward to — at the time I was also going with someone in Live Oak. I didn't meet my husband until my second year there; the first year I was dating a boy from Live Oak and he was at the University of Florida at Gainesville. So we looked forward to all the Fall frolics and spring house party and military ball and things like that when we went to Gainesville. They were the big things. When the boys would come up on the weekend, we would generally just go to the movies or ride around, ride down to Wakulla Springs, something like that.

Sellers: You lived in Landis the entire time?

Smith: Yes.

Sellers: Tell me about moving into Landis when it was brand new. What was it like?

Smith: Oh boy, that was something, because it was the first dormitory that had been built in a good many years. Boy, we thought we had it with the new dormitory.

Sellers: Landis was originally supposed to be partially a senior dormitory. The top floor, or something like that, was supposed to be a senior dormitory.

Smith: I think it was. But I think I lived in room 212 it seems like, I know it was on the western side of the building. I can remember looking out.

Sellers: Describe your room for me.

Smith: Well, it wasn't very large. We had twin beds and two small closets. Looking back, I think how small they were, but we thought they were great. Very plain furniture, really. Of course we furnished our own bed linen and all.

Sellers: Just single beds?

Smith: Just single beds and seems like two chest of drawers and a desk. That was all that was in the room.

Sellers: Two girls to a room?

Smith: Two girls to a room, yes.

Sellers: Your dining?

Smith: We had to eat in the dining hall. There was no other alternative, it was part of your fees. You paid each semester and your dining hall was included. The only other alternative was to eat over in the Sweet Shop, which mostly had snacks.

Sellers: Now when you were in Landis, was what they call the Seminole Dining Hall open now, the great big one that had four levels? Or were you still eating in the Suwannee Room?

Smith: No, the Suwannee Room, I'm sure, because it was not any fancy, and we had (if I remember correctly) it was ten to the table. One girl would act as hostess and it was done family style.

Sellers: Did you have to have breakfast? At one time breakfast was required.

Smith: It was supposed to be, but I was not a breakfast eater. I could not down breakfast. But I paid for it and I was supposed to eat breakfast; we were supposed to have three meals a day there. But my favorite was at ten o'clock to go over to the Sweet Shop and have a package of crackers and a Coke.

Sellers: That's about my breakfast idea; yeah, I'm with you on that. Was lunch served at a certain time, they rang the bell?

Smith: Yes, lunch and dinner was both served, and the breakfast hours were the same thing.

Sellers: If you came late to lunch or dinner, were they still closing the doors so you couldn't get in?

Smith: You know, I don't remember.

Sellers: You never came late to lunch or dinner, huh?

Smith: No, I don't think so. But see, even when we lived at Mrs. Bell's, we ate in the dining hall.

Sellers: Right. And you did not pledge a sorority?

Smith: No, I didn't, my father was opposed to it. Later my sister did. She broke him down, but he was very opposed.

Sellers: So all of your meals and living were there on campus. Do you remember, were you there for one of the Thanksgivings?

Smith: No, I always went home. You see, anytime we could, we went home.

Sellers: So you were never there for the Color Rush or anything like that?

Smith: No.

Sellers: Did you participate in any of the Odd-Even activities at all?

Smith: No. I played a lot of bridge.

Sellers: Bridge was the thing. What about mail? When you would get mail in — ?

Smith: We had — if I remember — gosh, it's been 60-70 years —

Sellers: I think the mail boxes were in Westcott?

Smith: Yes, we had our own mailbox.

Sellers: Did you write a lot of letters?

Smith: No, just to my sweetheart. I called home.

Sellers: Phones were in the lobby.

Smith: No, they were not in our rooms, no. And if you got a phone call, someone that was at the desk would come and notify you that you had a phone call.

Sellers: And you say you never got into trouble or broke any rules, so you never had anything to do with Judiciary or anything like that?

Smith: No, no, I never had any.

Sellers: What about with any of the student government things?

Smith: No, not involved in that at all.

Sellers: What is your fondest memory of being at FSCW?

Smith: Hmm. I can't – I really can't.

Sellers: When you started going to college, what was your intent? You said were in English literature. Were you going to teach or were you just taking courses because you enjoyed them?

Smith: Well, I think I was mostly just — we did not have all the counseling that they have now. We just sort of signed up. I think the first two years, it was mostly required subjects, if I remember correctly.

Sellers: So you really didn't have a plan for a career or anything like that?

Smith: No.

Sellers: So it didn't bother you to leave and get married.

Smith: No, that's what most people did.

Sellers: Do you have a memory that you would like to forget?

Smith: No, no.

Sellers: Well, can you think of anything else that you want to put on the tape about your college experiences or even Tallahassee experiences?

Smith: Tallahassee was such a small town. There were very few paved streets and they were

brick.

Sellers: What about if you went downtown to shop, what stores were there?

Smith: Oh, Wilson's, I remember Wilson's. And of course Bennett's, we all went to Bennett's.

Sellers: The drugstore.

Smith: That was the place to go was Bennett's. I do remember that we could not go — and I just saw in the paper that they are fixing to renovate the Green Derby, — that the High Hat and the Green Derby were off limits, you were not allowed to go to those two places.

Sellers: They served liquor.

Smith: Uh-huh.

Sellers: What about the Hodge's home that became Goodwood? Did you ever go out there?

Smith: No, I didn't. But the funniest thing is that later I was one of the first volunteers to restore Goodwood.

Sellers: Really?

Smith: Yes.

Sellers: So you worked with Larry?

Smith: Yes. I was a very active volunteer until quite recently. In fact, I got my fifteen-year pin.

Sellers: Goodness, you have been at it for a while.

Smith: Yes, one of the first volunteers.

Sellers: I remember when I was doing my research on FSCW, I ran across a notice in the paper that said that the art teacher from FSCW had restored a ceiling painting at an old home outside of Tallahassee, and I was new to Tallahassee and didn't know where that might have been. I later found out that it was when Mrs. Tiers owned Goodwood, and that was the ceiling painting in the drawing room.

Smith: But they have both been restored.

Sellers: I know they have now, but that was what it was, and I was so excited when I realized that I told Larry 'I've got a notice here that you probably want to have in your clippings.'

Smith: I was more active in restoring the gardens, because I am a gardener. I have three loves. I love to garden, I love to read and I love to play bridge.

Sellers: I've got to get with you! I haven't had a good bridge game up here in a long time.

Smith: Oh, I play duplicate, and I love it.

Sellers: Oh, I'm not sure I can do that. Okay, can you think of anything else?

Smith: No. I just think it's interesting – my mother-in-law attended FSU. [FSCW]

Sellers: What was her name?

Smith: It was Sara Lester, and she was there in the teens. Like, -13, -14, -15, something like that.

Sellers: Goodness, that was early.

Smith: Yes, it was.

Sellers: And you said that there were others?

Smith: And I attended, and two of my sisters attended. Then I had a daughter that attended and a grandson that attended. In fact he was, he's very active in FSU right now; he's on a couple of boards at FSU.

Sellers: So even though you didn't graduate, you brought the family back and they have —

Smith: Oh yes!

Sellers: That's good.

END