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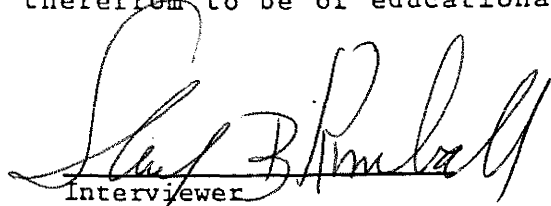
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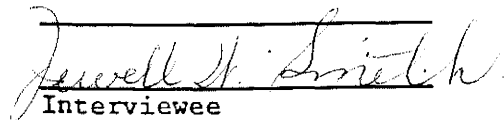
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SIUE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT

Summers 1990-92

Jewell Smith Interview, May 29, 1992

Interviewed by Stanley B. Kimball

Filename: SMITH. 529

Q: We just had an excellent interview with Helen and now we'll go to Mr. Smith, Jewell. Why did you come to SIU?

J: Well, I was wanting a secure job, much more secure than I had. Of course at that time SIU wasn't too secure it's self. I said well I'm one to just take a gamble to take a chance on it. Late in November of 59 I put in an application for work and all of sudden they said well we have an opening as a clerk in the library. Mr. Gene Turner asked me if I would be interested.

After I had the test it was graded and he said O.K. I took one test for the library and one for the physical plant. Well, the library job came through first fortunately and I started over on track 64 on Bluff road.

Q: You said you wanted more security. What were you doing prior to coming here?

J: I was working in a night club. I wasn't happy with the work so I thought I would get into something that probably would be self fulfilling, so I said I'll take a chance on SIU. After I had worked

on Track 64 for I guess 6 months. Mr. Turner came over and said well we've got a vacancy in the physical plant. I know you don't want it but I have to offer it to you because you made the highest grade. I said, Mr. Turner I'm satisfied right where I am.

Q: You were then a clerk in the library.

J: Distribution clerk.

Q: You sent books out.

J: To Alton, East St. Louis and picked up mail and delivered to different other offices on campus. I was working under Dr. Fred Forrest. He told me if I was interested in going to California, he could have got me a job at University of California. I said no, I didn't want to pull up roots and leave Alton. He said well O.K.

Well, after he left then Mr. Gene Herscher was my supervisor from the first day I went in work until the last day I worked here. My whole tenure was under Gene Herscher.

Q: I remember him.

J: There was never in my estimation a finer gentleman than him. Not only was it because he gave me a lot of breaks, (I think I earned them), but he was fair. He use to call me in the office quite a few times, but he was strictly fair with everyone. I think that kind of got him in trouble sometimes. Because they felt that he wasn't a

team player. My answer to that is he's not getting paid to be a team player. He's getting paid to supervise technical services in the library.

Q: Your wife, Helen, she came here January 1, 1959. You came in November. Was the fact that she was employed here influence you to try to get employment here?

J: Truthfully no. At that time jobs were a little bit hard to find at that particular time and I was dissatisfied where I was. My employer there said if your not satisfied you can always come back. I thought that was fair of him to offer me my job back if I didn't like it at SIU.

Q: No hard feelings in other words.

J: No, no, no not at all.

Q: Well, that speaks well for both of you. Why did you stay so long? You were here 20 years.

J: Well I had to work, I knew I had to work somewhere. I liked it here. I liked it at SIU very much. The only problem when we got over here on campus we lost a lot of the personal contacts we had in the farm house. There was a certain closeness there that just didn't experience as the university grew. Of course, we all knew that that

was going to happen. That is a natural thing to happen. The administrative wheels begin to turn faster and faster and that took away the family aspect of the job.

Q: Well, if you were in that track house, if that's where you started and then of course came here then it's quite obvious you worked very little if any in Alton or East St. Louis.

J: No, we went from there to Wagner Electric building for about 2 years.

Q: And then to Lovejoy.

J: They were just building the campus here then. This building of course was the first one completed. We got everything lined up. We set up a circulating library in the Wagner Building to accommodate students that had come to Edwardsville for classes. It was sort of an experience thing for us to for the bigger things to come. So in, I think it was 66 or 67, we moved over here. I was the first one from the library to move into the library building and boy, did I have some experiences there.

Q: Well, let's hear it.

J: Everyone was laying out there territory, even faculty and staff.

Q: Everybody was in the library almost.

J: Everything. Food service was in the area that I was supposed to be in. They were right across from textbook rentals. So I had to go to the third floor and laid out my area and that only lasted for a little while. I had to start shoving my space in. Finally they got the center finished in the cafeteria so they moved that facility out of the library basement. As soon as I got the word immediately I moved in.

Q: What do you feel best about your career here?

J: Well, I think the most interesting thing was being in a building situation. We built the library from the ground up and that is an experience even too many of the professional librarians never had. I feel I was fortunate in having that background to build on. I spent many many years under John Abbott. He was quite a librarian. He really knew his library work very well.

Q: Now you worked your way up to library Technical Assistant 3. Now was that basically on the job training?

J: Right.

Q: Or did you take any courses?

J: No just on the job training.

Q: Some of your frustrations?

J: Budgetary problems. We didn't have enough money to even hire help to give the service we should have given. We just had to make do and that was during the later years here particularly. The earlier years were fine financially I think budget wise it was really good. We got what we needed. Of course I guess they didn't want to fall on their face in the early development of the university so they were inclined to give us what we needed. Later things kind of got tough. That was one of the most frustrating things I had to deal with because I was head of a department and they always looked to me to supply the same amount of service whether I had two people or none. But we weathered the storm anyway.

Q: Did you ever experience any discrimination on this campus?

J: Very, very little. Very little. May have been due to the fact that I was in the library, I don't know. But the library always treated me fine, wonderful. I got more criticism from outside the library than I did inside the library.

A lot wondered why I didn't hire more blacks. Well, the jobs were Civil Service and no blacks applied. I couldn't go out in the street and pull them in and make them apply. So I had to take what personnel sent.

Q: Now you had not only students under you but Civil Service people under you.

J: Yes.

Q: Any other comments on this topic.

J: Well I had a few problems in the Civil Service deal. I don't know whether it was racially motivated or what. I rather think it was, but there was one instance that hit me pretty strong. Some lady went up to Mr. Herscher and wanted to know why I was head of the department. Of course, she had been there quite a while and she probably thought that she should have been. They had a little argument about it. Mr. Herscher, said as long as Mr. Smith is head of that department it looks like your going to have to work there. He said, if you don't want to work under him, we'll release you. She turned out to be the best person I ever had there. In fact when I would go off on vacation I would leave her in charge of the department. She was good.

It was a funny thing when I was working there anybody who came in and wanted anything from that department, well you need to see Mr. Smith, I can't do it, you have to see Mr. Smith. They were all loyal to me after we got some facts straightened out.

I think that was due to the fact that most of the help came from these smaller towns where they had no contact with blacks whatsoever. The saying is they figured the blacks had long tails. They just weren't used to being around us. After they found out we wouldn't bite them why they were all right.

Q: How about some of your best most pleasant memories?

J: Well, I think my most pleasant memories were with the University Senate and the Governance Council. I was appointed chairman of the Elections Committee at that time it was in a bad state of affairs. I think the procedures that you have now I think our committee was responsible for.

Q: Any real bad memories, worst memories?

J: No, I was always able to get around the bad memories. Maybe I just shut them out and closed my eyes to them, but the whole twenty years I enjoyed it here. I wanted to retire at 65 and Mr. Herscher being the man he was, wanted me to work another year. I just couldn't say no. So I worked until I was 66. I could understand why he wanted me there because he wanted to make a transition. The department was divided up, the cataloging went to the catalog department, the acquisition went to the acquisition department, which was all in my department at one time.

I had a chance at that time to get caught up with my cataloging. I didn't do anything, but catalog for the whole year and some of the other people from technical services on the third floor came down and took over the the duties of the department. The woman I was telling you about she said, if they move me out of here they'll have to carry me feet first. She was that much in love with the environment there. I said, oh you shouldn't feel that way about it. She said, well, hell I do. But I came back later to visit she was upstairs on the third floor.

Q: How about some funny humorous experiences over the years?

J: Well, there was a time when they were trying to bring students in from East St. Louis for contact. So they had some contact with the university atmosphere and there were pretty well underprivileged kids, anyway, and they came in there that, George Grant, you probably remember him. He was spearheading the thing so he called me one day and wanted to know if I could use a couple students from East St. Louis. I said, well, yes I guess I can. He sent over a couple so I put them in the binding operation so they could work in there and pretty soon I heard such another racket I went in there and they had this radio going. All the finger popping and carrying on that was disrupting the whole department. So I told them, boys you have to turn that off, we can't have that, people can't do there work. So they said O.K.

The next day they came in they brought their boom box and they started again. So I told them your going to have to quit or get out and he said, if I can't bring my radio I can't stay. So I said O.K. and I got their papers to sign and send them up to George Grant and I called him in the mean time. I said these guys are crazy. They got their radios going so loud their just disturbing the whole department. He said well, send up to me I'll set them straight. I sent them up to him and I never saw them any more. He told me later, I sent those guys on home. He said they were incurable.

Q: Any other little humorous things?

J: Oh, when we were in track 64, I think it was, they had some cherry trees in the back and every lunch hour they would miss me. They had to always ask me where did you go for lunch?

Q: The bing cherries.

J: I love those things. I would go up there and climb up in the tree and eat cherries until one time one of the girls saw me. That was the end of that. They beat me to the cherries.

Q: They taste better stealing them out of the tree.

J: Absolutely. But there were just a lot of things I enjoyed. I had 20 years of enjoyment that's for sure.

Q: Well, now that's not all bad is it.

J: Can't be.

Q: Now, how successful has the university has been in fulfilling its mandate, or its challenge, or contributing to the area?

J: Well, culturally it has done a wonderful job, economically it has done a pretty good job too. They put alot of dollars in this area and I don't think that should be overlooked. They have given students education that probably wouldn't have gotten it otherwise. Because the cost of going away from home and this that and the other thing. While it was still a commuter college, I think it really served a wonderful thing in this community. I think the community is a lot better off with it than it was before it got it. Of course, Shurtelff College wasn't too bad either.

Q: Did you ever go to Shurtleff yourself?

J: Yes.

Q: Did you know Mrs. Smith at the time?

J: Yes. But I wasn't in school with her. I knew her all right. I went part time because I was working and I would sneak off around 11:30 in the morning and go take a couple classes and come back around 2 or 2:30.

Q: Now if you had it to do all over again would you do it?

J: Same way.

Q: Same way.

J: I wouldn't want anything to change. I wouldn't want anything different.

Q: Anything else Mr. Smith You'd care to add to whatever we discussed or would you care to discuss something I haven't mentioned.

J: Well, talking to other people about college and universities in other parts of the country, I find that this is a unique university and in many ways. It is very and it gives me pleasure to bring

people on campus to see what we have here. You don't see anything way out in the woods like this anywhere else. It is usually stuffed into a city somewhere and.

Q: It is a beautiful campus.

J: Yes it is. When we were over in track 64 and 65 we use to come over during lunch hour and watch them work on the buildings and our eyes were green. We didn't know whether we would ever be able to enjoy the fruits of this university, but it came really quicker than we imagined it would.

Q: Anything else before we close Mr. Smith.

J: Nothing that I can think of off hand.

Q: All right on that rather happy note we can formally conclude.

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